

Special Focus Area: Homelessness



Homelessness

337 unsheltered individuals were counted in East King County during the Point in Time Count



295 homeless students in Bellevue School District in 2018-19 school year



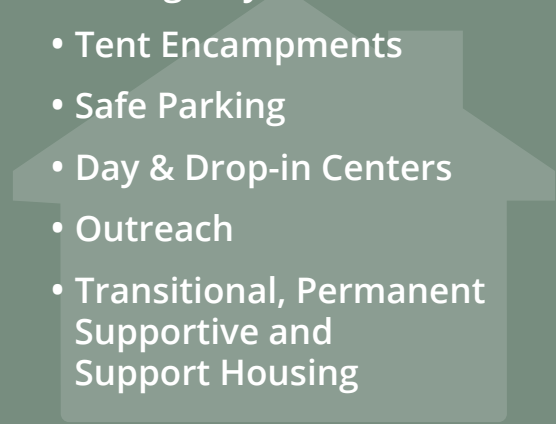
Increased needs at EKC low-barrier Shelters in 2018:

- Served **603** unduplicated men (Congregation for the Homeless)
- Served **413** unduplicated women (Sophia Way)
- Served **348** unduplicated individuals at family shelter (Catholic Community Services)
- Served **193** unduplicated young adults (Friends of Youth)



Homelessness Response:

- Emergency & Winter Shelters
- Tent Encampments
- Safe Parking
- Day & Drop-in Centers
- Outreach
- Transitional, Permanent Supportive and Support Housing



Homelessness System, Services and Needs in King County, Bellevue and East King County

This Special Focus Area of the 2019-2020 Human Services Needs Update provides information about:

- Homelessness in our Community
 - Count Us in Data
 - Students Experiencing Homelessness in Bellevue School District
- Root causes of Homelessness
- Regional Coordination for Homelessness Response
 - All Home
 - All Home Homeless Data
 - East King County
- Bellevue's Approach to Addressing Homelessness
- Preventing Homelessness
- Services for People Experiencing Homelessness in East King County
 - Emergency Shelter
 - Tent Encampments
 - Safe Parking
 - Day and Drop-in Centers
 - Outreach
 - Longer-term Housing Programs

Key Findings

- In the King County Point in Time Count of people experiencing homelessness, there was a decrease in the number of people counted in both King County and in East King County. However, there continues to be an increase in the students experiencing homelessness in the Bellevue School District and an increase in people using the local shelters.
- Many factors lead to someone becoming homeless, including lack of affordable housing, mental health, substance use disorder, economic disparities, racial disparities, criminal justice system, and lack of services for youth exiting the foster care system. Focus on resources to address the root causes of homelessness is needed to truly address homelessness.
- Bellevue's approach to homelessness is through providing direct investments into services to prevent homelessness, services and facilities for people experiencing homelessness, and providing compassionate enforcement in working with people experiencing homelessness. Bellevue is working together with other Eastside jurisdictions and community agencies to provide an array of prevention services (eviction prevention, case management, and employment programs) and homelessness services (shelter, day centers, transitional, and affordable permanent housing).

Overview

King County and the City of Seattle declared homelessness a state of emergency in 2015. Since then, the number of people experiencing homelessness has continued to rise.¹ In January 2019, the One-Night Count required by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development found 11,199 people experiencing homelessness in King County.² Committed to making homelessness rare, brief, and one time, King County is serving more people than in past years. However, as more people become homeless, waits for housing get longer. Over the past several years, the number of unsheltered people has steadily and visibly increased in East King County, a sub-region in which many would not expect to find homeless individuals on the streets, in vehicles, and in shelters. In 2018, the need continued to increase in East King County: the men's winter shelter in Bellevue served a total of 630 unduplicated men, the shelter for women served 413 women, and the winter shelter for families served 348 individuals.³ The 2019 Bellevue Human Services Needs assessment survey included an in-depth follow-up on homelessness in Bellevue. One hundred and ninety-seven respondents agreed to participate; 95 residents completed the homelessness follow-up questions. Eight percent indicated they had been homeless or at risk of being homeless. Housing issues such as rent increases, eviction and relationships ending were the top three events that led to being homeless or at risk of being homeless.⁴

