

Sno-Isle Libraries
Issues That Matter forum, "Homelessness Here"
Recorded Feb. 22, 2017
Weston High School, Arlington, Washington
Audio transcript



00:00:00 ***KENDRA TRACHTA***

...reelected in 2015. Mayor Tolbert was the executive director of the Arlington fly-in beginning in 1994, which quickly became Arlington's biggest tourism event, and of course she still serves as a volunteer. She currently represents the city of Arlington with the Snohomish County cities and towns, Puget Sound Regional Council, WSU North Puget Sound University Center, the Economic Alliance of Snohomish County, United Way Snohomish County, Arlington Family Resource Center, and Snohomish County Tomorrow.

Please welcome Mayor Tolbert.

[APPLAUSE]

00:00:59 ***MODERATOR (MAYOR BARBARA TOLBERT)***

We don't have a very big lip on this podium, so my papers could end up on the floor too.

[LAUGHTER]

Thank you all for being here tonight. I hope this is going to be a great community conversation about some of the challenges in our community, and particularly homelessness.

Arlington doesn't stand alone in having complex issues like homelessness. Cities of every size across the U.S. are grappling with this issue for a variety of reasons: lack of affordable housing for low-wage workers and their families; a terribly inadequate mental health and addiction treatment system; and after many years of decline in homelessness, we're now finding in Washington that it's growing at a significant rate.

Some communities in Washington are facing really rapidly rising home prices, and I'm sure you've all read about that and heard about that on the news. And less urbanized areas like Arlington are facing low vacancy rates and soft development economies that aren't helping us keep up with affordable housing for those that need it.

The inadequate mental health and chemical dependency treatment systems are compounding our homeless problem. Did you know the state of Washington ranks 46th in the nation in the number of psychiatric beds available for those who are suffering mental illness? Our emergency rooms are also overwhelmed by the number of people who need help.

Opiate overdoses -- this is really sad -- it's now the leading cause of death in the United States. Both methamphetamine and opiate abuse are driving this epidemic. And it doesn't discriminate. It comes to every race, every age, every sex, every religion, every geography, and every income level. People with chemical dependences and mental health problems are significantly more likely to be homeless, and homelessness really helps their downward spiral speed up.

Solving these problems falls to varied federal and state agencies, local governments, and nonprofit partners. There is a cost to the taxpayers for these problems, and it's pretty significant: increased police calls, incarceration, emergency room visits, locally funded homeless services -- they all strain local budgets. In cities like Arlington, we struggle with limited resources, and most of this funding doesn't come down or directly flow to our city. So we rely on partnerships with nonprofits.

Like many communities in the country, Arlington is experiencing an increase in the severity and the visibility of individuals who are experiencing homelessness, addiction, and mental health. We have deep concern for the health and wellbeing of these individuals as a community -- I know you do -- as well as a necessity to ensure a safe place for our residents and our businesses so we can thrive in our community. We need to have a vibrant and healthy community for all of us.

To best address the growing crisis, our city is seeking to better understand the network of community support and resources that exist today, as well as to understand where the gaps are in those services and how we can work together to fill them.

I want to thank Sno-Isle Libraries for coming to our community and putting on this great forum where we can all do one of the first things we can do to take a step in helping with homelessness, which is to educate ourselves, to find out what we have, how it works, and where we can play a role in making that better.

I'm going to outline night's format for you. Each one of our panelists is going to have an opportunity to speak, and we have a great panel for you tonight. When they're done giving you an opening presentation of what they do and what their agency does, we're going to then open it up to ask questions to the panelists and have a discussion. At that point, if you'll raise your hand when you want to ask a question, we want to make sure we get a microphone to you so everybody gets the benefit of hearing your question.

Now let me introduce our panelists and we'll get going.

First up is Kristen Cane. Kristen is the director of development and policy for the Housing Authority of Snohomish County.

After Kristen, we'll hear from Lynda Plummer. Lynda is the assistant director of social services as Housing Hope.

Following Lynda will be Nico...Quibano? Quijano. I even wrote it out phonetically for myself. Nico is an advocate and supervisor at Cocoon House.

At the end of our esteemed panel is Seanna Herring-Jensen, who is the program manager at the Arlington Community Resource Center.

Kristen, would you like to get the evening started?

00:06:08 ***KRISTEN CANE***

Thank you, Mayor. That was, I think, a really great introduction to what this issue is. I just wanted to thank Sno-Isle Libraries for putting on the event, and I wanted to thank all of you for coming to learn more and see what you can do to contribute to the solution to this issue.

My name is Kristen. I work for the Housing Authority of Snohomish County. Together with the Everett Housing Authority, we serve about 10,000 families in the county all over, including in the city of Arlington. The Housing Authority is a nonprofit governmental organization. We have a board of commissioners appointed by the County Council.

I just wanted to plug: we actually have an opening on our board right now. We're looking for interested citizens to apply through the county. We're specifically looking for someone in north county, because we try to get geographic representation, and that's the position that's open right now. Let me know after if you're interested, or you can go on the county website.

Also, just one more thing: we have about \$60 million in resources that come into the county every year to the Housing Authorities both through rental revenue and through the federal government, through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the United States Department of Agriculture. So we can fairly significant resources for housing, but what we have is still not enough for the need, and I'll go into that in a minute.

They already touched upon the main causes of homelessness: domestic violence, mental health and addiction issues, also intergenerational poverty at play. The main issue is an economic one. It's a supply and demand issue. Affordable housing isn't built by private developers because it's not profitable. The public sector and nonprofits develop affordable housing, but they need public funding to bridge that funding gap, and we have limited financial resources, especially in our county. When look at some of the other places in Washington, they have significant local resources to address this problem, through levies and other types of local dollars through the city and county. So when we try to compete at the state level for additional resources, we're sort of at a disadvantage already because of our local funding constraints. So that's where a lot of the big gap between the need and the supply comes from.

On the demand side, we have folks that cannot afford market rents. People are making poverty wages. They're not making enough money to afford rent. People are struggling with unemployment or long-term unemployment. Retired folks are dealing with fixed incomes with limited resources for housing. So all of this sort of comes to a head when you don't have a market that's producing affordable housing. You have people that are willing to pay for the housing, but they don't have the financial resources to.

In terms of the scope of homelessness and housing instability in the United States, there are approximately 10 to 11 million people that are homeless. 1 in 4 sleep on the streets or in emergency shelters. We have an additional over 11 million people that are severely housing cost-burdened, renters that are paying more than half of their income for rent and are at a significantly increased risk of becoming homeless. So we're talking about 25 million people nationally.

In our county, we've already heard some numbers. In terms of homeless students in the county, we just had the numbers come out: almost 4,000 school-age students are considered homeless. In the Arlington School District, it's 156 students.

County-wide, there are various numbers. They use a different definition of homelessness, but it's in the range of 1,000 to 2,000 people.

In our county, we only have 16 affordable homes for every 100 households that need them that are extremely low-income, which is a shortfall of 16,000 homes, and this just keeps growing and

growing every year.

