

What are some steps we can take to lower the temperature and stop the violence?

Group Discussion Summary • Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness • 5.12.23

Mother to Son

Well, son, I'll tell you:	And turnin' corners,
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.	And sometimes goin' in the dark Where there ain't been no light.
It's had tacks in it, And splinters, And boards torn up, And places with no carpet on the floor— Bare.	So boy, don't you turn back. Don't you set down on the steps 'Cause you finds it's kinder hard. Don't you fall now— For I'se still goin', honey, I'se still climbin', And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
But all the time I'se been a-climbin' on, And reachin' landin's,	

— *Langston Hughes*

Tactical Ideas

- How does Public Health launch campaigns? This is a public health issue.
- Tacoma Reads in November is part of solution.
- Need opportunities for people to “get up close and personal” with homeless.
- We need to change the fear and blame narrative that supports attacks on the unsheltered. Part of the problem is a culture that promotes violence.
- The government could provide better means for homeless to go to the bathroom and pick up their trash. By doing so they'd mitigate two of the biggest grievances against the homeless -- and therefore ratchet down the anger.
- The faith community needs to take a larger role in defending and honoring humanity of homeless. This was the key to success of civil rights movement. Need other orgs like schools and civic orgs to engage in humanization as well.
- Seattle has a statute SMC 12A.06.115 Malicious Harassment of Homeless. Is there a similar statute in Tacoma or Pierce?
https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/SeattleHumanRightsCommission/hate_crimes_wallet_card-08-single.pdf
- Education includes understanding underlying causes of homelessness like DV.
- Education is critical. Neighborhood meetings? Educating our neighbors? Schools?

- A small tactic is to produce more of the “paths to homelessness” infographic around the county so people can see the many reasons that people become homeless.
- Getting people to connect one on one.

Communications Issues and Tips

- Concern about how much the public attitude has become negative toward unhoused people, City staff people, and just about everyone else, and not sure how to change this. It’s really hard to work in such a negative environment.
- There is increased violence against people living houseless. We need to take more charge of the narrative.
- Hard to know how to intervene or change the conversation, negativity is really difficult to offset
- Use people first language all the time, listen to young people who are far less judgmental than their adult counterparts.
- Demonstrate respect in conversations with unhoused people.
- Intervene in conversations when people say negative things, think of ways to do this constructively.
- Not sure anger is the way to respond to anger... But then if you feel threatened, just loving the person back may make you unsafe. Sometimes anger is protective, and sometimes anger has its place.
- Sharing stories is important to counter the systematic dehumanization that is the core problem.
- Getting LEC involved - sharing stories to humanize the situation.
- Use of the word “homeless” can be dehumanizing by refusing people to a category.

Possible Policy Issues

- Sweeps, themselves are violence against unhoused; stop sweeps.
- The point in time count shows we have no way to house the increasing number of homeless folks. The Martin v Boise ruling shows just how illegal these sweeps are.
- People scattered in 1’s and 2’s are more vulnerable. Seniors follow younger unhoused for perceived protection.
- Injured unhoused being pushed out of emergency with no support.
- There is community on the streets that aren’t recognized by medical providers as “family” and people can’t get info about their friends.
- Women and other vulnerable people who are camping sometimes take abuse from tent-mates rather than risk worse by camping alone.
- Importance of understanding the role of drug sales/turf issues in violent encounters.
- Higher level drug dealers (typically are not campers -just using camps for cover) are bullies who generate a great deal of violence and people often do not report for fear of retaliation.

- There is a lot of survival sex in unsheltered spaces (trading sex for a night in a tent or vehicle) - this is a particularly creepy kind of violence because the perpetrators convince themselves that the victim is consenting.
- Many people living homeless have evictions on records and that makes it even harder to get out of homelessness.

Observations

- “Hooverilles were once allowed by authorities when no other options seemed to exist. Today, even without housing options, we have sweeps. People in poverty are viewed as nuisances rather than traumatized human beings.
- Stigmatization of homelessness deflects attention from the profiteering off real estate and rent.
- People are scared: Seattle just named 5th most expensive city in nation. The negative narrative is amplified by housed people’s fear of being in such a situation themselves.
- NextDoor promotes a culture of fear. There is a larger context of fear and isolation driving the division.
- “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.”

Notes and Resources List

New and Notable

Tacoma Recovery Center Open House is next Friday, 5/19/23, 11:30am-3pm. All orgs invited.

Tidy Up Tacoma Website link:

https://www.cityoftacoma.org/government/city_departments/environmentalservices/rates/solid_waste_rates/tidy-up_tacoma

The new Homeless Point-in-Time Count numbers are out.

<https://www.piercecountywa.gov/4719/Homeless-Point-in-Time-PIT-Count>

Narcan free vending stations at First United Methodist & 2 Tacoma Public Libraries. Also lower level at the T-PCHD.

Homeless Prevention RFP is open now. Closes May 26, 2023.

<https://www.piercecountywa.gov/7829/Current-Solicitations>

Affordable Housing Development and Preservation NOFA is open.

<https://www.piercecountywa.gov/7829/Current-Solicitations>

Hot Weather Resources page: <https://www.craft.do/s/3dK6tTHwQN42Ov>

Outreach Item Need/Share Google Sheet https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Wp-RaAr_x1yw9dlFKZD-EX8WrcQsS7DTczrK0I-6rA/edit?usp=sharing

Community Spotlight Opportunity: Tell the coalition about your organization's good work. Contact tpdrutis@nctacoma.org to schedule a brief presentation. 😊

Free Food & Resources Market, Greater Heights Church, 4819 South 12th St., Tacoma WA 10-12 Saturday 5/12/23. Everyone welcome. You can pick up for others.

Recent Press

Here is an article about Miracle Friends that appeared on the front page of the LA Times. <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-05-08/volunteers-connect-with-homeless-people-by-phone-and-sometimes-cash>

Ongoing Resources and Needs

Need good street shoes. No more sad feet. Nativity House, St Vincent DePaul, TRM all need shoes. Shoes have a hard life if the feet are in them 24/7.

Housing Alliance Advocacy Links

WLIHA Advocacy pages - Take Action Now! <https://www.wliha.org/take-action>

Advocacy resources: 2023 Public Policy Priorities <https://www.wliha.org/advocacy/2023-public-policy-priorities>

Join the weekly advocate calls on Fridays, 2-3pm on Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZUsdumvrDMtHtSqWteCBB4VDeAoIIrNuCl>

<https://leg.wa.gov>

<https://tvw.org>

Catholic Community Services Safe Parking at Holy Rosary, a 90-day program to work on housing, opened this week. Need to call for screening, no drive ups. Referral phone: (253) 719-9333, 9 AM to 5 PM Monday – Friday. Eligibility:

- City of Tacoma residents
- Submit to background check (specific crimes against persons screened out)
- Driver's license and proof of ownership of car
- Families or individuals welcome
- No RVs or trailers at this time

Priority referrals taken from City of Tacoma HEAL team, or outreach teams from The Rescue Mission and Comprehensive Life Resources

Pierce County Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness can be found here:

<https://www.piercecountywa.gov/7309/Comprehensive-Plan-to-End-Homelessness>

Please sign up to the inclement weather listserv at

<https://www.pchomeless.org/Home/Listserv>