HOMELESSNESS COLAB WORKSHOP

OCTOBER 20/21, 2017

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

This report is a summary of the Homelessness CoLab workshop that took place at Bates Technical College on October 20 and 21, 2017. It is based on the comments provided by the participants to the elected officials who attended at the end of the workshop. The participants are listed in an attachment hereto.

This summary attempts to use the same words and thoughts expressed in the report-out process. Because it is a summary, not necessarily a narrative, it may contain phrases instead of complete sentences in many places.

The CoLab was conceived and facilitated by Larry Seaquist with the support and sponsorship of the following non-partisan organizations:

- League of Women Voters of Tacoma-Pierce County
- National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- American Association of University Women (AAUW)
- Restoring the American Dream, Pierce County (RAD)

Additional support for the workshop, through use of their facilities, was provided by Bates Technical College.

The goal of this CoLab was to collaborate to generate creative new ideas to employ within Pierce County to address the homelessness issue – and to stimulate action to implement those ideas.

The CoLab process has three parts:

1. Identify the stakeholders, their specific interests and obstacles
2. Brainstorm solutions that could address the interests and obstacles
3. Develop recommendations based on common understanding of the issues

The report that follows is a summary of the discussion at the CoLab. A more detailed report providing background and additional details will be produced in the near future.

October 31, 2017

SESSION 1: PERSPECTIVES ON HOMESSLESS IN PIERCE COUNTY

GROUPS: WHO WE ARE	WHAT WE WANT	OUR MAIN OBSTACLES/BARRIERS	OUR FRIENDS AND ALLIES
Opportunity Makers • Churches • Housing authorities • Local governments • Etc.	• Training • Rehab opportunities for clients • More beds for housing	• Money • Clients need to travel, take shower, place to live, clothing suitable for work; • Land use legislation; • Loss of community within the community of people experiencing homelessness; • No government or homeowner out to help us; churches are our friends (only the churches); • People experiencing homelessness have to start over and over every time they hit a wall; • We include government, but government is an obstacle	• Churches
Homeless Communities • Non-profits, agencies trying to make a difference • Individuals and families experiencing homelessness • Veterans • Students • Educators • Survivors of domestic violence • The disenfranchised • LGBTQ • Those suffering from effects of the economy, medical situation,	• Housing • Support; for people to understand who we used to be • Basic needs: place of security, peace, rest; take care of offspring; • Source of income long-enough to become self-sufficient (we want to get back on our feet. Homelessness is not our life-style choice) • Rule-makers to talk to property managers and help build community	• Confusion and mixed messages about where and when to obtain services (multiple trips, returns, closures, etc.) • Being on a list for services – up to a year or more • No help until already in trouble; no preventive services • People do not truly understand what is happening or who it's happening to (not sure if they don't know or don't choose to know)	• Service providers, when they are available

GROUPS: WHO WE ARE	WHAT WE WANT	OUR MAIN OBSTACLES/BARRIERS	OUR FRIENDS AND ALLIES
families falling apart, chaos, or violence in our lives we never saw coming; • A huge portion of the community		• Eventual turning away by former friends and by family • Not enough resources for good people • Funds seem large to taxpayers but taxpayers don't realize the funding is not reaching the actual people experiencing homelessness	
Rule-Makers • Elected officials, municipalities/legislators • School districts/boards • Churches • Businesses • Civic Organizations • Lobbyists • Chambers of Commerce	• To be re-elected • Get win-wins • Solve the problem; long-term strategies • Deliver on promises • Safe community • Long-term • More funding resources	• Misconceptions, misperceptions, misinformation • We, ourselves	• Voters • Business community
Housing Owners & Makers • Housing authorities • Private (sometimes distant) property owners • Non-profits (e.g., Metro Development Council) • Developers • Associations (e.g., landlord associations, Master Builders, Housing Authority)	• Generate revenue and profit; we see people as income • Generate revenue to make more money quicker • Reduce turnover and vacancy rates; • Be competitively priced to continue to earn money; • Incentives; want to participate in solutions but need incentives to build housing at different price levels (it is not as profitable to build varying types of units as it is	• As a group, we aren't sufficiently defined; we don't know who all is part of this group; demographics are not available • Red tape to access funds for different properties; • Lack of leadership; there is no clear leadership or responsibility for our role in helping people experiencing homelessness; • Local laws prevent us from taking advantage of certain opportunities to increase	• Chambers of Commerce • Municipal Building Depts.

