

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Helping Hands: Group Strives to Aid South Florida's Homeless in Pandemic

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He was working in retail just a few months ago and now, he's living in the streets of downtown Miami. A man who asked us not to show his face or share his name agreed to use his voice to share a reality of the financial toll of the pandemic.

"I actually left my apartment because I was afraid that I wasn't going to be able to pay the rent and get evicted and have that ruin my credit," he said.

When he was initially laid off, he never imaged that he would end up homeless.

"You don't think about it at first," he said.

Now, he's not only homeless but also hungry.

"When your stomach is touching your back, it's hard," he said.

A recent unemployment analysis from Columbia University projects a potential 45 percent increase in unemployment. Here in South Florida, there is a concern about rising numbers.

The Downtown Development Authority works to help the homeless in Miami. Its executive director, Christina Crespi, says the reality of the pandemic is problematic.

"I do think we will see an increase with the numbers," she says.

Juan Portela is also with the Downtown Development Authority, but he works on the streets with the homeless. He understands them because he too was homeless a few years back.

"I see a lot of new faces," says Portela.

He knows the homeless community, but the new faces are people who have just recently ended up on the street. The relationship between hunger and newfound homelessness is painfully close, according to Portela.