Homelessness in Our Community

Count Us In (One Night Count) Data

- Since 1980, Seattle and King County has held a point in time count in January of people experiencing homelessness to provide a snapshot of the problem and track trends over time. In 2017, a new data collection method was implemented to include several elements that would improve the quality of the data, such as counting all census tracts instead of already known locations, and including a sample-based qualitative survey including shelter and service locations. While the methodology used in Count Us In is one approach, no methodology allows for 100% accurate count of all people experiencing homelessness at a given time. There are many challenges in a homeless count, including a large geographic region and a very diverse county, as well as the fact that individuals and families experiencing homelessness generally do not want to be located and make an effort to avoid detection. Regardless of the effort, the precise number of those experiencing homelessness continues to be underestimated.
- The count conducted in January 2019 found a total of 11,199 individuals. As shown in Figure 1, 47% (5,228) were sleeping unsheltered on the street, in cars or RVs, in tents or in abandoned buildings and 53% (5,971) were sheltered in emergency shelters and transitional housing. There was an 8% decrease in the number of individuals experiencing homelessness in Seattle/King county compared to 2018.⁵ Although there was a decrease in the count, there is a high potential for an undercount of the number of people experiencing homelessness.

Figure 1: Individuals Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness, By Region

Unsheltered						
	2017		2018		2019	
REGION	%	n	%	n	%	n
East County	6%	319	6%	393	6%	337
North County	1%	58	4%	251	2%	85
Northeast County	2%	84	2%	137	2%	99
Seattle	70%	3,841	71%	4,488	68%	3,558
Southwest County	20%	1,113	15%	974	21%	1,084
Southeast County	1%	70	1%	77	1%	65
TOTAL	100%	5,485	100%	6,320	100%	5,228

Source: 2019 Seattle/King County Count Us In Report

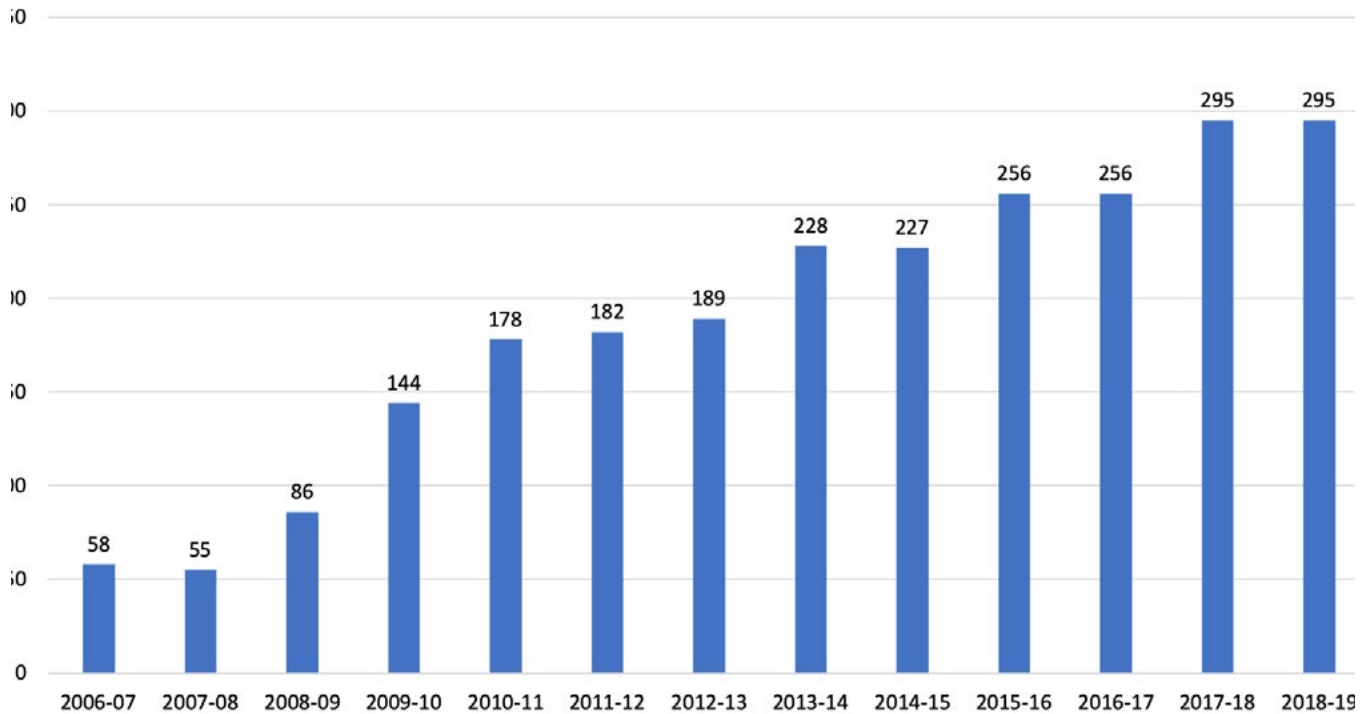
- In 2019, Count Us In found 337 unsheltered individuals in urban East King County (including portions of Bellevue, Kirkland and Redmond). There was a 16.6% decrease in the number of unsheltered individuals from 2018 to 2019, but a 5.6% increase from 2017 to 2019.⁶

