

give your gear

organization expands to Loveland in efforts to help the homeless

By NICHOLAS LOVERDE
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Living homeless means constantly fighting the outdoor elements — rain, snow, cold, wind and sun.

To help the homeless survive outside, Ken John created Homeless Gear. Founded a little over a year ago in Fort Collins, Homeless Gear seeks to provide survival gear to the homeless. The organization asks for tents, backpacks, coats, boots, socks, flashlights, hats, sunglasses and anything else that helps in the outdoors.

“Part of what I want to do is to reach the homeless in whatever way they need,” said Brian Day, who along with his wife, Pam, serves as an outreach volunteer for Homeless Gear in Loveland. “A big part of it for me is that the homeless get overlooked,” Brian said.

Because many shelters turn away homeless people for alcohol or drug issues or only open when the temperature drops below 40 degrees, Homeless Gear recognizes the need for outdoor survival gear. It gives out help to the homeless regardless of drinking or other drug issues.

“We’re not here to judge them. We want them to be able to survive,” Brian said.

However, they do keep track of bigger items donated. “We’re not just giving gear, throwing it away,” he said.



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The sign on the window outside Loveland Coffee reads “Homeless Gear Drop Spot.” Homeless Gear will collect outdoor survival gear for the homeless at Orchard Athletic Club on March 26, but people can donate any time at a drop box at Loveland Coffee.

One of the biggest challenges for the organization is to find out “who, where and how many are in the homeless community in Loveland,” Brian said. In many ways, the Days have to audition for the homeless people, to demonstrate that they can be trusted. Once the

donate

Homeless Gear will sponsor a drive to collect outdoor gear March 26 at the Orchard Athletic Club, 289 E. 29th St., in Loveland.

Homeless Gear is a nonprofit organization that collects unwanted outdoor gear and redistributes the gear to the homeless fighting the outdoor elements.

Because some shelters turn away homeless individuals with drug or alcohol issues, Homeless Gear focuses on equipping all homeless individuals living outside. Items to donate include sleeping bags, tents, flashlights, boots, socks and anything to help survive.

For a complete list of gear and clothing needed, call Ken John at 581-4921 or visit www.HomelessGear.com

In addition to the March 26 event, donors can contribute gear any time at other drop-off points in Loveland and Fort Collins.

other drop spots

- **Loveland Coffee**
620 E. 29th St., Loveland; 278-1221
- **House of Neighborly Service**
565 N. Cleveland Ave., Loveland;
667-4939
- **High Plains Scuba Center**
115 W. Harvard St., Fort Collins;
493-8562
- **Murphy Center For Hope**
242 Conifer St., Fort Collins;
494-9940

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Days gain the trust of a few, they'll connect to more homeless people.

"The word of mouth around the homeless community is the best way to get the word out," Brian said.

While the Days enjoy collecting the gear, the most rewarding part for them is redistributing it to the homeless and talking and connecting with the benefactors.

Brian recalled one homeless man who said he didn't need anything but eventually admitted he needed boots. The man shoveled snow to make a little money, and he had shoes with holes in them.

"A simple pair of boots can make all the difference to him," Brian said.

Distributing gear one day, Pam asked one homeless man what his biggest problem was, and he said sleep. He had only slept five hours in the past three days.

Pam said there's a fear factor

for the homeless when they're out on the streets alone.

"You're not safe when you're out in the elements," Pam said.

Pam, now a life and career coach, volunteered in the past with at-risk girls. "I've had a passion all my life for youth," she said. "I've had a heart for throw-away teens, and Homeless Gear will turn into an avenue to reach more of the homeless teens in Loveland."

"Teens are some of the hardest to reach because many don't want to be found," Brian said.

Brian and Pam also are concentrating on enhancing the level of communication between other organizations helping the homeless. They have spoken with the House of Neighborly Service and Angel House and Interfaith Hospital. With a strong level of communication between the organizations, they strive to make sure homeless people are helped. "If you need it, we try to provide it," Brian said.