The livable wage for a one-bedroom apartment in our county right now is \$18 an hour. To afford a market-rate apartment, you have to make \$18 an hour. To afford a three-bedroom apartment, you need to make \$30 an hour. We have a lot of jobs in our county that don't pay that livable wage.

As the mayor already mentioned, vacancy rates atmosphere at 3.5%, and the average rental rate is about \$1,500 a month. It's a very expensive market here.

In the county, what we are doing -- nonprofits, public housing authorities, county government -- we work together to make homelessness rare, brief, and one-time. We can't end homelessness, because it's like fires. You can't end fires, you can just try to prevent them. You can stop them as quickly as possible. It's the same with homelessness. We need to have a system that's efficient and get people housed when they become homeless.

We have a prioritized system in our community that prioritizes the most vulnerable to get into housing. We also have what's called a "housing continuum." We focus on short-term housing to stabilize folks, like emergency shelters. Then we have permanent supportive housing for folks that need both assistance with their rental cost as well as the wraparound services related to their mental health and addiction issues. And then we have affordable housing that is a below-market cost that folks can pay that's not as expensive as market-rate housing.

One of my perspectives on this issue is that it's really important for us to do things to build the entire housing continuum. We focus a lot of resources on certain areas, but if people don't have housing to move into when they no longer need permanent supportive housing, then we're not going to have enough slots for other folks to be able to move into that housing. So it's important to each stage of the continuum.

In terms of what you can do, I think it's really important to connect with the elected officials, both at the local, state, and national level, on this issue to communicate that it's important to you. For a long time, this issue has not been at the top of the agenda for decision makers. When they don't hear from their constituents about it, they focus in other places, both in terms of funding and in terms of policies that will allow for increased affordable housing.

Participate in planning commissions. Go to your City Council meetings. Talk to your state delegation. Talk to your congressional delegation. There are different bills and things happening at every level, and it's important to make sure that you're always communicating that this is an important issue and it's happening in your community and you want them to do something about it.

Also, there are some great nonprofit organizations that are going to be speaking tonight. You can volunteer with those. There are a lot of great programs out there and services, and they always need volunteers to help.

A lot of churches are really active in this area in all sorts of ways, doing meals or providing supplies to homeless families. Some churches are even donating their land or partnering with a developer to build housing on their land. So there are all sorts of ways that churches can be involved, and we encourage that.

I think there's a lot of hope for the future. I think this issue is something that's happening at the local level, and it's going to be solved at the local level. We might see the federal government

pulling away from this issue, and we need to come together to figure out locally how we're going to solve it.

I thank everyone and appreciate questions at the end.

[APPLAUSE]

00:14:22 ***LYNDA PLUMMER***

Hi. Again, I'm Lynda Plummer. I'm from Housing Hope. Thank you very much for having --

00:14:27 ***UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE***

Use your microphone.

00:14:35 ***MODERATOR***

Testing. There you go.

00:14:36 ***LYNDA PLUMMER***

OK. Can you hear me now?

I'm Lynda Plummer. I'm from Housing Hope.

[MICROPHONE CUTS OUT]

Third time's the charm. You heard the first part twice, so I'll move on.

I'd like to start by talking a little bit about the Housing Hope program and what solutions we offer to the homeless. Housing Hope is a nonprofit agency for homeless families with children in Snohomish County. We currently have 25 sites that are located in Everett, Monroe, Sultan, Marysville, Arlington, and Stanwood.

Last year, we proudly served 554 adults and children in Snohomish County. We also have six self-contained emergency shelter units, five of which are located in Everett, and one in Stanwood. Our sheltered families have approximately 61 days to stay in our shelter, at which time we are vigorously seeking homeless housing our permanent housing for them to transition into.

Our mission is to promote self-sufficiency and self-efficacy by increasing skills, eliminating barriers, and creating opportunities for positive change. Our hope and belief is that by doing so, we can greatly increase the percentages of employable skills that will ultimately remove them from the homeless population and into true self-sufficiency going forward with their lives.

We see the barriers as complex and varied amongst the families we serve. However, trauma, mental health, substance abuse, an increasing epidemic of heroin, and, sadly, guns have increased our concern in keeping communities safe and getting people turned around to productive lives. Challenging backgrounds, lack of education, and low life skills are common obstacles for many of our families to manage.

At Housing Hope, we use a team approach to help our families. Our homeless families are visited weekly via home visits with a family support coach who conducts an entire family assessment and puts a detailed plan together to address their goals and desired success within the time that they spend with us in our program.

Most importantly, they are offered the resources necessary to achieve their goals and self-sufficiency. For example, we have a child specialist who works with families requesting help with parenting, behavioral issues, etc. We have an employment education specialist team that works with families regarding education goals and employment goals, which may include internships at one of our three social enterprises: ReNewWorks, which is a home decor store; GroundWorks, which is a landscape enterprise; and CaféWorks, which trains people and employs people as baristas. These three enterprises have been highly successful in teaching employable skills, as well as offering an opportunity for viable employment for our participants. We are very proud of these programs.

Also, we offer families childcare at our Everett Childcare Center. Removing this barrier has been so critical for so many of our parents who otherwise would not be able to afford this service and successfully have employment at the same time. Last year, we served 167 children from 115 families.

Finally, we are very proud and passionate about the classes we offer through our College of Hope, which is located on the main campus in Everett next to our Childcare Center. This department offers life skill classes on a myriad of topics, such as financial management, cooking nutritious meals, landlord/tenant, housekeeping, dealing with grief and trauma, and many more. To further eliminate barriers, we offer transportation, dinner, and childcare for our participants to attend these classes.

Currently under development is our biggest project to date, HopeWorks expansion project, where we will have an intensive culinary internship for participants at a restaurant, the possibility of a catering services, and the opportunity for participants in this program and others to learn a wonderful career path, the possibility of working further with Housing Hope, and certainly to be prepared to go into the community and be successful working in a restaurant at whatever level they choose to pursue.

That, in a nutshell, is what Housing Hope offers of the homeless in the community.

I'd like to end by stating what I wish people understood about homelessness. Homelessness happens to adults and children alike -- lots of children. Homelessness is traumatic. It is stressful. It is scary. It takes tremendous courage on the part of homeless people to have self-discipline and the transparency to successfully overcome homelessness and graduate from a homeless housing program. It can be a humbling experience. It requires one to address their deepest fears, to venture out of their comfort zone and attempt to navigate programs and rules and procedures that are both foreign and sometimes frightening to them.

I have been in this field for a very long time, and I wish for all of you in the audience to experience the joy and emotion that comes from seeing a homeless family walk into our program, and being able to witness the joy when they open the door to their first home, and celebrate their successes along the way to self-sufficiency, and finally the realization of self-sufficiency in reality for themselves.

It is a feeling in one's heart when you see a young child go into her bedroom in her new home for the first time, and be overcome with the joy of that. It is a mom putting up knickknacks for the first time in a very long time and being overcome with the joy of that. This is what keeps families together. This is what a lot of us take for granted. This is what makes our work worthwhile.

