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POVERTY SYMPOSIUM SET FOR RANCHO CUCAMONGA JULY 29

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By Dianne Anderson

Inflation or recession, no matter what they call it, everyone is feeling the pinch, but some more than others.

Legislators, community-based organizations and philanthropists will all come together in a symposium this month to identify exactly what is keeping the low income community from getting services, and how to fix it. The 2022 Poverty Symposium: Connecting Community Support Systems, Creating Economic Change will be held on July 29 in Rancho Cucamonga.

Xiomara Henriquez-Ortega sees a tremendous increase of clients coming in daily, calling services, many are families with children. After the pandemic, a lot of their clients lost their jobs. Other factors impacted their housing even when the moratorium was in place.

“Some of these families were receiving unemployment benefits, but it wasn’t enough to sustain their families. A lot of them lost housing because of that. Times are really tough for a lot of us, but more so for our low income communities,” said Henriquez-Ortega, Manager of Administrative Support of Community Action Partnership of San Bernardino County.

Hosted by CAPSBC, the event brings elected officials, policymakers, and other community leaders in for a firsthand view to understand how poverty is impacting San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

As part of a lead project by the agency’s advocacy committee, she said they wanted to bring in key community organizations, including Arrowhead United Way, Catholic Charities of San Bernardino and Riverside Counties, Time for Change Foundation, Young Visionary Youth Leadership Academy, Youth Action Partnership, and the San Bernardino Superintendent of Schools.

One aspect is replicating local success stories by the nonprofits, and discovering which ways work best to help the most vulnerable navigate the current economy.

“We also want them at the table to hear innovative solutions that a lot of service providers have implemented to tackle poverty-related issues that our communities are facing,” she said.

Other participants will share their stories of how they came to CAPSBC agency, what services they received and how the resources transformed their lives to improve their economic situation.

Bringing legislators together with service providers can shed light on the problem, but she said it also impacts policy to get more financial help out to the community.

The symposium looks to get a response and commitment from its funders panel. Curt Lewis, grant program director with Rep. Pete Aguilar’s office will provide insight on how organizations are funded.

“Our goal is, what can we do to put it work, that it just doesn’t stay as a concept but becomes reality,” she said. “[Service providers] are seeing individuals and working with this population every day. You can no longer afford to look the other way.”

“We’re excited about the CAP has taken the lead in bringing us to the table to be able to do this,” said Dr. Gwen Dowdy Rodgers, President & CEO of Arrowhead United Way.

Role-playing is one feature of the poverty simulation to show what the low income communities go through daily in accessing basic needs. Typically, it takes hours and hours and miles and miles just to accomplish the most menial tasks.

“Going to the bank, trying to get loans, trying to figure out resources to get on the bus and all that the underserved individuals experience. Getting off the bus, trying to get to appointments and the place is closed,” she said. “They are navigating through all of that.”

Service providers will have presentations on how their clients have received services. Each organization will appeal to funders and legislators about their financial needs, and what organizations are dealing with to keep the doors open.

“We want legislators to be familiar with these organizations and funders also to get up close, so that if they see an RFP or grant request, they [recognize] the organization or staff that they can engage,” she said.

Larger foundations will also be at the table to answer questions in person and hear funding requests.

Since the pandemic, Dowdy-Rodgers said millions of stimulus dollars have been difficult to tap as local governments, cities and counties, have requirements for accessing those dollars.

“Not all nonprofits are ginormous with the bandwidth to come into an RFP or have reserves,” she said. “Nonprofits aren’t sitting around with fallback money. As quick as it comes in, it goes out just as fast.”

She feels that cities and counties have to understand that small and medium-sized nonprofits are doing the greater work in the community.

At Arrowhead United Way, she said there is an overwhelming demand for services with food and finances these past years. Investor-type donations to the agency have been negatively impacted, and she said the symposium is an intimate opportunity for a few of the selected nonprofits in the county to make an appeal.

“Finances are bringing us down right now,” she said. “Nonprofits are really still in need of financial funding. In order to be the broad work managing through the pandemic, there is a great need for investments to come by way of funding.”

For more information, see bit.ly/PovertySymposium2022

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