

Key Center works with local initiative to end homelessness

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A recent partnership between UNC Asheville and local government helped create awareness and support for the millions of Americans without a place to call home.

"This city of Asheville, not that long ago, developed a partnership with UNCA, and this joint work on the homelessness and hunger awareness week is a perfect example of that partnership in action," said **Amy Sawyer, coordinator of the Asheville Homeless Initiative**, a program seeking long-term solutions for homelessness.

The UNCA Key Center for Service Learning, in collaboration with the Asheville Homeless Initiative, recently participated in National Homelessness and Hunger Awareness Week. Events included a week-long food drive and a reading and showing of *The Soloist*.

"Most of the people who came to the book discussion were either homeless or formerly homeless individuals," said **Laura Furey, associate director for the Key Center**.

The center also set up a table in the Highsmith Union for the week, delivering information about homelessness and issuing pledges to people who wished to help the cause.

"We had about 45 people sign the pledges, so that was great as well," Furey said.

All food donations will go to the Emma Family Resource Center, a local food pantry and resource center for struggling families. Furey said the Key Center chose Emma due to its localized distribution rather than a larger organization such as the MANNA FoodBank.

"We're keeping it local," Furey said.

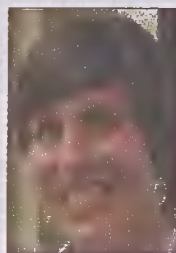
For the project, the Key Center collaborated with the Asheville Homeless Initiative. Sawyer said it focuses on implementing a 10-year plan to end homelessness.

"Our basic goal is to implement the 10-year plan, which will end chronic homelessness and reduce all types of homelessness over the next decade by investing resources and a coordinat-



Steven Hall/contributing photographer

A homeless man, Fred, sits under the I-240 overpass on Lexington Avenue. The Asheville Homeless Initiative collaborated with the UNCA Key Center on implementing a 10-year plan to end homelessness.



Laura Furey

ed, sustained effort that addresses the underlying causes of homelessness," Sawyer said.

Sawyer said the initiative attempts to find long-term solutions to the homelessness problem, rather than short-

term fixes. According to a 2005 congressional research report, there are anywhere from half a million to 2.5 million homeless people in the United States.

"Our basic premise is that the best and only known solution to homeless-

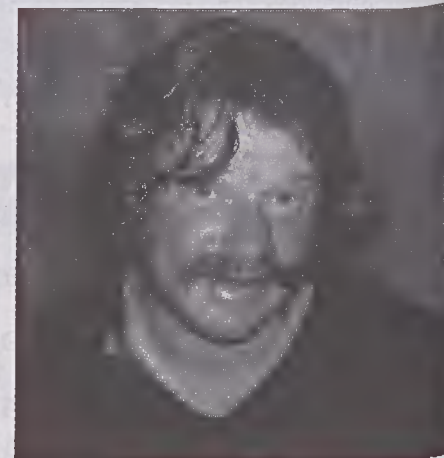


Eric Boyce

ness is housing," Sawyer said. "So, we focus on helping people access housing and also the services that they may need to keep that housing."

Sawyer said the project was a collaborative effort and a combination of federal, state, and local funds support the initiative.

"The project works with service providers, businesses, residents and people experiencing homelessness in a



Kate Santos/staff photographer

Mark Gibson, a homeless man, lives on the streets of Asheville.

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