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Fort Collins group volunteers, shelters the homeless

By [jason pohl](#) | RMSMC

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Executive Director of Homeward 2020 Bryce Hach stands in front of a reflection of Jefferson Street Park, a frequent of Homeless individuals in Fort Collins. Hatch and Homeward 2020 are 9 months into a 10-year plan to end homelessness in Fort Collins by 2020 which will result in systemic change.

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Many people look at homelessness as an unfortunate issue that will never really impact their own lives.

Bryce Hach and other community members, however, see it as more than misfortune. They see an opportunity.

That's why in 2010 volunteers and leaders around the community banded together to form Homeward 2020 – a unique 10-year project intended to end homelessness in Fort Collins.

What separates this program from the soup kitchens and shelters already in place are the planned-out, researched steps that target widespread and systemic change.

“When tomorrow arrives, they (the homeless) are no closer to a solution,” said Hach, the executive director of Homeward 2020. “What it requires is a home. Otherwise, the person is delegated into survival mode.”

This survival mode is what the program wants to eliminate, Hach said. Instead of temporarily alleviating the pain, Homeward 2020 offers long-term change through a “housing first” model that actually addresses the problem at the core.

In 2010, groups throughout the community worked on an initial three-month research period where data was collected from around the country to see what has worked and what hasn't.

Resources were pooled together, funding from all sectors was examined and volunteers worked to compose a census of the homeless population in Fort Collins.

Realizing the scope was large, leaders decided to focus the initial part of the 10-year plan on the chronically homeless – a group of dozens living on the streets. This group represents about 10 percent of the homeless, but uses about 50 percent of the resources, Hach said.

“We want to turn people from tax users to tax payers,” he said.

Hach explained the cost of keeping someone on the streets ranges from \$35,000 to as much as \$150,000. He said these costs accrue from emergency treatment, interventions and similar costly programs.

“These people are the truly vulnerable, truly expensive and very visible,” Hach said.

Phase one of the plan addresses the issue of chronic homelessness through a five-step process.

This phase constitutes the initial five years, and consists of assessing the demand, acquiring the resources, moving and keeping people in housing.

Much of this involves targeting the very at-risk individuals before something further happens, often as they are leaving the hospital or rehabilitation centers. From there, they can be assisted back onto their own feet.

The program works with a progressive plan under the condition that, if something doesn't work, a substitute will be found and the model will continue to grow.

Phase two is expected to go into effect around 2015, and it focuses on episodic homelessness where individuals simply do not have a place to call home. Instead, these individuals “couch surf” or stay with others for extended periods of time.

Hach said the project requires a lot of coordination, but by showing groups that every available dollar has been exhausted responsibly, others are more likely to help.

“It's a major undertaking,” the Colorado native and former Teach for America worker said. “I wanted to do something where I could make a substantive impact on a community where I was a member.” Volunteers drive the program, and there are numerous groups around the city and on campus that students can get involved in.

Regan Brown, a junior ethnic studies major, is the student coordinator for Project Homeless Connect, an organization that pairs students with homeless individuals for a day. Though this program is only a one-day deal, she said it gives students a new lifelong look into what it means to be homeless.

“Each of their stories is unique, and it really could happen to anyone,” Brown said. “You meet some of the most genuine people.”

Brown also said this program opens the door to additional opportunities students can get involved in around the community.

Marcia Davis, the lead volunteer coordinator for Homeward 2020, said seeing the program at work is amazing on all fronts. She also explained volunteers who work with the program often get a new perspective on the “multifaceted issue of homelessness.”

“It really helps you be aware,” Davis said.

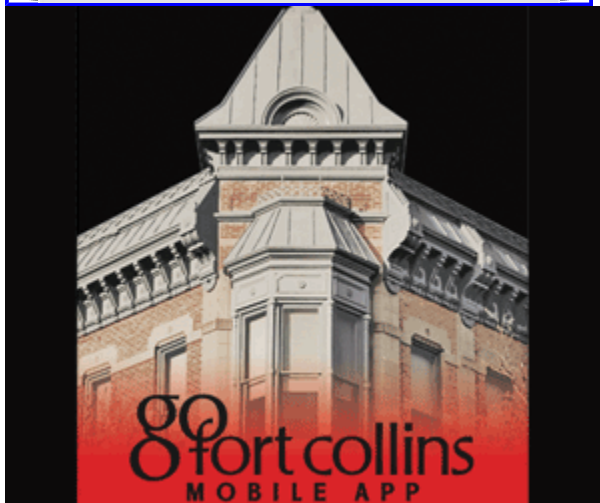
Numerous community groups have made changes in the lives of the less fortunate, whether in the form of a haircut, a home or just a helping hand. But there is always a need for more volunteers in almost every aspect of the project.

“Life is about being active and giving back,” Davis said. “It’s about being a life learner.”

To get involved with the program, contact Marcia Davis at davism@frii.com or visit www.homeward2020.org. Additional volunteer opportunities can be found within the SliCE office, located in the Lory Student Center.

Senior Reporter Jason Pohl can be reached at news@collegian.com.

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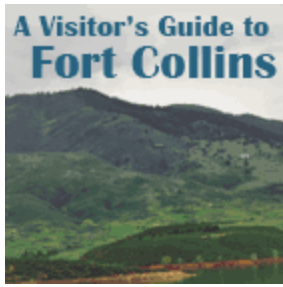
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