Students Experiencing Homelessness in Bellevue School District

- The McKinney-Vento Act is federal legislation, in effect since 1987, that ensures the rights and protections of children and youth experiencing homelessness. The purpose of the Act is to ensure that homeless children and youth are enrolled in and succeed in school. The McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless children and youth as “individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence.”⁷
- In the 2018-19 school year, the Bellevue School District (BSD) reported that 295 students were experiencing homelessness and eligible for the McKinney-Vento services. Forty-five youth were living in an emergency/transitional shelter, 209 youth were doubled up (due to economic or similar reasons), 24 youth were unsheltered at some point, and 7 used a hotel/motel as a primary form of residence. For the 2019-20 school year as of February 4, 2020, BSD is reporting that 338 students were experiencing homelessness.⁸ One hundred sixty-eight youth were doubled up (due to economic or similar reasons), 35 were living in an emergency/transitional shelter, 6 youth were unsheltered at some point, and 3 used a hotel/motel as a primary form of residence, and 24 are living on their own (unaccompanied).

- As shown in Figure 2, the number of homeless students continues to grow in the BSD. Between the 2006-2007 and 2018-2019 school years, the number of BSD students receiving McKinney-Vento services increased by more than 400%.⁹

Figure 2: BSD Students Receiving McKinney-Vento Services by School Year, 2006-07 to 2018-19



Root Causes of Homelessness

- Homelessness is a systemic problem that touches every major American city, including every city in the Puget Sound region. While there are many root causes, such as a health issue, the loss of a job, or the need to escape a domestic violence situation, that can quickly catapult people into homelessness. These root causes are inherently interconnected, and for unsheltered individuals, the factors listed below, in many instances, are compounded by each other.
 - Mental health and substance use disorder
 - Economic disparities and poverty
 - Lack of affordable housing
 - Racial disparities
 - The criminal justice system
 - A decentralized response to a regional crisis
 - Lack of wraparound services for youth within and exiting the foster system¹⁰
- In the 2019 Point In Time Count Survey, respondents were asked to identify the primary event or condition that led to their current experience of homelessness. Approximately 24% reported loss of job, with the other top responses being alcohol or drug use (16%), eviction (15%), and divorce or separation (9%). Other self-reported causes of homelessness included

inability to afford rent increase (8%), an argument with a friend or family member who asked them to leave (7%), incarceration (6%), and family/domestic violence (6%). These results are self-assessments and not from a clinical source. While these self-identified causes may have contributed to an individual or household's immediate experience of homelessness, they do not reflect the structural and institutional factors that contribute to such housing crises and the lack of an adequate safety net.¹¹

