



## Business leaders spend night sleeping on pavement

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Business professionals shifted the focus of homelessness in the city Thursday to youths who have been living out on the streets. They spent the night sleeping outside Covenant House to experience some of the struggles those teens face.

For most of the month, international attention has been on the city's new law that makes it much more difficult for charitable groups to hold outdoor feedings for the homeless.

But just a mile-and-a-half up State Road A1A from where police have cited 90-year-old Arnold Abbott for conducting weekly beach feedings for the homeless, more than 15 business people spread out cardboard boxes and sleeping bags in the Covenant House parking lot to spend the night. It's an act that would be illegal in a public space a few miles to the west, where the city banned sleeping on public property downtown – one in a series of measures approved this year regulating homeless behavior.

Attorney **Don Lunny**, who was participating in his third sleep out, wasn't critical of the city's efforts.

"I think that Fort Lauderdale is appropriately trying to address this issue from a government standpoint," Lunny said. "It's going to be important for citizens and charities to make a difference by supporting shelters such as Covenant House."

What Lunny has learned during the sleep outs is that it's a difficult life for the homeless.

Lunny said he will remember "how tired I was in the morning, how sore I was in the morning, and on reflection, how difficult it would be to do this day after day, to not have a place."

Besides raising awareness about homeless youth, the participants in "Sleep Out: Executive Session" were also raising money for programs that help teens move ahead with their lives. The participants get people to make pledges for them spending the night outside.

The sleep out is part of a nationwide effort. Last year, more than 500 executives nationally participated and raised \$2.7 million.

Covenant House in Fort Lauderdale took in \$65,117 last year. This year's goal is \$100,000 and the organization had raised more than \$63,000 as the evening began.

Before heading out for the night, the participants had a meal inside with some youths living there. Covenant House provides shelter and services to "homeless, runaway, at risk and trafficked youth" under the age of 21. The program has about 70 youths a night – and a waiting list – and has helped more than 30,000 since 1985.

Those on the waiting list could be "couch-surfing" from friend's house to friend's house, staying for a short time with family, or sleeping under a bridge or on a bench or in some bushes, Covenant House Director Jim Gress said. After the meal, the participants listened to the youths tell of their experiences before arriving at Covenant House. The business professionals shared a little of their history, too. The youths held up signs showing how long they had lived on the streets, signs that held times such as two weeks, eight months, 427 days and two years.

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