

## Number of homeless families at local shelter 'unprecedented'

By Joanne Huist Smith, Staff Writer Updated 2:24 PM Monday, August 23, 2010

DAYTON — Up to 80 children — more than half of them under the age of 5 — sleep nightly in a Montgomery County homeless shelter and the numbers are increasing, according to officials.

“We have never seen numbers like this,” said Leigh Sempeles, executive director of St. Vincent de Paul. “These are unprecedented times.”

At the Vincent de Paul Gateway for Women and Families at 120 Apple St., the economic recession shows no signs of lifting. The number of homeless families, measured in a unit equal to one-night’s stay at the shelter, grew 217 percent from June 2008 to June 2010. The shelter serves more than 200 dinners a night.

“We’re over our budget in terms of food supplies,” Sempeles said. “We can’t let people go out without soap, shampoo, deodorant. Those are essentials.”

When St. Vincent moved to its current facility in 2005, hosting seven or eight families a night was high. The Dayton Daily News visited the shelter Wednesday, Aug. 18, when 36 families — six with both mom and dad — and 68 children stayed overnight along with six couples. Dorms for single women designed to sleep 52 people accommodated 92.

Sempeles projects a \$50,000 deficit by the end of the year if demand continues at the current pace. Cutting back on nonessential items like paper plates has already started and a Friends of the Poor Walk is scheduled for Sept. 25 to raise pledges.

The Apple Street shelter operates yearly on a \$1.2 million budget, with its largest funding stream, \$441,500, coming from the county human services levy that is on the ballot in November. More than half of the shelter’s budget comes from charitable giving.