GROUPS: WHO WE ARE	WHAT WE WANT	OUR MAIN OBSTACLES/BARRIERS	OUR FRIENDS AND ALLIES
	to build consistent types) • Government desires may be different from private sector desires • Units off the market would be an opportunity to generate more revenue if could get them back •	stock/bring back properties; auxillary dwelling units (ADUs)	
Community Protectors • First responders • Incarceration institutions • Community health nurses • Fire depts. • K-12 educators • Financial institutions • Libraries	• 100% homefullness; • Prevention/recovery; early and often prevention; • Skills and opportunities • To change mind-sets; education just like stores on TV; • More intentional; creative wrap-around services	• The community (people experiencing homelessness are not wanted there) • Business owners; • Ignorance; perceptions; • Systematic oppression: e.g., under-employment; low wages; etc/	• Those who deliver services inside jails; civil service; • National best practices; • K-12 and other community resources; • Faith-based organizations (where people go because they are not threatened or judged and create relationships; • Funders (though they can become barriers)
Ministers of Chaos • Businesses • Landowners, • Government officials • Homeowners	• Push the people experiencing homelessness away so we don't have to see them • Don't let the people experiencing homelessness have kids	• Social service/social justice organizations • Faith-based organizations	• Politicians • Lobbyists • Deniers

SESSION II: IDEAS GENERATED BY GROUPS

Overall, there was discussion about how what is currently happening is not working ("How is "normally" working?") There must be a change in thinking, a change in the foundation within the County. People need to get together in one group to support the change.

People in the vicious cycle can't get out of poverty because they are homeless, can't get housing because they are in poverty. It was noted that just increasing wages may not cure poverty. Homelessness cannot be entirely cured by curing poverty.

Suggestion	Discussion
Establish an "AirB&B" for people experiencing homelessness	• Would require a third party to screen both housing providers and potential residents
Convince businesses of the bottom line benefits of helping with housing for people experiencing homelessness	• Per Amazon's provision of housing in its office building in the South Lake Union area of Seattle, some businesses could help with providing facilities • Businesses could be persuaded to assist with funding
Provide incentives for developers to build more housing suitable for people experiencing homelessness	This includes: • Allowing greater density in some areas • Incentives to renovate buildings/homes that are currently boarded up. There are buildings now that are not being used for anything. • Assistance in working with banks to release some repossessed properties/homes for renovation as housing for use by people experiencing homelessness • Reviewing regulations and determine where they can be "loosened" in order to stimulate more building of housing
Address the disconnect between "affordable" housing and what is actually affordable for people with no or low incomes.	• A "living" wage is far below the "housing wage"; both are much higher than minimum wage • Housing is not affordable for people in poverty • Rental rates are increasing rapidly
Create a path between where people experiencing homelessness are and where they	• For people newly experiencing homelessness, the first question is "where do I go"? Everyone should be able to answer that • Houseless does not equal homeless; need a place to stay (dry/safe) even if a camp • People experiencing homelessness need a place to shower and dress for work • Allow housing coupons to be used for rooms, not just for apartments

Suggestion	Discussion
need to go	- Provide cell phones, transit passes to make job searches and service delivery more accessible - Provide temporary housing where access is flexible (e.g, access in evening) - Treat housing like a disaster, emergency; disaster response. This country knows how to respond to disasters; can we do the same for homelessness? Get emergency services to be part of the solution (ERs, Jails, Psych beds much more expensive than other ways of addressing; they are not a housing response; but we need those people to be part of the solution) - Jails should not be the largest mental health facility in our county - Medical respite care; adult family home model to help transition
Long-term: Resource Center	A Center could be constructed using existing closed up buildings that could provide up to 500 units 500 beds = 400 @ 5X10 with bed and dresser; 50 @ 10X10 for couples; 50 @ 10X20 for families - Could be in groups of 100 each, dispersed, or all 500 in a center 5:00 pm to 9:00 am shelter with access in evening - Combine with day center functions, such as computers, support groups, substance treatment support groups, etc. This could be a resource to those not living at the Center as well - Contractors who are people experiencing homelessness could provide some construction and maintenance; many have these skills - Could have self-governance - Note that centralizing requires transportation to get to other services - There are models in other areas, including in Seattle (note San Antonio program)
Short-Term: Camp Grounds and RV parks for housing during winter when not used as much for recreational camping	- Could follow the Walmart model - Would provide restroom facilities - Foster care, mental health system, emergency departments transferring people without knowing where they are going
Long Term: Address the factors that create poverty and the high percentage of people living below the poverty line	- Access to education needed - Recognize that none of the strategies work equally well for everyone; advocate for multiple, appropriate pathways that work across groups - Housing wage jobs (higher than min wage); $26/hour gets housing today and increasing at higher rate than previously - Employment opportunities are needed that allow people to stay permanently housed - Career advancement opportunities are needed so that people experiencing homelessness can build on previous careers; wage progression - Behavioral health services needed - Need a place that is strategically thinking, not just in government – doing systems-level thinking; note that here there is not the same sense of urgency here as there is where it gets terminally cold in winter