I stand here very grateful to be a part of a community who truly cares about reducing homelessness, and very grateful indeed to be part of this forum and see all of you in the audience who came tonight because you care about homelessness as well.

Thank you so much.

[APPLAUSE]

00:23:11 *NICOLAS QUIJANO*

Hi there. I'm Nico with Cocoon House. I just want to start by saying thanks to Sno-Isle Libraries for putting this event together, the mayor for hosting this event, and to everyone for coming out to join us today. This is a very complicated issue without any immediate solutions, but I think if we all work together, there are things we can do to make our community a better place for everyone in it.

I'm going to start by talking about the community, what we can do to work in it and make it better for the homeless folks here. Then I'll move to my organization, Cocoon House, and what we do to help youth. Our organization generally works with folks between the ages of 12 to 24 to support them in whatever ways we can and help them get to a place where they're able to achieve stability and have a sustainable, long-lasting, productive place in society.

I want to start by telling people what the landscape for homelessness is like as far as youth are concerned. One way that we're able to measure that is in terms of the data that schools put out to us. This was referred to a little bit earlier, but schools in Arlington are reporting 156 homeless students -- that's 156 in Arlington alone -- 391 homeless students in Marysville, and 194 in Stanwood. If you add up all the cities in Snohomish County, that adds up to almost 3,000 homeless children on a given night.

Also, if you look throughout the state, it ends up being about 40,000 homeless children. And that's before you consider all the youth who aren't enrolled in school, all the folks who are between the ages of 18 and 24 who maybe aren't nominally children but do not have the life skills or the support that's required of them, have never had the ability to pursue their interests or pursue the things that might get them to a place where they need to be.

We have a drop-in center in Everett which provides a hot meal to youth, laundry facilities, a shower -- all the things that can sort of help them get to a better place in their lives. Of those 30, I'd say maybe one or two were currently enrolled in school. Maybe another two or three of them had been enrolled in school in the previous years. I think you see these youth every day, out on the corner of 172nd and Smoky Point Boulevard, the 19-, 20-, and 21-year-olds who are panhandling, who are hanging out in groups. We see them all over the place.

I would estimate, just from my experience of being on the streets, that those people may as much as double the amount of double the amount of homeless youth that we have in our county. So that's something like 6,000 homeless kids on a given night in Snohomish County. That seems like a

dystopian alternative universe to me, right? Not the world that we actually live in. Hundreds of homeless kids just roaming the streets and not having a place to go or knowing what to do. But the fact is, it's reality. It's what we live in, and we need to do something about it.

So what can an individual person do about homelessness, whether it's youth homelessness or homelessness in general? I would say that wherever a youth or a homeless person goes, even if they come to a program like ours that provides shelter, we're not the beginning or the end of the services that they receive. What happens to get a person out of homelessness or help them get to a place where they are able to be housed is that they have to be part of a communal response, a community collaboration amongst people who are willing to work together to help that person.

Everyone in this room can help to be part of that communal response. They're just little things like knowing: Where do I go to connect a person to services? Where do I point them out? What should I tell them? What do I tell the person panhandling in front of the stoplight at the Walmart? Do I just give them five bucks? Do I just buy them a meal? What should I do for them?

I think it starts by just having a very basic, little amount of information about what that person can access. Knowing something like the Arlington Resource Center is west on 172nd and then north on Smoky Point. Just take a right on Smoky Point and head by there, and they'll start connecting you to services. Just knowing that if someone works for -- if you see a homeless teenager, that you should give them the card -- I have a bunch of them on that back table over there -- and they can just hand that to the person. They should call that number or come to our facility.

If they are not in a place where they have a house, or they need to get access to a drop-in center, knowing to tell them to get on the 201 or the 202, to head down to Everett so that they can down to our drop-in center at 14th and Broadway.

I think to some extent you can get lost in the weeds, right? There's never an end of numbers that you can call. There's never a finite amount of addresses that you can refer a person to. But if you can just be aware of the key places in your community that you can refer a person to, that can get them started. Once they get in the door, they come to our shelter. But then they still need to know how to get drug and alcohol treatment. They need to find an education program that works for them. They need to develop life skills so that they can work and be a productive member of society. And that happens by us working with other community collaborators as well.

Seanna will talk about it more, but know that the Arlington Resource Center is just around the corner. West on 172nd, right on Smoky Point Boulevard. Know that the Community Food Bank is on 63rd street, over by the skate park. Know that DSHS has a Community Services Office essentially right across the street, right behind the Walmart in the same plaza as the driver's license office and the Safeway, and that they can go into that office to get access to food assistance, assistance for their families, and that they can get that access on any day.

So just knowing a couple of key locations and how to get there and what to do is a big first step in terms of addressing the needs in the community.

I want to talk also about what you can do to work with Cocoon House, how you can help what we do and how you can collaborate with us.

We work with anyone in the age range of 12 to 24, as I already said, to help them get access to housing, to guide them through the various needs that they may have as a homeless person. That

can include things like finding the right school for them, helping them to find employment, helping to drive them to a facility where they can get a license, and talking to the person at the licensing office about how to get their ID.

We do a lot of work like that. I could go on and on about that, and I would like to, but I only have eight minutes. So if you have any questions, if anything comes up afterwards, please, grab my business card. Send me an email. It's also back there with the general information that I put up. I would love to talk more about our program and what we do in however much of my eight minutes I have left when I'm done speaking. Not much, apparently. I would be glad to elaborate.

At Cocoon House, we serve a hot meal every day at 4:30. So if you're interested in coming and helping us acquire the food for that hot meal, we would be glad to have you. If you want to come in and cook the meal for us and serve it to our kids and meet them and talk to them, we'd be glad to have you do that too. There are a number of things that you can do that are like that -- helping to provide transportation or intensity a life skill and teach it to our kids -- that we would be glad to have you participate in.

Very briefly, then, to talk about what we do in general: we have a program that works with parents and young adults called Prevention. It will work with both the parent and the at-risk youth to help them figure out what needs to happen to keep that child in their home.

We have our housing program. We have an emergency shelter in Everett and another one in Monroe that will house youth at any time. We have a phone number that youth can call -- it's on that card in the back on the table -- and we will come pick them up and take them to shelter.

And then we have our advocacy program. To put it very briefly, the advocacy program will make sure that if a youth has a need, we will go to them, find them, and help them get connected to services.

Anything that I can do to help make it clearer what any of you in the room can do, I would be very glad to do in whatever way possible. Thank you for having me.

[APPLAUSE]

00:31:39 ***SEANNA HERRING-JENSEN***

I'm Seanna Herring-Jensen. I am with the Arlington Community Resource Center.

This is Lori. Raise your hand. Lori is our housing navigator.

We came together from members of the community -- Barbara was on the council that did that as well -- we came together in response after the slide, and we keep going with the services that we have because there's so much this community needs.

We do a lot more than just work with the homeless. We help people with employment and other supportive services as well. But tonight I'm going to focus on this issue.

