



Summit brings community advocates together

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CONTRA COSTA COUNTY (KGO) -- The very non-profits that help people in need are finding themselves in need as they struggle to stay afloat in these tough financial times. This was the topic Tuesday afternoon at a summit meeting of community organizations who first made their voices heard at an ABC7 Listens meeting that we first hosted in Concord earlier this month.

Contra Costa County first saw this crisis coming a few years ago and formed a task force. Now they're hoping to produce real change; not just in meeting need, but in ending it altogether.

The people gathered Tuesday afternoon in a room at the Contra Costa and Solano Food Bank were the who's who of Contra Costa County social services and beyond, listening and learning from one another as to what's needed to better serve people who need help.

"There's always need for more resources in primary safety net services," said former county administrator John Cullen. "And the recession only made the situation worse."

The recession meant government funding at all levels dried up at the same time more people needed help with everything from food to health care.

In Contra Costa County from July 2010 to June 2011, more than 6,000 people used homeless services, nearly 3,000 of them for the first time. And one agency said that in 2010, 45 percent of its clients were worried about a lack of food. While in 2011, that number rose to 89 percent.

"No matter what we do to help people in need, if they stay in need, we haven't really solved the problem," said Contra Costa and Solano Food Bank director Larry Sly.

According to Sly, the food bank is doing well at keeping up with the growing need. But says he's there to help make sure other needs are met as well, "We're doing what we're doing incredibly well. But it's not enough. We know the need is larger than what we're doing, so we need to interact with the other folks who are taking care of health issues and school issues and other things that are part of the problems facing the people we serve."

Linda Best is president of the Contra Costa Council, a public advocacy group promoting the county's economic vitality, she adds, "Well I think it takes all the stakeholders in the county coming together to collaborate to find solutions and the business community certainly needs to be a part of that."

The community is also being encouraged to volunteer

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