Suggestion	Discussion
	• The cost of experiencing homelessness, the cost of homelessness on our community – compare to cost of providing housing for someone and return on investment once housing is provided • Leaders making the funding decisions need to be diverse; we need to intentionally move to that • Start at "stopping the faucet"; programs available but access is a challenge; Rules vs guidelines – rules too stringent; every individual has own specific needs but the program rules don't flex. Give opportunity to vary. • People experiencing homelessness (7000 votes) could influence elections. What if all of them vote? Changes politicians' attention. There is a campaign now, "Our Votes Count" (Fuse WA)

Create a single entity that is responsible for data gathering, implementation of solutions
 	
Establish evidence-based best practices
	• Data is inconsistent and underestimates the number of people who are homeless
	• The rate of homelessness in Pierce County is increasing by 100 people/week
	• Need a place that is strategically thinking, not just in government – doing systems-level thinking;
	• Elevate this issue to the level that exists where it gets terminally cold in winter
	• There are some evidence-based best practices, and they need to be used here
	• Preventive measures cost some people; reactive measures cost other people
	• Accountability and performance measures are needed
	• Currently there is no accountability in the system. People are moving from place to place with no help because of rules
	• Transparent data base, method of getting people to what they need
	• Central access point with duplicable system that all of the service providers can use
	    o The coordinated access system has several bumps in the road
	    o How to ensure central coordinated access that actually functions as "no wrong door" system
	    o Working with shelters now
	    o More a PARTNER question than a resource question to expand this
	    o Want to engage food banks, health clinics, etc. Working now with perinatal program
	    o Deputize 211
	    o School districts are complicated; leadership sometimes not in alignment with staff
	• For people newly experiencing homelessness, the first question is "where do I go"? Everyone should be able to answer that
	• Long-term: equity in the system – people disseminating opportunities and information inside the system and people with actual homeless experience using the information with others; much going on but the info not available
	• Accountability – Set a goal; large conversation; go-to people [data show variance in number of people experiencing homelessness on a month-month basis but total is increasing]; transparency. Need a specific proposal about how to do this
	• Ask first responders, what if you were maxed out, what would you do? Need info as well about what is not working as well as success stories.
	• Invest current resources to create better leverage and not have different

Suggestion	Discussion
	jurisdictions working against each other • Tackle the long-term problem by making sure what is needed is actually delivered; politicians don't know what is actually delivered. Get information from those in the system, what they actually experience. Don't spend money on what isn't going to fix the problem. Go back and sit down with stakeholders and figure out what is actually working. Get feedback from people experiencing homelessness and their advocates; constituents worry about how money is spent. As well as trash, etc. Figure out what it would take to remove those visible problems and address the needs that create those. • How would we create analysis? Analytic group? • Data is available; need to look at costs comparison to public of addressing vs not addressing the problem. Need a third-party analysis to do this. • Need a method to get everyone to share the right data. • Research institutions are doing the best work across the country. • Call it what it is, in terms of what is/is not working. Decision makers do what they do/don't do because they don't understand. Underneath all of our stories is the security of housing and what it means to our families. Without housing, cannot function in society. Do not want to only talk; want us to do something. • Make the programs available to those with mental health, about to lose housing, etc. Some people don't even know we have a mental health program here. Shortages of beds, appointments with practitioners, etc.
Create a marketing campaign to develop a better understanding of homelessness within the community Declare an emergency	• Focus on prevention with intentional "marketing"(public education) campaign like Xmas • Address the perceptions and what we THINK we know based on the limited pictures we see (some quite dramatic) • Create a door-to-door campaign • Recognize that there is homelessness among our families that is not visible to others; but people know what they're doing within their families • Make corporate philanthropy matter; menu of opportunities (change the language to address their mission/vision/values) • It helps to understand specific people's backgrounds and stories • People with addiction can get clean and then something happens and they're back at square one; the transition doesn't happen automatically; media is doing a disservice by featuring end result, not the story of how they got there • Need to recognize most of us are one step away; need to change the narrative, the stigma • Find out what people on the street need every day; recognize there is a history, none of this happened overnight • Generational impacts, different cultures, support each other but not everyone else functions that way • Need a visual • How do to this? Community meetings, five-year contract with media to produce something on this issue weekly (for example). Recognize it takes a long time to change public perception. Not "info-mercials" but visually stimulating and real people • Need a conversation about what is happening but not tear-jerkers • Need a real-life story, what is really happening in the background • Not those commercials with animals with big eyes!