The areas that have come to our attention more often than not now are those children that are on the street (which you've heard already quite often), veterans that are on the street, those who come from domestic violence situations, those who come out of foster care, those with varying abilities .

. . the list goes on and on and on.

I'm going to tell you right now, before anyone else says anything different, most of the people we work with are from Arlington. A lot of people think that the homeless you see on the street come from other areas, but most of them graduated from Arlington High. They stay local to be near family and friends, and hope to repair those relationships if they've been damaged.

Most of the people that we have that come in are families that do not use substances. They are going through a really hard time, and a lot of them are working and can't afford a place to live.

I share the story that I myself -- my husband and I were almost homeless a year ago because we were renting a place we thought we were going to buy. It ended up that we didn't buy it, and we had to be out in a month. Where do you go when there are no vacancies?

My three dogs, my children, and my 18 ducks were going to move into a hotel. I got lucky -- Lori took my ducks -- we were able to find someone to rent to us. But I got lucky. I was this close to being homeless. One of our staff members did live in a hotel for a month and a half.

It happens to good, hardworking people that are trying to get their feet up underneath them. Once you get into the hotel circle, you start spending a very large amount that you would not normally spend on rent. Now where does your money come from for deposit and your first month down? You can't do it. So now you're stuck in a cycle.

Good, hardworking people trying to keep their feet underneath them are having a hard time.

And they're scared. A lot of families are scared to come forward because they're afraid that CPS will take their children away. That doesn't happen.

So we're here to help them navigate the situation, get them some resources they need, get them the mental health help, get them deposits if they need it, help for the children, etc. We work with the school district, we work with the churches, we work with law enforcement, we work with -- you name it. The churches out there are indispensable.

It's not just us. We work with about 85+ partners. There are quite a few of our agencies working together. These are some of our partners. It's not just one agency doing it alone.

Some of the other things that have come out -- you heard about the point-in-time count earlier. That was last January. Some of you were out there. I see faces that were out there volunteering. We don't have official numbers yet. I really wanted to be able to share those, but we can't. The numbers I can tell you that are not official are that we had about 150 here in Arlington. We had 400 on the north side of the county. That's a third of what the county had last year. It's 200 more than we had counted last year. So it's more.

The problem is growing. We're doing the best we can. We're trying to come up with some resources. Some of the things that we have done after the point-in-time count was to pull together what we call the North County Homeless Coalition. It has a lot of our partners sitting on it. We have law enforcement -- Arlington P.D. is on it, Marysville P.D. is on it, Lake Stevens P.D. is on it, Tulalip P.D. is going to be joining us.

Since we do work a lot with law enforcement, it helps to have their input. They are concerned

about safety, but also the safety of those that are on the street. They're out there for all of us.

The North County Homeless Coalition is working towards some things. One thing we'd like to do is to do a one-stop shop, something similar to what they have in Mount Vernon that's been there for 35 years. That serves three warm meals. It has a place for folks to sleep during the day. It has laundry services and showers. But all these partners can be in one location. So that's something we hope to work towards this year.

We are also working towards a community court. For a lot of people who are struggling, especially if you're sleeping in your car, you're going to get asked to move. There aren't places that you can park and stay for long periods of time. You may end up with a trespass. How do you go to Everett to pay your tab on the trespass? You probably can't, so therefore you end up with a warrant. Now how do you get a job? How do you get a place to live? Something simple turns into something very large very fast. A community court can help alleviate that and get those folks back up on their feet.

They have very successful programs in Spokane and in Olympia. We're trying to find our place in the middle and make a court that's right for this area.

The other thing we're working on is for seniors especially. That's one the areas that I'm personally attached to. We have so many seniors that are on the street right now because they cannot afford a place to live with their income of \$700 a month. So they will sleep in their cars with their dogs. We're able to find them housing over a long period of time, but most of the time, they will have to give up their dog. They're not going in. That's their family. They're not going in.

So we try to find them a place where they can. One of the things that we've found that will work is to do matchmaking and get them roommates. We can put two or three people together to share an apartment so they have a comfortable place a live, a good social circle, and they can take their dogs. So those are some of the things that we're working on in this area.

The cards that Nico was talking about are on the table back there. So when you pull up to that corner and someone's asking you for money or holding up their sign, feel free to take some of those cards with you and hand them one of those cards. It says "We care about you," and it's got our address and where we're located and our phone numbers.

I saw Sarah Higginbotham back here someplace. She has some laundry services, and she's with LIFEchurch360. Were you able to bring some cards tonight for that? There are more cards to pass out. We're trying to get the resources out to you so you can get those things out to the folks that need it. We'll be around afterwards to answer questions too. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

00:38:26 MODERATOR

Thank you so much to our panelists for sharing your perspectives and the work that you're doing in our community.

OK, now we want to hear from you. If you have a question -- I'm just going to go over a few rules here. Raise your hand if you have a question. I'll call on you. It will just take a minute until the microphone gets to you. I want to make sure everybody gets a chance to hear you. Speak directly

into the mike. You probably noticed that tonight. If you hold it like this, no one's --

[MICROPHONE TURNED OFF]

-- going to hear what you're saying. And you might accidentally turn it off.

[LAUGHTER]

[MICROPHONE TURNED BACK ON]

And keep your questions to the point so that we can hear from as many people as possible.

So let's begin the question and answer. Please raise your hand if you want to ask a question to one of our panelists.

00:39:16 *AUDIENCE MEMBER FRANK*

Seanna, last week you talked to the Romeos. One of the things you talked about --

00:39:24 *MODERATOR*

Frank, could you stand up? Would you mind? Thank you.

00:39:27 *AUDIENCE MEMBER FRANK*

Oh, I'm sorry. One of the things you talked about was the students that are living in cars going to the high school. I can't help but wonder, do they have access to showers and everything when they get to Arlington High School so they can clean up and take their place with the other students?

00:39:47 *SEANNA HERRING-JENSEN*

I can't tell you for sure because I don't work at the school district, but I know a lot of them will give them access to the gym so they can take showers there. Nico can probably talk about it a little bit more. But I have known of people that are going to private gyms for showers and the high schools for showers.

00:40:05 *AUDIENCE MEMBER FRANK*

Good. OK.

00:40:07 *NICOLAS QUIJANO*

Yeah, aside from what they're able to access at any of their respective high schools, whether it's here at Weston or at Arlington High School, there's usually an array of services that are available to any homeless students in the area, including assistance through the McKinney-Vento Act, which can include help with transportation or accessing necessary services.

We're actually in each of those buildings something like a couple of times a month. Our advocate for the area, Sabrina Johnson, is actually right there wearing a Cocoon House shirt.

We will also often work in conjunction with the school to make sure that the student is getting connected to services, not just being able to access a shower or get the food that they need, but also figuring out what needs to happen for them to get into a house or get into a place where they can have a stable living situation.

00:41:09 ***MODERATOR***

Any more questions?

