

Homeless initiative surpassing goals

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GREENSBORO — More than 99 people and 31 families are no longer living on the streets of Guilford County, numbers that far surpass goals set forth in the county's 10-year-plan to end chronic homelessness.

The announcement comes two years into the Partners Ending Homeless Initiative's plan to end chronic homelessness by 2016. The plan had called for placing 20 people in stable housing each year.

The group has spent much of the past two years establishing community relationships, mobilizing volunteers, raising money and increasing awareness, Jehan Benton, the group's director, told supporters at NewBridge Bank Park on Monday morning.

High on the group's priorities is the creation of a permanent day center in Greensboro. A temporary center — where the homeless can find help in the form of showers, washing machines and social services — is up and running at Bessemer United Methodist Church. A donated warehouse on East Washington Street will become a permanent home for the center, which Benton hopes will open in October.

"Time is slipping away for some of our friends who are homeless," Benton said. "It is time to connect to one another, support each other and our efforts, and restore the lives of those who are experiencing chronic homelessness."

Also on the immediate agenda is funding the Housing First program, whose current money source will dry up at the end of the month. A new grant will kick in on Sept. 30, but Benton said the group is looking for ways to support the program — which places the chronically homeless directly into housing — in the interim.

"We're reaching out to our community to help us with bridge funding," Benton said.

Rabbi Fred Guttman attended the gathering to accept The Nehemiah Award on behalf of Temple Emanuel, honored for raising \$10,000 at a Run for Shelter event.

"The people that are doing this are really doing God's work," he said. "The work they're doing is just the epitome of righteousness and holiness."

Additional awards were given to The Guilford Center and David S. Miller. Nine individuals were recognized as Homerun for Homeless Honorees.

The group also announced it has reached the following goals:

- Creating the WE! Initiative, which provided six emergency homeless shelters during the cold winter months.
- Developing a plan to ensure everyone discharged from jails, hospitals, mental health care or foster care has a place to stay.
- Teaching 70 landlords, property managers and developers about housing laws.
- Coordinating job training groups, education programs, employment agencies and homeless services to help the homeless find work.

As the initiative enters the third year of the 10-year-plan, Benton said the 2016 goal will be attainable with increased community support.

"Because of the economic times, everyone is vulnerable and people really are starting to think of homelessness differently," she said.

As part of the day's events, the group hosted "Homerun for Homelessness" Monday night at the ball park, which included a kid's carnival. Proceeds were donated to the initiative.

Bobby Smith, president of the United Way of Greater High Point, said the baseball theme made perfect sense, considering that many of Guilford County's homeless did, at one point, have a place to call their own.

"Somewhere along there they got stranded at first base or second base and couldn't quite get home," he said.

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