Regional Coordination for Homelessness Response

All Home

- All Home, which is part of King County government, brings together local governments, religious institutions, non-profits, philanthropic organizations, shelter and housing providers, the private sector and engaged citizens in a coordinated effort that both responds to the immediate crisis of homeless individuals and addresses the root causes of the problem in the region. Its vision is that homelessness is rare in King County, racial disparities are eliminated, and if one becomes homeless, it is brief and only a one-time occurrence. All Home's role is to lead the Seattle/King County Continuum of Care in realizing this vision by:
 - Developing a common agenda and plan of action
 - Building the capacity of funders and providers to implement
 - Measuring results, monitoring performance, and holding funders/providers accountable
 - Communicating transparently and continuously¹²
- Coordinated Entry for All (CEA) is the access point for which people who are experiencing homelessness are assessed for and connected to homeless housing resources. The purpose of CEA is to ensure that all households experiencing homelessness have equitable access to housing resource connections to resolve their housing crisis. The system aims to work with households to understand their strengths and needs, provide a tailored assessment process, and progressively engage households to connect to the housing and homeless assistance that will best support them. CEA incorporates the principles of a system-wide housing first approach and prioritizes those with highest service needs through a Dynamic Prioritization model. Dynamic Prioritization is a revised coordinated entry approach which uses population-specific prioritization criteria (i.e., assessment result, unsheltered status, length of time homeless) to identify the most vulnerable households and utilizes a case conferencing model to connect prioritized households to housing based on the anticipated number of available housing resources over the next 60 days.¹³

All Home Homelessness Data

- Over the years, the number of households experiencing homelessness has increased with a slight decline in 2019. All Home data looked at households experiencing homelessness who accessed services from a program participating in the Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) or in the CEA queue based on data from January 31 of each year, they reported 9,371 people in 2016, 11,379 in 2017, 14,760 in 2018, and 13,006 in 2019.
- All Home posts performance measures annually for the programs in King County that participate in HMIS. The data points below are for July 31, 2018 through June 30, 2019.
 - Thirty-nine percent of households exited to or maintained permanent housing.

- The average length of stay was 94 days for households enrolled in shelters, transitional housing, and rapid rehousing.
- Thirteen percent of households returned to homelessness.
- Utilization rate is 93% for 9,921 units.

East King County Regional Effort

- Eastside Homelessness Advisory Committee (EHAC) has met monthly for over 10 years to network, share ideas, and hold trainings. EHAC works to ensure the Eastside voice is united and East King County representation is present in regional efforts addressing homelessness. Members of EHAC include agencies providing services to people experiencing homelessness, faith community members, advocates, funders (Eastside cities and King County), A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH), All Home, Public Health Seattle and King County, and community members.
- East King County cities work collaboratively to fund homelessness services across regional boundaries to maximize resources and services. For example, Congregations for the Homeless men’s shelter is located in Bellevue, Friends of Youth’s young adult shelter is located in Redmond and both Sophia Way and Catholic Community Services shelter location rotates to various congregations located throughout Bellevue, Redmond, and Kirkland, but all eastside jurisdictions contribute funds to these programs.

We’ve seen a steady increase of the number of homeless. At any given time, I’d guess there are approximately 50-75 homeless people in the library.

~Participant, Bellevue Library Staff
Community Conservation

Bellevue’s approach to addressing homelessness

As Bellevue has grown in population and transitioned into a more urban environment, homelessness, a nationwide issue, has become more visible here. Working together with other Eastside jurisdictions and agencies, the community provides a wide network of services to support individuals experiencing homelessness. The City of Bellevue has undertaken a comprehensive approach towards homelessness and is guided by a commitment to compassion and pragmatism, with the focus on preventing individuals from becoming homeless, transitioning individuals out of homelessness while maintaining a commitment to enforce current codes. This approach requires a high level of coordination between services, facilities, policies, and enforcement.

