



ABOVE: Metro senior, Amelia Bachtiar, right, helps Manuel Ramirez of Denver, pick out a pair of jeans Oct. 29 at the Auaria Event Center.



LEFT: Metro Student Amelia Bachtiar helps Manuel Ramirez fill out a survey Oct. 29 during the 2010 Project Homeless Connection.

### During the first nine Project Homeless Connect events:

- 702 clients obtained food stamps
- 3,032 medical screenings, services and immunizations were given
- 1,011 identification cards and driver's licenses were issued
- 1,272 copies of birth certificates were obtained
- 318 homeless court cases were discussed
- 1,149 hours of legal advice were dispensed
- 410 haircuts were given

[www.denversroadhome.org](http://www.denversroadhome.org)



David Berezin, left, talks to Curtis Dujas of Denver Oct 29 during Project Homeless Connection 10 at the Auraria Event Center.

### Homelessness in Denver:

- 60 percent of the homeless are in families with children
- 42 percent of the homeless are women
- 40 percent of the homeless are working
- 20 percent of the homeless are veterans
- 44 percent of homeless are at risk for early death, two percent higher than the national average
- The most commonly reported reasons for homelessness are:
  - Job loss (35 percent)
  - Housing costs (31 percent)
  - Breakup of a family (20 percent)

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# Lending a helping hand

## Homelessness, a problem in Denver, is bringing people together to make lives better

Story by Ashley Moreland [amorela1@mscd.deu](mailto:amorela1@mscd.deu) Photos by Steve Anderson [sande104@mscd.edu](mailto:sande104@mscd.edu)

Every night John Higgins drives by the Denver Rescue Mission and sees hundreds of homeless men.

"It just personally affects me," he said. "After seeing that every night, it just seems like I want to give back and help."

And so he does.

Higgins, who is on Denver's Road Home Resource Allocation Committee, volunteered at Project Homeless Connect 10, which was held Oct. 29 at the Auraria Event Center. The event offered services such as health examines, legal assistance and housing assistance.

It was there that Higgins met Robert Buch.

Buch has applied for disability, but said it could take up to two years for his application to process. Even if he is granted disability, he said he will only receive \$647 a month.

"It's a hard situation," Buch said. "I don't know what they expect you to do in the meantime. And then when you get it, they don't really give you enough to survive. You'd have to pair up with someone in order to get by."

Currently, Buch is paired up with someone. For six months,

Buch has been living with his friend, Curt Dujas, and a couple of months ago, another friend, Manuel Ramirez joined them.

But within two weeks, the three friends will be homeless. Dujas' landlord died, and the property he rents will be sold.

Ramirez hopes the three of them can find a new place and stay together.

"We look out for each other," Ramirez said. "When there's no one else around we can go to each other and say, 'hey, I need a place to live.' If I had a place and [they] didn't, [they] could always come to my place to live ... we basically help each other out."

The friends also reach out to others who are in need. Ramirez said that if they see someone on the street in the cold, they will ask them if they want a warm place to stay for the night. They offer them a meal and shower and sometimes even wash their clothes. The only thing they ask is that their guests "don't steal from us, don't BS us."

According to Denver's Road Home's website, 40 percent of those homeless in Denver have jobs. While Buch is unable to work, Dujas has a job. Ramirez also works, but is employed through a

temporary-job service and sometimes goes weeks without work. He said he can do a variety of things like cooking and some electrical work, and if he can't do something, he said he can learn fast. He said the problem with the United States economy right now is that all the jobs are being sent to other countries.

"America's just giving up," he said. "We don't need to give up; we need to keep fighting."

While Ramirez will soon lose his home and is discontent with the economy, he keeps a positive attitude and said Project Homeless Connect 10 was extremely helpful to him. He plans to take the resources he gained from the event to better his life and share with others.

And that's exactly what Higgins hoped he and the event would accomplish.

"Just knowing that we're helping people get those services, hopefully getting them on a road to recovery, that's the biggest personal satisfaction ... just trying to help them get back on their feet," Higgins said.



Curtis Dujas of Denver talks to a volunteer about housing options and assistance Oct. 29 during Project Homeless Connection 10.