00:41:20 ***AUDIENCE MEMBER***

Hi. This is a question for Kristen. I heard you mention that you're not able to build affordable housing because the government partners that you have -- that you have to come up with -- like maybe they give you 80% and you have to come up with the other 20%. Is that correct? Is that how that works?

00:41:47 ***KRISTEN CANE***

Yeah. Usually there are layers of funding in a project. You can have some debt on the project, like tax-exempt bonds. We also try to utilize the low-income housing tax credit program. But usually when you're trying to serve a very low-income population, you need to layer on public funding like grant awards from the county or the state. That gap can usually be about 30% of the project cost.

00:42:18 ***AUDIENCE MEMBER***

OK. The other part that I was thinking is: about a year ago, I saw this on the internet, and I think they were called "10,000 Homes." This group got together and they targeted investors and asked them if they would be willing to donate an apartment to a family, and then they could just write it off. Do you have any sort of campaign like that?

00:42:42 ***KRISTEN CANE***

That's a great idea. I haven't heard of that before. That would be like a private market landlord type of thing. I don't know. Do people in the audience think that the landlords in the area would be open to doing something like that? Is anyone a landlord in the audience?

00:43:05 ***MODERATOR***

Guess we didn't appeal to that market tonight.

[LAUGHTER]

That's a great question.

In the back?

00:43:18 ***AUDIENCE MEMBER***

In King County, they're having success with the tiny house villages. Is that an option here?

00:43:36 ***MODERATOR***

Tiny homes need to have some regulatory framework that goes with them, and currently we don't have that in the city of Arlington. There is a bill that is in the state legislature this year, and it did make it out of committee that would allow a way to lay that grand planning framework.

There are a lot of questions that go with tiny homes. Do you want just the homes? Do they have to have plumbing? Do they have to have electrical? Do they need to be movable? Are they permanent? And it's tough for small cities to get through that list of things. It's very complex to rewrite codes in order to allow that. But it's one thing that we're looking at in the Association of Washington Cities.

Again, you cannot strongly advocate enough to our legislators from the 39th District to support to support those bills that are out there that will clear some of the hurdles out of the way.

00:44:31 ***AUDIENCE MEMBER***

Thank you.

00:44:41 ***AUDIENCE MEMBER***

I don't know who I'm addressing with this issue, but I wanted to know if you can tell me what percentage of homeless people are on some kind of a drug? And also, are the rehabilitation programs really working?

00:45:03 ***LYNDA PLUMMER***

Well, I would say, to give you an exact percentage is impossible. It's high, I can tell you that.

What was the second part of your question? I'm sorry.

00:45:18 ***AUDIENCE MEMBER***

The second part of the question was: are the programs really working for rehabilitation for drugs? How many would you say out of 100 actually get off of drugs and live productive lives?

00:45:38 ***LYNDA PLUMMER***

It's a process. I can tell you now that the treatment itself is multifold and has improved so much over the years. Of course, for anybody to get off drugs, there has to be a willingness on their part and a real desire to do that. So that's where, again family support coaches come in, and alcohol/drug liaisons come in. Just a lot of wraparound services to encourage people to get into treatment, number one, and then really most likely follow at least a year or two-year followup program.

So it's improving. Is it there yet? No. People are going to relapse. It's a process. But we feel very strongly that we have the best systems in place right now that we've ever had. It's far from perfect.

00:46:34 ***MODERATOR***

Once they do get out of treatment, they have to have a place to go to. You can't send them back out on the streets or in the woods, because we've found that's a sure way to ensure the cycle continues to go on.

We do have one more guest who joined us this evening, which is Chief Ventura from the Arlington Police Department. So if any of those questions come that way, we might call upon him as well. Thanks, Chief, for joining us.

[APPLAUSE]

I saw another hand in the back.

00:47:02 **AUDIENCE MEMBER**

My question would be to anyone who could answer it. Why do the different agencies involved in caring for homeless people, and the churches they say are involved (and I know for a fact ours is), why do they not band together -- and this has been on my heart for years now -- and take these big buildings that are empty, like the one that was Food Pavilion and is now a tractor place (that sat empty for a very long time), and create a homeless shelter out of it?

00:47:37 **MODERATOR**

Well, the easy answer to that question is: it takes resources. Even the nonprofits and the churches need to have the funding. They have to have qualified staffing. They have to have training. They have to have education. So it really takes a community will to make these things happen.

And I can tell you as mayor, I get asked the question every day: "What are you doing about it?" There's no single person who's going to solve the issue. But when we have a community will to work together with our faith-based organizations, these awesome nonprofits and the work they're doing, I hope everybody leaves here tonight with a sense of support for them. Let's give them our time or our money or what they need so that they can get more work done as well too. It's a great question.

[APPLAUSE]

00:48:36 **AUDIENCE MEMBER**

Hi. As a volunteer at Stanwood Food Bank, I came here because I wanted to learn about services. A couple of weeks ago I ran into a situation, and I was hoping you would tell me what you would have done had you been me at the time.

A 27-year-old woman showed up at the Food Bank. She had been homeless for quite some time. She had been in Seattle, and she got really scared and some back things happened to her, so she came back to Stanwood where she had grown up.

We let her sleep there. She was really tired. She didn't have many belongings. We gave her a sleeping bag and a mat and food. It was about 4:00 p.m. in the afternoon. I took her over to the Stanwood Resource Center. I asked the person there if we could find her some shelter for that evening. She said, "We have nothing available in Stanwood, but there is in Arlington or Smoky

Point a place she could go, but it doesn't open until 8:00 p.m."

She had no way to get there. I was hesitant, truthfully, to drive her very far. I ended up driving her around to several different places. But what should I have done? What would you suggest?

00:49:56 *SEANNA HERRING-JENSEN*

Was this on a freezing cold night?

00:50:02 *AUDIENCE MEMBER*

I don't remember that it was below freezing. I mean, it was 4:00 p.m., but it was probably going to get, you know, 34°, 35°.

00:50:13 *SEANNA HERRING-JENSEN*

OK. The only time there's overnight shelter that's available is on the freezing nights. There are cold weather shelters that open up when the temperature goes down below 32°. It's unfortunate; there is no place.

00:50:25 *AUDIENCE MEMBER*

You know, she did ask me. She said, "Where are all the homeless people in Stanwood?" And I'm like, "Well, I don't know where they are."

00:50:31 *SEANNA HERRING-JENSEN*

Stanwood has a good chunk of homeless too. It does. It's a growing problem. There are a lot of families. They will get together. If they're a tent or something, they will band together and stay together to keep warm. They go to places that they can be in overnight, if there are some restaurants or stores that are open. There are different places to go, but not in Stanwood.

It's hard. It's hard here. There are the hotels, what you were talking about down Smoky Point. If you don't have money for them, they don't let you stay there for free.

We don't have a safe parking lot. We don't have overnight shelters. So if you're homeless and you're on the street, you're going to be walking around all night long trying to stay warm, trying to stay alert so you don't lose your things, and then try to sleep during the day. It's tough. It's really tough.

And women, unless she has children, she's down at the bottom of the list for help. Families with children get help, and those with disabilities get help first.