Suggestion	Discussion

	• Fear of the unknown, "that could happen to me" stops people
	• Can't have just the county and Tacoma working on this; will take a much wider scope
	• Media blitz; all forms of communication; positive, pro-active, issue with clarity and suggestions about how the community can engage to make a difference and how it helps the community to address this
	• Recognize full awareness is essential to responding to emergency
	• These conversations are not currently happening in the community outside of government and social service providers
	• How? Brochure with steps to take; connect the dots with each other;
	• PSAs, ticker tape, public access channels, libraries, large footprint of social activities going on but not addressing this issue adequately yet; need to leverage these smartly
	• Define emergency as anyone 72 hours or less of homelessness
	    o Data tells us 93% in homes who move toward homelessness are victims of domestic violence, losing job, etc. Prevention is in dealing with poverty, health care, etc. Shift the responsibility to systemic reasons we have this emergency; use our creative thinking to do this. Talk to policy makers about system causes; community responsibility, not a government responsibility
	    o How would you respond to someone just about to lose their car, their house?
	    o Pierce County has a diversion program involving creative conversation with someone about to experience homelessness, identifying the one thing that will allow them to stay in residence. Need community help to expand this. Need to connect more with those who are interested in ending homelessness.
	    o We have a crisis response system. The larger issues are the systemic and structural factors that create this. We need a community level conversation about why we as a society accept the fact that 12% of the county live below the poverty line; while 50% people are living on the verge of poverty. Need to look at the data with the community. Will never make headway without a community conversation about poverty and factors that keep people there.
	    o Declare an emergency, get everyone talking; how?
	• Outreach is focusing intentionally on poverty, moving the needle in the community, goal to get to housing wage ($26/hour). Five-hour classes available. Down Payment Assistance program for first time home buyers. At grass roots level, ….National model, has brought public and private funders together. Center for XXX Families.
	•

Establish a levy to get the funds to accomplish what is needed	

Suggestion	Discussion
Provide cell phones and transit passes to people experiencing homelessness	• Get donors to pay cost of cell phone service for homeless; data in real time and access in real time • Hygiene, waste disposal areas needed short-term as well

SESSION III: RECOMMENDATIONS

In this session, there was instruction to move to an action plan. The following recommendations were presented to elected officials. Additional bases for these recommendations are noted in the discussion described above.

ACTIONS THAT SHOULD BE TAKEN IMMEDIATELY:

1. **Declare an emergency and conduct a marketing/education campaign within the Pierce County community**.

   Declare a county-wide emergency and commence an intentional marketing/education media campaign. Obtain resources from private sector organizations, using the argument that solutions to the homelessness issue are good for business. There are many groups currently involved in this issue that could be used for public education strategies.

2. **Establish a core group, a hub, responsible for homelessness countywide.**

   Establish a multi-jurisdictional, multi-sector coordinating group responsible for development and implementation of policies and programs to address homelessness in Pierce County with accountability. This group would also be responsible for compiling and analyzing data – potentially using a third party to analyze - to quantify the needs and to measure progress. This group would complete the "no wrong door" strategy that has been started also be a way to keep this conversation going.

   This group would also develop strategies for addressing the needs of people in poverty who could become homeless at any time.

   The League of Women Voters has agreed to spearhead this strategy by working with the jurisdictions and interested parties in Pierce County. Once formed, the League of Women Voters would not be the leadership. In addition, a number of the participants have volunteered to work on this.

3. **Provide support in the form of transit passes, access to hygiene and cell phones with expanded data service.**

   There are public and private resources already available that could address this. For example:
   - The transit system already runs, with or without having passengers who are experiencing homelessness, so transit passes would not be an added cost.
   - Transit Center restrooms have been taken out of service, but they would help people in transit continue on their routes instead of missing buses to find restrooms elsewhere.
   - The private sector could be asked to provide cell phones.

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ACTION THAT SHOULD COMMENCE IMMEDIATELY FOR LONG-TERM:

Create a super-village of housing plus support services and a system to graduate people from homelessness through a phased approach back to permanent housing.

- A "one-roof" hub with temporary housing plus support services (job training, counseling, etc.) is needed. This could be a single facility or a dispersed set of smaller units using the Starbucks model of making them look like the communities where they are located.
- This would require a tax levy, which in turn would require public will.
- Analyzing the cost of not addressing homelessness in contrast to the cost of providing these services may be helpful in garnering public support (as well as the campaign noted above).

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October 20-21, 2017

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