

LINKING ARMS:
AFFORDABLE HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS IN OUR COMMUNITY

November 16, 2012

On November 16, 2012, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, Multnomah County, Metro, and the City of Portland convened a community forum on affordable housing and homelessness in our region.

About 200 attendees listened to panel experts, shared their stories, and asked thoughtful questions about how to ensure that everyone in our community has a safe, decent, affordable place to call home.

Their feedback has been compiled into this report for regional policymakers and community leaders to consider.

Breakout Discussions

Forum participants broke into groups to discuss eight specific areas where we face special challenges or opportunities in the fight to end homelessness.

Group facilitators asked three prompting questions to spur discussion:

1. How can you help educate the people in your life about this slice of the issue, and what would you need to do that?
2. What role do you challenge the faith/business/government/non-profit/other sector to take on?
3. What new role can you play?

Group Feedback

A scribe took notes on each group's summary of its conversation.

Challenges Facing Women

Facilitator: Portland City Commissioner Amanda Fritz

- What is working: Connection between homeless service providers and Domestic Violence providers.
- Gateway Center.
- Safe shelter, need more shelter like this.
- Barriers: Lack of access to care for those in foster care system, rules of shelter can cause people to get kicked out of beds.
- Lack of mental health services.
- Good things happening!
- Too many are invisible, call on men.

Employment

Facilitator: Seth Lyon, Multnomah County

- Diverse group with cool ideas.
- Public/private partnership = employers and job trainers need to connect and share goals.
- Bring new business in the community with incentives and make sure business provides living-wage jobs.
- Make farming a focus, maybe we moved too far away from day labor market.
- Staying in your lanes – bring people together who do different things and focus on specialty.

Legislative & Systemic Barriers

Facilitator: Kirstin Juul, Rose Haven

- Get the word out to people who don't understand.
- Decriminalize homelessness (i.e. camping).
- Look at government for revenue sources.
- Very serious topic for everyone – how do we engage neighbors?
- R2D2 as learning tool – can be expanded upon as model.
- Need to voice opinion on all levels of government.
- Get involved with Sisters of the Road, Section 8 reforms.

Alternative Housing Models

Facilitators: Cole Merkel, Street Roots

- Good conversation from R2D2.
- Define alternative housing – a place with resources, safe, community-based, open, run by those who use it.
- Other models: shelters, recovery centers, etc.
- Models meet immediate needs of those using them.
- City needs to lend support – no city code written about this [unspecified] model.
- Public support and education is vital, have been to Eugene promoting model.
- Positive: change perceptions, R2D2 stop on Chinatown tour, promotes ownership of neighborhood and safety, community has softened impact of not having homes/houses.
- 1,700 people sleeping outside, end camping ban, shift from homelessness to houselessness.
- Break stereotypes.

Families

Facilitator: Annie Heart, Family Bridge

- Need ourselves to be better educated. Know what others are doing in community, know other agencies.

- What role should different sectors have? We are all concerned with same issues. We all care about children – an education opportunity.
- Know demographics and data.
- Need to be a resource and stand for more resources – stand with politicians who are taking a stand.
- Need training tools.
- What new role can we play? Each of us can make a difference.
- Make a faith forum.
- Go to schools and classes about issues – kids will pass info to parents.
- Be a role player and voice.

Healthcare Transformation

Facilitator: Rachel Post, Central City Concern

- Reps from County, City, Nonprofits, Faith.
- Partners and providers need more education about CCOs and transformation.
- Many questions: How are savings going to be realized by leveraging services?
- Efforts to develop workforce of community health workers – people of the community – not old model, but more flexibility.
- Support services we know to be effective will be better funded.
- Objective is to reduce health care costs by 2% - Obama Admin. Infuse 2 Billion – reduce costs 8% over 10 years.
- More people covered by OHP – how do we assist people to get enrolled? Need to make sure everyone is covered who is eligible.
- OHP revise CCOs requirements for paying for supportive employment services?

Changing Public Perception

Facilitator: Tony Bernal, Transition Projects

- Is there a single perception? What is it?
- People on streets, people asking for money are the homeless is the perception, but there are many hidden individuals.

- Enthusiasm for plunges.
- Educate ourselves about variety of homelessness – moving, couch surfing.
- Challenge everyone to listen to stories, engage corporate volunteers.
- Need to market homeless issues.
- Need to engage in work and move beyond just being supportive.

