Community Solutions Workgroup – Continuum of Housing:

Meeting 1 Notes

Different points in the spectrum to FOCUS our efforts:

**PRESENT**
- Providing more housing units and services to those who need it now

**NEAR-TERM**
- Helping the severely cost burdened & those in danger of becoming homeless

**FUTURE**
- Enabling people who are currently in subsidized housing to transition out and remain stable in the community

**LONG-TERM**
- Preventing future homelessness (breaking the cycle) & preventing gentrification

Stated PROBLEMS related to the continuum of housing:

**PRESENT**
- Few opportunities for consumer-run/peer-run services for those experiencing homelessness (Hill)
- Emergency release funding is dropping, along with #s of clean & sober homes leading to few placements available to those who need them (Joe)
- Shortage of detox beds; transitional housing with case management for people coming out of the prison system is disappearing (Dan)
- There is a housing stock issue. Less housing = more homeless (Kate D)
- It is more difficult to obtain housing now than ever. We need more units (Hill)
- We may need alternatives to conventional housing that keep homeless communities together (Karen)

**NEAR-TERM**
- We are dealing with problems like old housing units, meth, and bed bugs that cause people to return to homelessness again (Kate D)
- WWU brings in 1,000 new residents a year, most of whom don’t want to leave after graduation (Ann)
- Low-income people here have three choices: make sacrifices, leave the community, or get subsidized housing; there is no hope (Tony)
- Many in the foster care system exit to become homeless (April)

**FUTURE**
- Those who need help can’t stay in their own community and get help – there are few services in the small cities around the county (Kathy)
- Rules for housing vouchers are inflexible; linked to targeted geographical areas (Greg)
- Renters need education on financial management and how to retain housing (Hill)

**LONG-TERM**
- We have not addressed the root causes, or systematic/community issues that lead to homelessness, etc (Emily)
- Addiction plays a significant role in people becoming homeless. The quality of addiction treatment could be improved (Anne)
- A barrier to exiting homelessness is repairing broken relationships – this isn’t an easy one to solve (Hans)
- Incomes are low (Tony)
- Bellingham is in danger of becoming a Monterrey or Santa Barbara, i.e., there are no problems related to poverty because only the very rich can afford to live there (MK)
More INFORMATION requested from the group:

PRESENT
- How much do we currently leverage in outside funding with our existing housing levy and federal housing dollars?
- What are our limitations? What can and cannot the City fund?
- What are the locations on a map of the most cost burdened households?
- What is the predicted population growth?

NEAR-TERM
- Do we know enough about what causes homelessness here? Ask the population served about their needs and the gaps. What are people’s actual experiences?
- General population trends for the US and what factors are impacting homelessness.
- Are there communities our size that have seriously decreased homelessness? How much money did they spend?
- What are the alternatives to conventional housing? Are there models that keep the homeless community together?
- What can we do to enable and inspire formerly homeless people to get back into the community?

FUTURE
- What conversations are we having with WWU about accommodating students?
- How many people are leaving subsidized housing?
- What does it take for those being housed to then transition out and become participating community members? What are the characteristics of people that move out of subsidized housing?

LONG-TERM
- Who are the people that have the most traumatic impact on other members of the community? How can we wrap around those people (to prevent them causing more trauma to others)?
- Where in Bellingham is there the most criminal activity?
- What are the best practices for avoiding becoming a gentrified (high-income only) community?

POLARITIES to balance:
- Crisis response ------- Prevention
- Bellingham ------- County & small cities
- Opportunity/action ------- Strategy/analysis
Additional Data Needed

☐ Ask population served what the gaps are.
☐ Leverage potential goals.
☐ WHAT ARE NEEDS of people.
☐ Anne will send info on addiction services.
☐ Housing Stock Condition.
☐ What is the "box" but understand entire problem.
☐ WWU-planning 4 new students.
☐ Churn rate.
☐ Locations.

Gaps:

☐ Decline in clean & sober housing inventory gap 12-18/mo, conserve 1-3.
☐ Addiction services, treatment facilities, providers.
☐ Harder than before.

Strategy:

- Develop community.
- Shared commitment w/partners.
- Education/retain housing.
- Alternative housing.
- Work for those that don't work or mainstream.

Long-term investment:

☐ Focus next few months on preventative measures, big picture.
☐ Better options - add expertise, kids/schools.

Immediate Crisis:

☐ When homelessness service providers complete work, focus on priorities.
☐ Needed to serve currently homeless.

? Prevention of certification.
? "Entering Homelessness"
? Generational - Aces.