In partnership with local community providers and by providing Human Services Funding to an array of services, the system of responses to homelessness in Bellevue falls broadly into these categories:

- **Services to prevent homelessness** – basic needs provision, emergency financial assistance, counseling and treatment programs, medical care, employment opportunities, affordable housing
- **Services for individuals experiencing homelessness** – mental health resources, employment programs, housing assistance, substance use disorder treatment and counseling, and case management, etc.
- **Facilities for individuals experiencing homelessness** – day centers, shelters, and other facilities where homeless individuals can not only sleep, but keep belongings, meet with case managers, and focus on addressing underlying issues that may have contributed to their situation

- **Compassionate enforcement** – response to behaviors and activities that don’t comply with existing city rules and regulation using a team-based approach, which includes an outreach worker to provide community resources. This approach includes police and code enforcement response to unauthorized encampments on private or city-owned property, as well as any criminal activity.¹⁴

The City of Bellevue invested over \$500,000 in additional dollars to the City’s Human Services Fund to provide year-round emergency shelter for men starting in September 2019, through Congregations for the Homeless (CFH). The early start date was made possible by the generosity of the Bellevue business community coming together with design, engineering and financial contributions to modify the existing winter shelter at Lincoln Center for year-round overnight use, and an agreement with Cloudvue, a local developer, to allow CFH to use their property as a temporary “bridge” shelter while the current winter shelter is brought up to fire code for year-round operations.

Regarding expanding CFH winter shelter to year-round operations:

“This is a major step in the provision of emergency services for men experiencing homelessness on the Eastside. It is another example of how the city, our human services providers, our residents and the business community are stepping up to meet the challenge of homelessness.”

~Bellevue Mayor, John Chelminiak

In December 2019, CFH moved the shelter back to Lincoln Center and the facility will be the temporary three-year location until a permanent shelter is constructed. CFH and King County have identified a site owned by King County on Eastgate Way for a new men’s shelter. CFH and King County continue negotiations on the final purchase agreement with a goal to have Bellevue work with CFH and King County to site a new men’s

shelter on property owned by King County on Eastgate Way. CFH and King County have stated that the goal is to have it sited, built and operational by September 2022.¹⁵ Bellevue will work closely with CFH through the design and permitting process.

In Fall 2019, Bellevue added a Homelessness Outreach Coordinator position as part of Bellevue’s strategic effort to help the city advance a proactive and comprehensive response to the challenging issue of homelessness. In addition to providing direct assistance to those experiencing homelessness, this staff person coordinates efforts across city departments, external partners and regional service providers. This staff person also responds to related community issues, and develops performance metrics for Bellevue’s work to reduce homelessness.¹⁶

Preventing Homelessness

Preventing households from losing their housing is an important strategy for ending homelessness. To be truly preventative, homelessness assistance must extend beyond just the specific episode of homelessness: an effective system should help people to resolve their crises, access on-going sources of support in the community, and provide basic safety net assistance such as emergency shelter and temporary rental assistance.¹⁷ Some best practices to prevent homelessness include:^{18, 19, 20}

- Jobs that pay a livable wage, and job training and education that helps workers move up the wage and job ladder

- Economic development to create a wider range of opportunities for living wage jobs, including those that do not require advanced college degrees
- Preservation and creation of more affordable housing that accounts for family income as rents and other basic needs increase
- Affordable, quality childcare so that parents can work knowing that their children are well taken care of
- Access to assistance that already exists such as tax credits and rebates for low-income people that frees up more of their limited income for housing
- Access to transportation to maintain employment and needed services
- Elimination of racial disparities by promoting equity and social justice in funding and program design
- Healthcare that provides for both mental and physical health services
- Access to emergency assistance for times of crisis, such as financial help to prevent eviction, legal aid for those who have had past criminal histories

