

Summit on homelessness kicks off 2015 conversation

Sarah Jane Kyle, *The Coloradoan* 9 a.m. MST January 22, 2015



(Photo: Erin Hull/*The Coloradoan*)

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Around 200 people gathered Wednesday at the Lincoln Center for the start of what stakeholders hope is a sustained, solution-oriented discussion about homelessness in Fort Collins.

“Communication is a big hurdle to overcome,” said Ryan Houdeck, who owns a number of eateries

downtown. “Silos. In faith-based organizations doing their thing. Police doing their thing. Government doing its work. Businesspeople. All want to see a solution but are all sort of not talking to each other. This is a first step.”

As public interest in the issue increases, multiple events related to homelessness are on the docket for 2015.

Next week, volunteers will conduct an annual winter survey to identify the homeless population and its challenges.

Fort Collins will continue to discuss the issue and how local government can play a role in the conversation. In April, voters will decide whether to support a tax that would allocate \$4 million to permanent supportive housing efforts.

The first of these conversations — a summit led Wednesday by Homeward 2020, Bohemian Foundation, city of Fort Collins and Fort Collins Area Chamber of Commerce — included dialogue that was constructive. It also would sound familiar to those who followed the issue over the summer in Fort Collins.

“It feels like we’re trying to nibble at an elephant here,” said Tom Konstanty, assistant director of local homeless shelter Fort Collins Rescue Mission.

Comments collected during the two sessions will be analyzed by Homeward 2020 and used to identify future strategies and points of discussion.

Common threads included a need for higher wages, more affordable housing, more data and more support for the often marginalized. Konstanty said action on any of these issues will require a clear plan — and a clear understanding of who is leading the charge.

“We all need to be on the same page using the same language,” he said.

“Sometimes there are too many voices. When you try to address too many things at one time, you get mixed up.”

Some participants called for more urgent and immediate help, as the number of homeless individuals in Fort Collins continues to rise.

A 2014 winter count of the city’s homeless population tallied nearly 300 homeless individuals, up from 250 in 2013. A summer count identified 438 homeless persons.

Bryan Tribby, a Homeward 2020 board member who is formerly homeless, said the

community needs to get on the same page and prepare to address homelessness.

“Whenever I come to an event like this, it fills me with a great deal of hope, but also trepidation,” Tribby said. “There are so many people who want to do the right thing, but it seems like we’re all fighting one another and at odds.

“If we pull together, we can overcome this. I can tell you from personal experience that if you have a home, your life will improve a great deal.”

Follow Sarah Jane Kyle on Twitter [@sarahjanekyle](#) or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/reportersarahjane.

More information

Have questions about Homeward 2020 or community efforts to fight homelessness? Visit www.homeward2020.org or email vanessa@homeward2020.org.

