

Conversation on Loveland's homeless moves on to business engagement

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Daily Reporter-Herald, The (Loveland, CO)-May 13, 2013  
Readability: >12 grade level (Lexile: 1340L)  
Author: Shelley Widhalm Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

The fact that 10 clients of the 137 Loveland Homeless Connection got jobs in six weeks is good news, but not enough to stop the community conversation.

Alison Hade, administrator of the Community Partnership Office, helped organize the first community conversation on homelessness Jan. 31, and that conversation will continue Monday.

"One of the major issues of being homeless is burned bridges," Hade said, adding that the homeless face behavioral, mental health and other issues. "How do we move somebody from homelessness to housing who has these issues?"

Typically, 7 to 8 percent of the day shelter's clients find jobs over a period of months or even years that help them end their homelessness and enter into permanent housing.

But from mid-February through the end of March, 10 regular clients found stable minimum-wage and labor jobs, plus two others plan to return to school. Three of the 10 who are working found a place to rent and four more are working out of town and staying in hotels, but are homeless over the weekend, said Doug Ashbaugh, homeless program manager for the 137 Connection.

The clients' jobs include working in fast food, construction and metal fabrication, being a mechanic, washing dishes and doing landscaping.

"A lot of the others are working in day labor, not in stable jobs," Ashbaugh said, adding that finding temporary work is easier in the warmer than in the colder months. "There are guys who work through the winter, but it's not enough to become un-homeless."

The day shelter served 151 individual clients from Nov. 1, 2012, through March 31 of this year. But identifying the actual percentage of clients finding work is difficult to calculate, because the number who stopped in each week varied because of personal or work-related issues, Ashbaugh said.

Ashbaugh and Hade want to move more of the clients into jobs and thus housing, which is difficult in this area because of the high rent and lack of availability.

To do this, they hope to work with the local business community to hire some of 137 Connection's clients.

A first step is a second community conversation at the Loveland Public Library with the Hand-Up Cooperative as a special guest to discuss business engagement.

Daniel Covey from Hand-Up will talk about how the organization engages businesses and the model it uses to work on employing the homeless and near-homeless.

Because employment is the key to ending homelessness, helping the Hand-Up Cooperative reach into the Loveland business community could make a difference, Hade said in an email she sent to the 50 participants in the first community conversation.

In that first conversation, representatives from nonprofits serving homeless and low-income residents gave their input on what's working and what's lacking in the current homeless response system. They broke into groups to identify ways to address the homeless problem in Loveland.

"Loveland needs permanent supportive housing for this group of people," Hade said.

When clients first come to the 137 Connection, they fill out an intake form with their personal information, including how and why they

became homeless.

"They hide a lot," Ashbaugh said. "What we're trying to do is make them feel very comfortable, so that they'll spill the beans."

The 137 Connection staff and volunteers provide referrals and enter clients into the appropriate programs to help them learn life skills and address their issues. Each week, staff members meet to discuss their observations of the clients and to develop an individual plan to move them out of homelessness that includes casework and mentoring.

"We keep working with them," Ashbaugh said. "We don't give up."

Shelley Widhalm can be reached at 669-5050, ext. 531, or swidhalm@reporter-herald.com.

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