Services for People Experiencing Homelessness in East King County

Emergency Shelter

“Emergency Shelter,” according to a federal definition, means “any facility with overnight sleeping accommodations, the primary purpose of which is to provide temporary shelter for the homeless in general or for specific populations of the homeless.” There is an extensive network of emergency shelter facilities but demand far exceeds availability.²¹

Men:

- Congregations for the Homeless (CFH) operates a low-barrier, year-round emergency overnight shelter. In 2018, they provided 15,829 bed nights for 603 individuals, with 234 self-identifying from Bellevue.²²
- CFH operates a year-round emergency shelter program with 35 beds per night. The shelter rotates each month between different congregations, primarily in Bellevue. In 2018, they provided 6,383 bed nights for 113 individuals, with 45 self-identifying from Bellevue.²³

Women:

- The Sophia Way operates a low-barrier, year-round emergency overnight shelter. The shelter rotates between different congregations. In 2018, they provided 8,219 bed nights for 413 individuals, with 65 self-identifying from Bellevue.²⁴
- The Sophia Way operates a six-month intensive shelter program with 21 beds per night. In 2018, they provided 7,464 bed nights for 96 individuals, with 14 self-identifying from Bellevue.²⁵

Families with Children:

- Catholic Community Services operates a low-barrier, year around emergency overnight shelter. The shelter rotates between different congregations. In 2018, they provided 7,203 bed nights for 348 individuals, with 16 self-identifying from Bellevue.²⁶
- Hopelink operates 19 units of apartment style family shelter in Redmond and Kenmore. In FY 2018, they provided 20,425 bed nights for 149 individuals, with 16 self-identifying from Bellevue.²⁷

Domestic Violence:

LifeWire operates a confidential shelter for individuals and families experiencing domestic violence. The shelter is located in apartments scattered around East King County. In 2018, they provided 13,523 bed nights for 127 individuals, with 28 self-identifying from Bellevue.²⁸

Youth and Young Adults:

- Friends of Youth operates a licensed staffed residential home for up to 12 youth, ages 11 to 17 in Kirkland. It's a short-term emergency placement for homeless youth and for state involved youth through the Children's Administration. In 2018, they provided 1,851 bed nights, with 78 of those bed nights for Bellevue residents.²⁹
- Friends of Youth operates a low-barrier overnight shelter for 20 young adults age 18-24 in Redmond open seven nights a week. In 2018, they provided 6,818 bed nights for 193 individuals, with 13 self-identifying from Bellevue.³⁰

Future:

In mid-2020, Catholic Community Services and Sophia Way will be opening the first 24-hour homeless housing site and day center for families and women in Kirkland on the property formerly owned by the Salt House Church. The facility will be able to provide 48 beds for women and 50 beds for families. They will provide case management, housing navigation, mental health counseling, meals, and a computer lab.

In early 2019, Congregations for the Homeless (CFH) announced they had selected a site for a permanent shelter and day center in Bellevue, a piece of surplus King County property along Eastgate Way. This facility would provide 100 beds for men, as well as case management and supportive services. CFH and King County continue to negotiate final terms of the sale of the property, and CFH continues to work with Bellevue on the review and permitting process. CFH has identified the goal to have the facility up and running mid to late 2022.

Tent Encampments:

Tent City 4 in East King County consists of homeless adults who form temporary encampments to live together as a self-managed community. Tent City 4 sets up on land owned by faith communities for several months before moving to another location. Since first arriving on the Eastside in Spring 2004, the camp has maintained a consistent presence, locating in Bellevue, Bothell, Issaquah, Kirkland, Mercer Island, Redmond, Woodinville, and unincorporated King County. In November 2012, Camp Unity Eastside was established as a new nonprofit temporary encampment organization.

Safe Parking:

Safe parking programs provide a safe place for people living in vehicles to sleep at night. None of these programs can accommodate RVs, trailers or campers. The programs have differing requirements, amenities, and lengths of stay.

