

# **ONE-STOP SHOPPING FOR DOCUMENTS**

## **IDignity gives homeless people a chance to get key papers easily.**

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Carlos Turpin is 49 and homeless, and - until Wednesday afternoon - was unable to apply for work, cash a check or qualify for any kind of government assistance.

That's because three weeks ago, he lost his wallet, which held his Social Security card and Florida identification card. Without being able to prove who he was, no one would hire him, not even the local labor pool. The only shelter that would take him in was the Coalition for the Homeless men's pavilion, where he has slept on the floor.

"I can't wait to start putting in job applications," Turpin said.

He wouldn't have to wait long. Turpin was one of 160 homeless people who crowded into the region's first IDignity event Wednesday, where staffers from the Florida Division of Driver Licenses, the Orange County Health Department, the Social Security Administration and the nonprofit Legal Advocacy at Work pored over computer records, trying to resurrect the documents necessary to reissue identification.

"The neat part is that we get everyone to work together, because there's usually kind of a Catch 22 system," said Michael Dippy, a volunteer who coordinated the event. "You need a Social Security card to get a drivers license. And you need a drivers license to get a Social Security card. But we have everything in one place."

The event, held at the Orlando Union Rescue Mission and modeled after similar programs in other cities, was so successful that organizers ran out of the paperwork people needed to start the process.

Those turned away were told to come back for the next IDignity event June 25. But of those who did make it in the door before supplies ran short, about 99 percent were able to get help.

Sheldon Ritter, 43, showed up at 8:55 a.m. for a chance to get a valid ID. Though his birth certificate was in the Virgin Islands and he had no Social Security card, he did have an expired Florida identification card. That, it turned out, would be the key for the rest of the pieces to fall into place.

"They even took me over to a bank to get the form notarized for me to get my birth certificate," Ritter said, grinning as he clutched a freshly printed - and thoroughly valid - Florida identification card shortly before 2 p.m. It came from the driver-license division's "mobile office" - a computer-outfitted motor home parked in a lot next to the rescue mission.

"To be able to get everything in one place like this," Ritter said, "well, it's a blessing."

Ritter's Social Security card will be mailed to him at the rescue mission, where he is currently staying, in about two weeks. The birth certificate likely will take a few weeks longer.

The Homeless Services Network of Central Florida paid all the fees for the documents, which added up to about \$1,500. But Cathy Jackson, the network's executive director, said the credit should go largely to the agencies willing to send staffers and a group of downtown churches that pressed for the service to become a monthly event.

Those included First United Methodist Church of Orlando, First Presbyterian Church of Orlando, The Cathedral Church of St. Luke, St. James Catholic Cathedral and Trinity Lutheran Church.

For Gloria Norfleet, a manager at the Orange County Health Department, the day's effort paid off. In some cases, she was able to get a birth certificate printed at her nearby office and have a runner retrieve it.

"Just to see them smile when we handed them the certificate - that was the best part," she said.

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