Mental Health

Facilitator: Bill Boyd, JOIN

- Big picture: What is mental health?
- Should we look at alternate views of mental health – look at it as spaces between us, Open Dialogue from Finland.
- Who gets to define it? Is the participant equal in the process? Are they being heard?
- In crisis situations: insurance.
- People with alternate views of situation.
- When someone presents a challenging interaction how do we move forward and listen?

Comments & Questions for Further Discussion

Throughout the Forum, participants were asked to write down their ideas and questions about affordable housing and homelessness.

Questions to Consider

- What is being done in Portland to address human trafficking? Homelessness and human trafficking go hand-in-hand. Especially in regards to youth.
- The youth continuum continues to serve an aging population, with the average “youth” being 21+ years old. Where are the “Youth” 18 and under and how are we serving them?

- What is the impact of the ex-offender on the houseless issue in the Portland metro area?
- Following up on the use of parking lots – Beyond religious organizations will the city support neighborhood associations in the effort to connect with local business in support of private/public relationships ease regulations and restrictions for helping homeless?
- Domestic violence shelters have been challenged with housing a larger population of homeless women and children than what our missions and funders hold us to. We are desperate to connect closer to the homeless agencies & communities and have begun to make these steps. How can we make this happen and how can we have county and city support?
- Where can limited and small foundation dollars make the most impact?
- If you can waive code requirements for vehicles why can't you waive code requirements for Right to Dream Too?
- It currently seems as though the homeless/houseless are criminalized. What partnerships are needed to change this?
- So many of the homeless talk about wanting a job as the single most important way to restore their dignity and get off the street into an apartment or home. Partner with employers! Why isn't there more conversation about creative employment opportunities, outreach plans for training, talking to employers partnering for jobs rather than money?
- What about shelter for couples married for more than 10 years, no children? They always try to separate us! Not in an abusive, alcohol, or drug addicted relationship. I feel like the Caucasians are now the immigrants.
- For Portland homeless family solution- how do you handle the information sharing and confidentiality issues with you coordinated intake and sharing of the "one piece of paper" intake process?
- Why are alternative foundation models thought of as unacceptable?
- One speaker people "here are on their own." Yet there are not enough jobs for all people to have income. Why can't leaders commit to WPA program to get people working?
- Why are people of color over are represented? Where do vets fall in the homeless picture?
- Will the city work with a non-profit houseless group? Work on houseless issues.
- Why are we fining R2D2? Wouldn't supporting them be an easy step to getting people a little safer and a little closer to getting off the street?

- What specifically would you like the city and the counties do to help assist those experiencing houselessness? – Mama Chewy & Michelle.
- Why not let people sleep in the building instead of in their car?
- In regards to surveys conducted by business or government agencies, can houseless people be allowed to help create surveys with you, rather than just take surveys about information you want from them?
- Can government agencies find any large federal grants to apply for to help get more resources for the houseless? (Not sure how the process works.)
- How do federal guidelines impact who you can help?
- There is much talk about a lack of housing, yet there are many empty apartment buildings, condos, and The Grove Hotel standing. What about using some or all of those?
- With affordable housing can we sign up? Where do we sign up?
- Are you all willing to change your perception of reality itself and go through an ideality change in order to live in a world that works for all, people and planet?
- Portland says it's a city that works, could they work with an idea that works? R2D2 cause the city 0 cents, would that help?
- I hear those who are living outside using the term “houselessness” this morning rather than “homelessness.” Is this a trend in our language around a sensitivity to the terms we use to describe or friends who are living on the streets?

Comments and Ideas

- We need to move towards processes that move away from the “certainty” of facts and move toward dialogue and other tools that actually change the nature of how we do relationships with people. We need the change of heart and openness to changing our minds.
- “Purpose of government is to lift up those who have need- not further aggrandize those that have more than enough...” (a rough paraphrase of F.D.R) Let's look seriously at the government deals – developments and public private partnerships etc- demand they pay fair wages and support union rights.
- Let's continue a new source of revenue for our many needs, including homelessness. As the only tourist destination of the top 50 without a food and beverage tax we fail to take advantage of our famous cuisine. Tens of millions of dollars in revenue. Ashland and Yachats are Oregon examples.
- WPA program needed!