I wish you had a resource to give her, and I wish I had a resource to give you, but we don't. We're working towards it, but we don't have it right now.

00:51:41 *AUDIENCE MEMBER*

Well, here's the way it turned out. I wasn't able to bring her at 8:00 to this place. She didn't really show that much interest in wanting to go there. She did want to be driven around to a couple of

places where she thought maybe some old friends would be. So I took her to a couple of different places, and she didn't recognize the house or anybody there.

She had one more place she wanted to go to. She said it was a family home. I drove her there, and it was a well-known drug house. She went to the door and flashed some cash. Basically, a few minutes after she went in, I took her things out and I left them there because I didn't know what to do at that point. I knew I had exhausted everywhere that she had thought about going. For my only safety as well at that point . . .

00:52:34 *SEANNA HERRING-JENSEN*

Yeah. It's hard.

00:52:36 *AUDIENCE MEMBER*

Plus, I'm a teacher. If she accused me of something, I could lose my certificate. You want to be helpful, but at some point, you also have to protect yourself.

00:52:45 *MODERATOR*

You do. God bless your compassion, though.

00:52:47 *NICOLAS QUIJANO*

I would just add that I think your initial instinct is absolutely correct: take them to something like the Resource Center and see what they know of or what they're aware of.

I think one thing that's helpful to keep in mind is that often, there are going to be a variety of potential housing resources, and it's a question of what the most efficient way to access and assess them is. If the person thinks they know someone, call around to those places instead of driving to each one.

I know that if you encounter a young woman over the age of 18, the places that I'm most likely to refer someone to are the Everett Gospel Mission (which has a women-specific shelter), the Monroe Gospel Mission (which has a women-specific shelter), and places like Maud's House or whatever shelters may be around in the area. Maud's House is in Marysville.

And then I would also -- regardless of what happens that night -- because realistically, you may be able to get someone into shelter 25% of the time or 50% of the time. You may be able to find a solution, but they have that ongoing problem: they're still homeless. They still have a lack of access to the services that they need.

At the very least, call 2-1-1 with them, or get them into coordinated entry. Get them looped into services so that at some point in the future, they will at least be connected to some sort of long-term assistance so that they're at least on the map, so that even if it does happen that you drop them off at a suspicious house (or in this case it appears that you're very aware that this was a drug house), you would at least know that this person whose needs probably weren't going to be entirely addressed that day are still being put on the map. They still have the ability to access them at some point in the future.

Again, that number is 2-1-1. Oftentimes, Resource Centers -- I believe the Arlington Resource Center will do that -- will do a coordinated entry, will connect a person into our sort of countywide housing program, just by virtue of them walking in the door. I don't believe that's the case with the Stanwood Resource Center.

But again, your initial instinct is right, and I think it's just a question of trying to figure out the most efficient way that you can try to get this person connected to as many things as possible. Ultimately, we just don't have the capacity or the emotional energy to be doing that for every single homeless person that we run into.

00:55:15 ***MODERATOR***

How many people here have heard of 2-1-1?

This is a service that you really need to know about. This would have been something useful for you to call to find out what resources were available or what your options were at that point in time.

It's not only coordinated entry. It does a lot of things. It coordinates with the Snohomish County Health Department for encampments that are in the woods and biohazards and other things.

If you're looking for just one thing to remember, remember 2-1-1, and call them and ask questions, and they can lead you down a coordinated path.

Judge?

00:55:53 ***AUDIENCE MEMBER***

Hi. This is more of a comment than anything else. I'm the judge in Arlington, and we service Stanwood and Granite Falls and Darrington and Oso. A lot of people come here and think that this is a law enforcement issue. It's not. It's a social issue.

I practiced law for 25 years in this area, and children are different now. Things have changed. They carry pressures that we don't understand. It is a social issue.

One of the things that law enforcement officers are doing is that some of them are having social workers go with them on patrol. Then when they find someone who has mental health issues or has drug issues or is homeless, they try to provide the services for them. But it's going to take every single one of us, because it is a social issue, and I think we all have to participate to make it easier for people to develop life skills to be able to go out in the world.

I think that's one thing that's sadly missing. I have people come into my courtroom, and they don't know how to call someone to make an appointment. They've never had to do it before. In fact, some of them have never accomplished anything like making their bed, and just achieving something. It has a lot to do with self-respect and being able to do things. But if you say, "You need to go call probation," they'll call one time, and three months later, it's like, "Did you call them?" "Yeah, they never called me back," and they don't pursue it.

They don't learn simple skills, like you mentioned earlier, cooking or darning a sock, or things that we take for granted when we're a certain age that everybody learns to do. These kids don't know it.

One other comment I want to make too is that there are a lot of children that are homeless in this community that do not tell anyone they're homeless. They hide it. They're ashamed and embarrassed. They're ashamed because their whole family's sleeping in a car or a storage unit, or they're ashamed because they've been kicked out of their home because their life choices are different than their parents approve of, and they're left without a home.

So again, I just wanted to comment that it is a social issue that we all need to really address. I hope I didn't take too much away from that, but I just thought it was important to say that, because a lot of people come here and think, "I want homeless people off the street. I want them to stop doing drugs. I want law enforcement --" and it's not that anymore. It's changed. It's a social issue. It's an issue for all of us.

All right, thank you.

00:58:04 ***MODERATOR***

Thank you, judge.

[APPLAUSE]

00:58:11 ***AUDIENCE MEMBER***

Hi. Kind of a comment also: as far as the addictions go, there is a woman named Lindsey Greinke. She was a heroin addict. I read about this a few years ago. Anyway, she has created a group called Hope Soldiers, and she has done wonders for people. On weekends, they go out into the woods, and they take food and she'll take a card and say, "If you want to make a change, you can." But they're scared, you know?

There was also something else called TED Talks, which the Sno-Isle Libraries would know about. There's one on addictions, and it's a real eye-opener. My first husband years ago abused drugs and alcohol, and I couldn't take it. We didn't have any children. This was years and years and years ago. We divorced, and five years later, he died. So this is really close to my heart.

And actually, March 4 of this year, we will have been homeless for a year. Now, we used to have a business, and we lived in Arlington. We had plenty of money. I'd go to Costco and buy lots of stuff. We went in business with someone and we lost everything.

We had some wonderful people from our church help us with a home for a long time. And then they needed to sell their home, which they had every right to do, and they gave us plenty of time, but we just had had a lot of financial things, and we couldn't do anything.

My husband had worked for someone in construction. You know, you always hear at the end of construction, "The construction guy is bad." Well, on the other end, people sometimes don't pay you either. We tried to fight it; they owed us \$10,000. Well, that makes a lot of difference.

So we've lived at different friends' houses. And we used to have people live with us; we've been on both ends of it. I'm glad I was nice to them. If that ever happens again, I will be nicer even yet.

