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## Hand-up jobs program gets \$15K to help homeless

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Ned Sickle decided he wanted to give the homeless a hand up.

That's why the general manager at the Hilton Fort Collins worked with Sister Mary Alice Murphy and staff at the Murphy Center for Hope to develop the Hand Up Cooperative, a collaborative effort created to help the homeless find jobs.

The Hand Up Cooperative is a partnership between United Way of Larimer County, the Larimer County Workforce Center, the business community, and the Sister Mary Alice Murphy Center for Hope. Its mission is to match area businesses that have employment opportunities with pre-screened, qualified applicants from the homeless community who need a job.

Last week, the cooperative received \$15,000 from United Way of Larimer County.

"This is a new innovative approach to employing the chronically homeless and community members who've recently become homeless," said Gordan Thibedeau, president and CEO of United Way of Larimer County.

The Hilton has an associate from the Hand Up Cooperative who has been working at the hotel for about five months, Sickle said. "I see no reason why this program will not help this employee flourish and grow and it's good for an individual who is hungry for an opportunity," he said.

Funding for the Hand Up Cooperative will come from United Way's "Bridging the Gap Fund," specifically for projects or work being done to address poverty in Larimer County, in an effort to accomplish United Way of Larimer County's Pathways Past Poverty Initiative.

"The homeless are the most poverty stricken population," said Mary Atchison, vice president of community investment for United Way of Larimer County. "It's necessary to create pathways for them to become self-sufficient."

The funding provided by United Way of Larimer County will be invested in a coordinator to ensure all aspects of support needed for this impoverished population are met. "This is the hardest population to employ. Any effort we can make is a breakthrough in breaking this particular cycle," said Thibedeau. So far, eight businesses are involved with the Hand Up Cooperative, including the Hilton.

The biggest challenge for is finding employers willing to participate, Sickle said.

"Some are hesitant and for good reason, with unemployment so high, there's no shortage of highly qualified, capable people looking for work," he said. "We have to have employer partners who really want to partner with the community to make a difference."

Sickle decided the Hilton would participate in the cooperative because it fits with the hotel's mission.

"We want to make a difference in the community," he said. "We want to be great partners in making Fort Collins a better place to work and a better place to live."

Atchison said the cooperative is a good fit with the Pathways Past Poverty Initiative.

"We see this as a really critical link," she said. "We wanted to see if this truly has the potential to create systemic change. That's what Pathways Past Poverty is looking for."

The Pathways Past Poverty initiative is a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to poverty with the goal of turning the trend of increasing poverty around in Larimer County.

During the last three years, dozens of community volunteers worked together to determine 12 goals for Pathways Past Poverty. Now, dozens more are researching and developing strategies to accomplish these goals.