- Lake Washington United Methodist Church in Kirkland operates for single women and families with children. They serve an average of 40 people a night.
- Overlake Christian Church in Redmond serves single men and men as part of a couple. They have 15 spots for vehicles.
- St Jude's Parish serves adult men and women in Redmond with 6 spots for vehicles.

- Our Savior Lutheran in Issaquah serves single women and families with children with 6 spots for vehicles.
- Newport Presbyterian in Bellevue serves people by referral only through Lake Washington United Methodist Church's Safe Parking and REACH Center of Hope.³¹

Day and Drop-In Centers

Day and Drop-In Centers for people experiencing homelessness are critical resources to keep people safe. They provide food, respite, showers, laundry, and connections with case managers and employment support.

Men:

Congregations for the Homeless (CFH) operates a day center for men experiencing homelessness. It is open at the Lincoln Center in Bellevue seven days a week. In 2018, they provided 9,451 drop-in visits for 526 individuals, with 249 self-identified from Bellevue.³²

Women:

The Sophia Way operates a day center for women experiencing homelessness. It is open seven days a week and located in Bellevue. In 2018, they provided 11,266 drop-in visits for 492 individuals, with 88 self-identified from Bellevue.³³

Families with Children:

Catholic Community Services operates New Bethlehem Day Center seven days a week. In 2018, they provided 19,704 drop-in visits for 705 individuals, with 54 self-identified from Bellevue.³⁴

Youth and Young Adults:

Friends of Youth operates a drop-in center for youth and young adults (age 18-24) at the Together Center in Redmond six days a week. In 2018, they provided 5,321 drop-in visits with 346 individuals, with 26 self-identified from Bellevue.³⁵

Outreach

Outreach programs are vital for reaching out to people who are experiencing homelessness. Outreach workers go where people are to develop relationships and trust that has often been lost due to traumatic experiences and systems that failed to meet their needs. All outreach programs on the Eastside are serving all populations, with the exception of Friends of Youth, which serves only youth and young adults. Many of the programs have flexible financial assistance to provide resources to address the barriers that are keeping them from becoming stably housed. These may include but are not limited to first month's rent, paying off prior landlord debt, and car repair to allow them to return to work. Outreach Case Managers, who respond to concerns regarding homelessness in these communities, serve as an important point of connection between cities, agencies, and the surrounding area.

Congregations for the Homeless:

Outreach services are currently provided in Bellevue, Issaquah, and Kirkland. They work with individuals sleeping outside, in a vehicle, and in emergency shelter.

The Sophia Way:

One outreach worker focuses on vehicle residency with an office located at the Safe Parking Program at Lake Washington United Methodist Church. Another worker focuses on homeless individuals sleeping outside or in their emergency shelter.

Friends of Youth:

Friends of Youth's Outreach Team provides street outreach to homeless youth age 16-24 in East and North King County. The Team has a van equipped with basic needs items (food, clothing, and hygiene and first aid supplies) and can be used to transport youth to shelters, health clinics, and job interviews.

City of Redmond:

The Homeless Outreach Specialist works with people who are experiencing homelessness to connect them with resources. In addition, the Outreach Specialist operates the weekly Community Resource Center at the Redmond Public Library.

Bellevue's Homelessness Outreach Coordinator:

Through Bellevue's City Manager's Office, the Homelessness Outreach Coordinator provides direct assistance to those experiencing homelessness, responds to community concerns, and works with internal and external partners to reduce homelessness in Bellevue.

Longer-term Housing Programs

In Bellevue and East King County, there are several non-profit organizations that are funded by King County, local cities and other sources to provide longer-term housing for individuals experiencing homelessness. These models include transitional housing, permanent housing with supports, and permanent supportive housing. Providers of longer-term housing include Imagine Housing, Low-Income Housing Institute, LifeWire, YWCA, Hopelink, Attain Housing, The Sophia Way, and Congregations for the Homeless.

Affordable housing that can be quickly available is needed to help people move out of homelessness.

~Participant, Sophia Way
Consumer Conversation

Endnotes

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