But we've learned a lot, and I've had inspiration that we were supposed to learn a lot of these

things. I have actually walked around the streets late at night and talked with some of these homeless kids and stuff like that, and it is heartbreaking. And yes, sometimes they go to the casino and walk around all night long. And I have done that too, to be with someone that kind of needed some support. They don't know what to do. They have to be up all night long because they are cold and you can't go to sleep on a casino floor or anything, but it's a safe place for them. You can only walk around Walmart so much, and all of these things.

So I have a different look at this stuff now. And it is scary, especially for youth. One little boy over there, he was 23, he just had his birthday like three days ago, and he had been on the street for four years. Four years! It's just heartbreaking, you know?

And I think we should all do a lot of praying, those that want to, and look up the Hope Soldiers and the TED Talks on addictions. The addiction one definitely opens your eyes. Everybody wants to shove, shove, shove them away, but they need love. They're heartbroken. What little kid grows up and says, "I can't want to grow up and be a drug addict"? Nobody thinks that. Things happen.

And the pharmaceutical companies, they're bigtime bad. They are pushing drugs on them when they're 12 years old, and they just get their teeth out, and then they get hooked on it. It's a really bad situation that we need to pay attention to.

Anyway, thank you.

01:01:59 ***MODERATOR***

Thank you. Thank you very much.

[APPLAUSE]

Right up here in the front.

01:02:13 ***AUDIENCE MEMBER KATE***

Hi, I'm Kate. I recently looked in the phone book, and I found out from some research recently that 40% of the people who are homeless have disabilities. There may be some things available, but it seems very limited, and they face so many barriers. I mean, yes, we have the ADA, the Americans with Disabilities Act, but if you don't have a phone, you can't call. If you don't have a home, you can't do some things.

Some people have mental disabilities, some emotional, some physical. But my research has shown that they are much more likely to experience homelessness. And again, it's that living in the hotel situation or being very close to being on the street. People who depend on Social Security or SSI or whatever have very limited means. And many people, including myself, have been so close to homelessness. I don't know what we'd do.

What are some of the thoughts related to barriers and people with disabilities who experience homelessness?

01:03:31 ***NICOLAS QUIJANO***

I'll start, because this is something that I see fairly often: people with varying disabilities who are

not diagnosed, or who do not have the proper medical identification or the proper paperwork.

There are usually services that are available to folks, but it takes a lot of work, even if you're not disabled. It takes a lot of work to show up at DSHS for your appointment at 10:00 a.m. It takes a lot of work for you to get on the bus and get to the right place at the right time. Having people to accompany them through that process is one of the key steps in terms of helping that particular population. It's really a question of negotiating all the services that they need to be able to access to get to a good place.

At least for me, for our youth, for people that are under the age of 24, that's a question of directing them in the door so that I can start talking to the person, figuring out what their needs are, what they do and don't already have access to, and then going from there. I imagine that Seanna would probably say something similar: just walk in the door of the Arlington Resource Center and let us start working with the person so that we can identify what needs to happen.

Our case managers will literally accompany someone to DSHS, will talk to the person at the front desk, will help them to get the paperwork that they need to, will walk into the doctor's office with them, help them to schedule an appointment, which they may not have the capacity to do.

So being able to either -- whether it's you or just connect the person that you know to a resource like some of the ones up here on the panel, to be able to accompany that person through the process is a major first step. I think afterwards, it's still a struggle, but at least having that initial connection helps to get them going in the right direction.

01:05:23 ***LYNDA PLUMMER***

I would just say too that we often have times at Housing Hope filling units that are specifically designated with disabilities, and largely that is because there's not the accompanying paperwork that we need, compounded by the fact that a lot of particularly homeless people have difficulties following through due to transportation, due to all sorts of a myriad of problems. But I would encourage you to definitely have more hope about housing for disabilities, and contact agencies like Housing Hope, all of us really up here, to point you in the right direction for that. There's more hope than you think.

01:06:17 ***NICOLAS QUIJANO***

That's another little thing about being able to help people in the community. It's little stuff like getting someone who's maybe doing generally well but has a disability, making sure that they have whatever diagnosis, whatever paperwork. You don't know where they'll be in ten years. If there's a 12- or 13-year-old kid who seems to be kind of starting to fall off the radar, make that initial step of making sure they have connection to those resources. Even if they have housing for the next two or three years, there's a real possibility that at some point in the future, they're not going to have access to all the things that they need to.

So the little steps like just making sure that people who are starting to look like they're fraying around the edges, if you can make sure that they have something that says their name and has their picture on it, if you can make sure that if it seems as though they have some sort of documentable disability that they're getting treated for or that they're getting connected to resources. Taking that step perhaps before the person becomes homeless or becomes in a situation where they're in dire straits, whoever you are, whatever you see in the community, just taking the time to ask a couple

of questions can be really beneficial in terms of preventing a more difficult situation further down the road.

01:07:34 ***MODERATOR***

I saw a hand up over here.

01:07:44 ***AUDIENCE MEMBER***

I had two comments. You were talking about the difficulties of getting to places and that kind of thing. I just had an experience over the last couple of years. It's no sweat off my back to drive people to these places. There was a woman I became involved with that had a lot of needs. She had no way to get to her counseling. She had no way to get here.

So I drove, and I listened, and I drove, and I listened. And I would just encourage -- you know, all of us can do that if we have some extra time. That was a situation where there was -- some people you wouldn't want to put in your car and drive, you know. But for most people, they need somebody just to come alongside them and do something simple.

The other thing I want to talk about was a program I heard about in Skagit County not too long ago. It involved the churches. There are a number of churches there that are a part of a program. I understand this goes on in places all across the nation. I think up there there's about six or seven of the churches that work together in this program. And the homeless people are checked out, vetted somehow, okayed for the program, whatever that means. The churches open their doors, like their social halls or something. And they have this group of people come and stay there for a week at a time. And then the homeless people go to the other church, and then they go to another church. So like, if there's six churches, you have them every six weeks.

During that time, the people have to -- you give them a lunch, and they're off for the day, and then they come back at a certain time at night. You feed them dinner. You provide showers and things. Somebody from the church has to stay there. Every church has their own supply of bedding that they wash and clean every time the group comes through. Someone else hauls the cots from church to church. And the congregation just comes together and provides meals.

I haven't heard of anything like this here in Snohomish County, and I don't know what the rules are as far as who can participate. I don't know a lot of these details. But that just sounded like a wonderful program that a lot of churches could get involved in. So, just an idea.

01:10:52 ***NICOLAS QUIJANO***

Yeah, I agree. I think with things like that, we'll see -- someone asked, "Why can't we just buy a vacant warehouse and repurpose it?" For organizations like ours, that raises a number of legal issues and permitting issues. There's a lot of really frustrating red tape paperwork that we have to get around.

I would imagine that the program you're referring to started because some parishioners reached out to some other parishioners. Those are just people who are interested in helping, trying to create a collaborative organization in their community to help the people that they work with. So if you're part of an organization like that, there's always something that you can do to start. Especially private organizations like that have a lot more leeway to kind of accommodate where they can let

people sleep and what they can let people do. I would urge you, if that's something that you're interested in doing, to seek out the advice and guidance of professional organizations. But there's always the capacity of people to meet those needs.