- Oregon's racial disparity and racial disproportionality. In Oregon's DHS/CPS/CSC runaways who feed into human trafficking in Oregon as number one in the nation. Highest number of homeless children= Oregon. How are you going to deal with this issue? This is a mental health issue for children and youth which is child abuse by Oregon DHS who remove children for safety reasons.
- Stop assuming that we're addicts. What do you qualify as family? My husband and I have no children nor do we use drugs or alcohol. Caucasians are in the ranks of homeless people. Homelessness ends with a set of keys.
- Let's do a joint opinion piece for The Oregonian! Let's update the summit format by integrating more technology and less passive listening. Let's make this an annual regional event I'd give it a budget line. Nice worker everyone! – Rev. Kate Lore.
- Your city already has a grassroots answer to immediate survival after trauma. That is already being consulted state wide by active members of Dignity Village Inc. I have been to Ashland, Eugene, and Cottage Grove Oregon showing the models adoptiveness in many facets of severity. If the council, PHB and PDX would get behind what we're already doing by helping me and our outreach team administrator what is there on paper that has worked for 12 years so far.
- Money to help out the homeless with services for bills, transportation, and more places to sleep.
- There has been an emphasis placed on homelessness both in terms of spending priorities and policy priorities. But the affordable housing aspect seems lost in the discussion. What would you consider a fair balance of time, energy, and resources spent on each?
- Please discuss what the county (city) is doing about homeless/ housing in Portland. What is currently available to the homeless families? Does your ten year program have immediate solutions?
- Instead of continuing the winter of financial cuts to social services how do alternative solutions play a part?
- This was worthwhile but far too reared, and too "one way". For an event called "Linking Arms," there was not enough opportunity for dialogue. The divide between "provider" and "receiver" of services was disappointing. Loss of good information, nonetheless.
- Safe housing – a long term indefinite place to stay for those who are underemployed/ unemployed; those who are also attending college or no. These people don't want to be housed with people with problem issues like alcohol, drug abuse, mental health issues, criminal background, disabilities, veterans etc. These people are homeless due to the economic recession for no other reason. Portland's plan to end homelessness doesn't address homelessness due to economic recession. These people need housing

until they are full employed and have saved enough money to rent a market rate home. They don't want to live in HUD or Section 8 housing. HUD told me waiting lists for Section 8 project based housing are supposed to be 2 months long. Currently the waiting list is 3 – 8 years long. Nothing has been said about hotel/motels vouchers. No single women's shelter has been built for 1 year. There are only 2 single women shelters in Portland, that's not enough. Create large resource books to be housed at city, county, metro, state offices, and libraries. The partnerships aren't published in street roots or on 211infor.org. Needs to be a 1 stop place for people to find these non-published resources.

- First of all, this summit needed to be at least a full day long, it felt very rushed. The dominant message being “were doing the best we can with meager resources”.
- Domestic violence affects women and children in four ways. 1) Immediate crisis of violence. 2) Homelessness from past domestic violence situation. 3) Chronic trauma keeps women from becoming stably housed. 4) Domestic violence continues on the street as homeless families seek safety.
- Need to involved education from birth to twenty one in the discussions. Panels were great re: housing/partnerships, but where education of the children who are experiencing poverty/homelessness is.
- People don't only need to help with housing, we need to reclaim our own lives and be able to build our own homes, our own community relations, our own dreams. Helping people to be self sufficient, not only for themselves but for each other. Open markets need to happen. People looking for jobs should also be able to make and sell their own goods and services on the streets. People selling are and goods instead of drugs on the streets. The right to sell good and services with out being fined and harassed for trying to make an honest dollar.
- Stop the fines against Right to Dream too and embrace it as a model for communities of peer support where people can help one another, build skills, and meet their basic needs. There is not a one size fits all solution, but these are many solutions coming from the houseless community and they should take the lead and be given technical support and resources.
- Align economic opportunity systems (WIA, DVR, FSET, OED, TANF) with homeless service dollars and healthcare to implement evidence leased practice programming that is documented nationally in literature to assist those exiting homelessness in securing earned income; a light solution o ending homelessness.
- Need raisers for the panel.
- There are many more empty houses than there are houseless people. The financial institutions should be fined to raise revenue. Austerity is not the answer.

- The role of city and county government is to support fair wages and union right in development and private/public partnership deals.
- Loss of Section 8. Families, and children are removed DHS/CPS/CSD. Case workers are informing judges of family being homeless.
- Are there things being learned about amelioration of houselessness by the non government/ non profit which can be incorporated into formal government programs?