



News Release

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SUBJECT: Leaders gather to seek collaborative resources to end homelessness in the watershed

San Bernardino, CA – Nearly 130 leaders from the State of California, local cities, counties, educational institutions and non-profit government organizations forged through the rain and heavy weather to gather at California State University San Bernardino for a working symposium to collaborate on the topic of homelessness in the watershed. The event opened with San Bernardino County Supervisor, Josie Gonzales. As an advocate for a “people first” philosophy, she shared insight on her personal experiences of visiting with those experiencing homelessness living along the waterways of the Santa Ana River. Her heartfelt message passionately described the barriers, which are hindering opportunities for solutions.

“This conference is the culmination of the work put forth and connections made at our last two symposia. At this conference we have heard from those leading the strategic work to end homelessness from San Bernardino, Riverside and Orange Counties. Today we collaborated to bring a cohesive plan to end homelessness in this region. We celebrated the successes and the challenges facing this topic,” shared Megan Brousseau, Inland Empire Waterkeeper Associate Director.

Following panel discussions from San Bernardino and Riverside County teams, as well as non-profit groups, who are working at solutions to end homelessness along the Santa Ana River Watershed, attendees separated and self-selected to participate in a breakout session. Breakout sessions included: encampments, technology: GIS connecting agencies, non-profit government organizations and, permitting and policy barriers. The event, which was hosted by the Inland Empire Waterkeeper and the California State University Water Resources & Policy Initiatives aimed at gathering key stakeholders from relevant public agencies to share with one another what their agencies were doing to tackle this critical concern, as well as what resources could be shared.

“As a supporter of the symposium, the California State University Water Resources & Policy Initiatives shares a true connection to the seriousness of the issue of homelessness. As public agencies it is our responsibility to seek solutions collaboratively,” stated Boykin Witherspoon, Executive Director, Water Resources & Policy Initiatives. “People experiencing homelessness are the most underserved of the underserved. Our department provides internships to students in various sectors, including partnering with agencies that impact the homeless community. Because our teaching mission is focused on experiential learning and some of our students are facing housing insecurity themselves, we are able to see full circle those impacted by homelessness seeking solutions to end the crisis.”

Once the group reconvened, shared findings were presented. It was found that collectively, with technological resources already being implemented in some areas, other areas could benefit from sharing the resources. With sensitive issues pertaining to HIPAA laws, public safety personnel boundaries and policy, there are certain matters, which will take time to resolve. Jointly, the breakout groups made a commitment to improve on inter-agency relationships.

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Established in 2005, Inland Empire Waterkeeper is a non-profit environmental organization whose mission is to protect and enhance the water quality of the Upper Santa Ana River Watershed through programs of advocacy, education, research, restoration and enforcement. For more information, visit www.iewaterkeeper.org.