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Searching for Solutions

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Forum on homelessness shows efforts being made, steps moving forward

By Tom Hacker

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

Four people on the front lines of the battle against homelessness shared war stories with a group of about 75 Loveland residents Sunday night.

And, some of the stories were about winning.

"Homeless on the Front Range," a Namaqua Forum sponsored by the Loveland Unitarian Universalist Congregation, packed the auditorium at Ferguson High School.

Glorie Magrum, director of Loveland's House of Neighborly Service, described how the city, its churches and an army of volunteers had coalesced to put a dent in the problem over the past decade.

The effort has been against all odds: When Magrum joined the HNS staff six years ago, the agency served a homeless population of 150. This year, it worked on behalf of 500.

"That includes the chronically homeless, as well as the newly impoverished," Magrum said. "About four years ago, we asked ourselves, 'Why don't we create a network of churches?' Thirteen of them responded."

The Interfaith Hospitality Network now provides emergency shelter to the city's homeless population, filling a gap that had existed for years.

Likewise, a temporary shelter at 137 N. Lincoln Ave., known as the 137 Homeless Connection, has helped meet a need that is growing as the economic burden on vulnerable families and single people mounts.

Bryce Hach, a Loveland native who now heads a Fort Collins program called Homeward 2020, described the 10-year plan that the city has in place, patterned after hundreds of similar programs in other American communities.

He said solutions to homelessness made good economic sense, beyond their humanitarian benefits.

Resources that communities spend on their chronically homeless populations - health care, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and jail facilities - cost more than housing solutions, he said.

"Nationally, we spend between \$35,000 and \$150,000 per person per year on those kinds of services," he said. "When people are placed in supportive housing, it costs \$13,000 to \$25,000 per person per year."

Allison Hade, just six weeks into her new job as the director of the city's Community Partnership Office, said that while federal grants for housing for low and moderate income families are available, the resources could not possibly match with demand.

"The gaps are really substantial," Hade said. "They're in the 7,000 range," meaning the number of Loveland residents who qualify for such Housing and Urban Development assistance.

Hach described the chronically homeless people in Fort Collins, estimated to number more than 175, as a "recession proof" population, a group less affected by the economy than their own social afflictions.

"These people are homeless less because they run out of money,

and more because they run out of relationships," he said.

Hade said the statistics that Hach used to illustrate the scope and scale of the problem were "especially telling."

"There is so much money being spent on this that has nothing to do with solutions," she added.

"We are wanting to get the word out that our community does care. That fact that so many of you are here demonstrates that."

Tom Hacker can be reached at 669-5050, ext. 521, or thacker@reporter-herald.com.

Reporter-Herald photos/TOM HACKER

About 75 people gathered Sunday night at Ferguson High School to hear panelists at a forum on homelessness on the Front Range.

Moderator Cecil Gutierrez talks with panelists, from left, Kelly Sullivan, Bryce Hach, Glorie Magrum and Allison Hade, prior to their discussion.

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