

Nursing student Chantel Yates performs a medical checkup on John Burkhart on Thursday morning at the Waterfront Mission.



Daily News
DEVON RAVINE

OWC students nursing the poor

■ School, Waterfront Rescue Mission partner to provide free health evaluations.

By ZAC ANDERSON
Daily News Staff Writer

It'd been more than 15 years since John Burkhart had received medical attention of any kind, and although he'd gained a few pounds and started smoking since that fourth-grade physical, the general diagnosis was heartening for the Waterfront Rescue Mission resident.

"He appears to be pretty healthy," said Okaloosa-Walton College nursing student Chantel Yates after listening to the 25-year-old Burkhart's heartbeat and taking his blood pressure during a recent noninvasive physical.

Although the news was good enough to make the recovering drug addict smile and boast of his heartiness, had something been wrong he may never have known until it was too late if not for a partnership between OWC and the Waterfront Rescue Mission.

Nurses in the college's bachelor's program recently began visiting the Fort Walton Beach mission to provide free health assessments.

Free was the optimal word for Burkhart, who is currently jobless as he undergoes substance abuse treatment at the mission.

"I was pretty much on the streets, not even thinking

about my health," said the Texas native, who came to Florida a few months ago to work in the construction business but found himself tempted by drugs.

Now Burkhart has progressed from kicking his drug habit to improving his diet and developing an exercise routine.

"I guess they just got me thinking about my health more," he said of the white-capped student nurses.

The program has helped raise awareness locally among the poor and indigent about health issues while simultaneously providing valuable training for student nurses, said OWC nursing instructor and program coordinator Beth Arrington.

As a nursing student in

HEALTH SERVICE

Anyone who would like to receive a free health assessment courtesy of the nursing program at Okaloosa-Walton College can contact the Waterfront Rescue Mission at 796-0700. Only persons who are truly in need should apply.

Tennessee, Arrington participated in a similar public health clinic at an inner-city middle school.

She said the poorest people often have the most health problems and the least access to medical care.

"We saw a need for this," Arrington said. "What we've found is that if somebody else takes an interest in their

health it's almost like they feel obligated to do the same."

Waterfront Rescue Mission Director Louie Carlton said many of his clients are reluctant to seek medical attention. Having the nurses come to the mission has made the process much easier.

"A lot of these people get very nervous around doctors," Carlton said. "Maybe because they're afraid of what they might find."

"They're more comfortable here," he added.

If it wasn't for the program, Burkhart said he might have gone another 15 years without seeking medical attention.

"It feels good," to get a relatively clean bill of health, he said. "I want to do even better, though. Get my blood pressure down, eat better."