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Forum turnout higher than expected

BY BRIAN AHERN

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ST. GEORGE - Turnout for Tuesday's Human Services Forum was nearly double what organizers expected, a clear signal, they said, that Washington County residents are determined to get the resources they need from their local government.

"We really want to hear from you and see what your needs are," Utah Community Action Partnership Associate Director Paul Leggett told those in attendance at Grace Episcopal Church. "Hopefully, we'll get some consensus about what the biggest problems are and then we'll really start to address the solutions."

Organized by Utah's Five County Association of Governments and presented every three years, the event tackled issues relevant to low-income residents.

The issues included education, transportation, emergency services and mental health.

Leggett and UCAP Executive Director Heather Tritten moderated the discussion, formulating a series of solutions that would be incorporated into FCAOG's three-year plan for Washington County.

"We explored some good things in depth," Tritten said. "Each agency will serve the local needs."

When it came to education, the group said low-cost, adult education should be more easily accessible.

A larger public transit system that connects various Washington County municipalities was an idea to deal with transportation problems.

For emergency services, crisis intervention and better administration support, the crowd said, would be needed.

With many of the county's homeless and incarcerated population suffering from mental illness and substance abuse, attendees recommended a greater emphasis be placed on educational services for law enforcement and better access to treatment for those in need.

Attendee Kelly Anderson said she was pleased to see a healthy turnout, but was discouraged that no St. George City Council members or representatives from any nearby municipalities were present.

"This is what the city councils need to know," she said. "This is probably the only way it will be brought to the attention of other people."

There were some in attendance, however, who were looking to help.

Melissa Hansen of the Red Rock Center for Independence came to the event with the goal of helping.

"It's important that we work on solutions," she said.

The meeting was so successful that Chuck Goode of Grace Episcopal Church said he'd like to host it once a year instead of every three years.

"We see so many resources out there and we see so many needs that are not being met," he said.
"They have ideas we would never think of."
