



Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness

<https://pchomeless.org/> - info@pchomeless.org

What stories have those who are currently homeless shared with you?

Group Discussion Summary • Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness • 1.13.23

“But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation.”

— *Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., I have a Dream*

“Our job is to help everybody do what we want to do. Helping each other to walk this path is something we all can work on.”

— *Gerrit Nyland*

“Maybe that giant web is in fact our beloved community.”

— *Maureen Howard*

What homeless people are saying.

- It hurts. It's cold. I don't want to be alone. Shelters feel lonely.
- Need of supportive services (those that connect, things are so disjointed – may not get through on 211).
- Permanent supportive housing – definitions don't meet the needs (based off what HUD days) – people don't often fit the “box”; how “bad” does it have to be to meet needs?
- You ask for help – can't help you, but they give you a number, have to tell your story again – every time you have to tell it again, you suffer (trauma porn and the constant re-abuse).
- Can you get help without having to cry/relive trauma? Retelling your story retraumatizes people – can you just get help without having to be retraumatized?
- Criminal justice system: you lose housing while in jail, not paying rent, incarcerated for long periods of time during which time relationships break down.
- Cost of housing: even working multiple jobs, cannot afford housing.
- Domestic violence: trapped in an abusive relationship living in a tent with abuser.
- A story of a woman in a common law 38-year marriage, loses the house when the husband dies and his kids put her out. "I never thought I'd end up on the streets".
- Stories of success include a young man who got permanent job with a hauling co because of work ethic and fellow employees bought him a car. another successfully entered treatment after support at a sanctioned encampment
- System breakdown for veterans who did not get help needed after leaving service and who didn't even know about right to benefits.
- A homeless woman in Colorado, out on the street probably due to paranoia issues, bonded with me as a fellow NPR listener and encouraged me to follow my dreams.
- Spoke to people with medical problems/emergencies, loss of housing such as substandard housing being torn down...no housing for people with physical disabilities



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that require modifications. Then, the "find housing for these folks" system is broken and dysfunctional. In both cases, the unhoused person spent months in the hospital which is the most costly option possible.

- The "snowball effect" story. Someone loses their car by it being impounded and no funds to recover it. Then they lose their job. Then the self-medication increases. Then the search for safe sites.

Other observations

- Every person has stories – hundreds of stories, all are painful.
- Young adults' needs can be very unique.
- There is not a variety of housing options – some feel unsafe in shelter settings and will refuse this.
- Work near several encampments and able to provide lunch at the office. Find that most folks don't seem to want to talk. Several seem to be dealing with mental health issues.
- Multiple people with serious and persistent mental illness who have no safety net. Combination of mental illness and lack of supports.
- Was discussion of "rights" language vs "needs" language in crafting stories to provide for public engagement efforts.
- Homeless people who just got out of encampments into housing often go back to bring food and check on their friends. Sweeps make this type of community more difficult.
- Discussion about lack of systemic respect for homeless' "wisdom of crowds" in finding places to exist.
- Positive response of street residents glad to receive paper, pens, writing tools, to write songs, poetry, journaling. Bring notebooks, pens, colored pencils in Ziplock bags when doing outreach.
- Volunteers have a more welcoming response than paid outreach in some cases, since no sweeps have followed visits by outreach teams. At least that is the perception.

Etcetera ...

Project Homeless Connect is January 27, 11 AM - 3 PM, St. Leo's Church. Load in at 9:30 AM. Volunteer registration is now open. <https://associatedministries.org/supportive-services/phcvolunteer/>

Love in the Time of Fentanyl" film, The Grand Cinema, 1/22/23, 2:15-5p. (3) 1/27/23 the next Project Homeless Connect, St. Leo's Parish 11a-3p.

The Washington Low Income Housing Alliance begins its weekly Housing Advocate Session Briefings this afternoon and every Friday at 2 p.m. during the Legislative Session. Register here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZUsdumvrDMtHtSqWteCBB4VIDeAoIIrNuCI>



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Registration for Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Days on Feb. 6-8 is open now! You can register to join this virtual advocacy event at <https://www.wliha.org/hhad>

Housing Justice Narrative Toolkit: <https://housingnarrative.org/publication/housing-justice-narrative-toolkit>