01:12:01 ***MODERATOR***

I agree. There are so many people that are homeless now. I mean, the numbers we've heard tonight are devastating. Can you imagine? I won't sleeping knowing there are 6,000 kids on the street in Snohomish County. That's just not right.

So we're behind the curve, and it's going to take multiple things to solve this issue. Some of it will be short-term to get roofs over their heads, and maybe that's the role the community can play with the faith-based organizations while these other organizations beef up the counseling and the wraparound services and stuff.

I'm going to take your question, but I just want to say one thing. I watched this community do amazing things after the Oso landslide. You guys blew me away. You blew the nation away with what happens when you have a singular focus to help people in need. Don't ever forget that power that you hold.

01:12:57 ***AUDIENCE MEMBER***

Thank you. One of the numbers that sort of struck me really hard was the number about the income level needed to afford a one-bedroom apartment in this state. That's \$18 an hour. Our state has one of the highest minimum wages in the country, and it just recently became \$11 an hour just this year. That's a huge gap. The federal minimum wage is \$7-something an hour.

What you guys are doing is really awesome as far as the training and life skills, and so much of that is fundamentally important, but I can't help but feel this frustration as far as the job training -- for example, like the barista. If we train them to be a barista, and then they go in and earn that \$11 an hour -- because realistically, that's going to be what they earn -- I guess, in a broader sense, it feels like there's a fundamental gap here.

We've heard a lot about the helpfulness of the temporary shelters and the resources, and that's awesome, but is there something possibly we could do to address the larger problem of this income gap and the rising cost of housing, etc.?

01:14:06 ***LYNDA PLUMMER***

I would argue that for homeless people that have been chronically homeless and lived through generational homelessness, training to be a barista or training to go into any one of our social enterprise programs is such a huge improvement. Sometimes we have to look at baby steps. Oftentimes you have to look at two incomes. So many of our single moms and single dads have partners that they live with. If they're both making \$11 an hour, that's a start. That's so much better than \$500 on TANF.

It does so much more towards self-efficacy and self-esteem. We see it as a win-win. Even though we recognize it's not a solution at the moment, we hope, we know, we believe it's going in the right direction.

01:15:15 ***KRISTEN CANE***

I'll also add that I think a big part of the solution is the creation of more affordable housing. We're not necessarily going to get new rental subsidies and be able to add people to the Section 8 program, but as a county, we can be more competitive in getting the state money and getting the tax credits and building more affordable housing where you're not going to need \$18 an hour, you might need \$13 or \$14 or \$15. At least that's a little bit of an improvement. But we need units to be built to meet the need.

01:15:59 ***MODERATOR***

OK, one more question.

01:16:01 ***AUDIENCE MEMBER ALLIE***

Hi. My name is Allie. I have two questions. One is, you know, we have a total number that we think are homeless in our area. Do we know what percentage of those are addicts, versus how many are not addicts?

[PANELISTS SHAKE HEADS NO]

Nothing. OK.

I think we're dealing with two different animals with that: dealing with an addict, and then dealing with a family that's just down on their luck. It's two completely different things.

The other thing I'm wondering is, has anything ever been considered -- my husband and I have housed people that needed a home before. Normally it's somebody we know. We didn't know anything about heroin until about two and a half years ago when we met a young couple at our church, took them to dinner, chit-chatted with them, just fell in love with them, and then took them home with us. The next day, luckily we found out, they were both heroin addicts. They of course told us they were not. They were clean, they said. They were just regular kids.

So we were able to get them to fess up, and we moved them back to their tent. But in the meantime, we stayed in touch with the young man, who's been in treatment three times now. We and my son have employed him when he's clean, and we've even worked with his parents so that he doesn't get a paycheck and has no disposable income. It goes to his parents. We've done some really dramatic things to help them. Addicts are completely different.

Is there any kind of a program where maybe a family can adopt another family, or some folks that just need six months to a year of help? "Come stay with our family and get on your feet so you don't have that hotel sucking up all of your money."

01:18:05 ***SEANNA HERRING-JENSEN***

There's one that's coming to Arlington. They just approached us last week, but I can't tell you the name. I don't remember it. But it's about fostering the family. They say they have it in other areas. It's working through the churches. We'll know more about it probably in the next couple of weeks.

01:18:23 ***MODERATOR***

I think most of the churches work with our family resource center, the Arlington Community Resource Center. Talk to your pastors and talk to the people at your church. There has to be a way to help. Thank you.

We're nearing the end of our program. I would like to offer each of our panelists one minute to emphasize something that's important that's been discussed this evening, and provide us all with a closing thought.

Kristen, do you want to go first?

01:18:53 ***KRISTEN CANE***

I just want to thank everyone for coming and showing an interest in the issue and wanting to learn more and do something. I think there have been some really great ideas floated from the audience members about things that the local community can do to meet the need.

I think it's important to try to balance the short-term and the long-term solutions. It's visible and I know people really want to do something right away, and I get that. But also, as the larger system, we're trying to shift more resources to permanent housing because that's what people really need. They don't need a bed in a big warehouse. They need an apartment to live in to get back on their feet.

So it's just always that hard balance of how much of your time and resources you spend on the short-term versus the long-term solution. They're both important and needed.

01:19:49 ***LYNDA PLUMMER***

I agree with everything that was just said. I'd like to point out that the interesting part to me were the questions on addiction, particularly, as being a very big part of the homelessness problem, which it is. I think less touched on (and certainly because of time parameters here) is the role of mental illness, the misdiagnosis of mental illness, and the impact that it has on the homeless population.

01:20:28 ***NICOLAS QUIJANO***

Similarly, I think that there's this kind of competing balance. There's this desire to do things right now. And there are things that you can do right now: you can be aware of the resources in the community, you can refer to them, you can navigate them. And then there's this desire -- and I absolutely have this desire and frustration as well -- for broader systemic change. It's frustrating to hear because it's not going to change anything tomorrow, but it starts with going to legislative district meetings. It starts with voting. It starts with talking to your elected officials, getting together with friends, showing up at meetings, rallying, and making your voice heard.

I think you heard a lot of what we're trying to do to address the problem right now. I don't think that there's any illusion that we're solving it. I think for there to be a long-term solution, there has to be a broader political effort to treat people and to engage with people in a way that actually meets the needs that they have. While I would encourage you to be informed locally about what you can do now, if you really want to see things change, engage politically as well.

01:21:34 ***SEANNA HERRING-JENSEN***

I do want to thank you all for being here. Know that the Arlington Community Resource Center will morph and change with the needs of the community. This is taking a lot of our attention and a lot of our time because this is growing. It's not getting smaller, it's growing.

It's important to understand, with the panhandling, please, please, please don't pass out money! Please, please! I know people want to help immediately. Hand out resources. That's an excellent suggestion. You want to give somebody hygiene products? That helps tremendously. We give out food packages all the time so people have some protein for the week. Or for the day. We don't even do it for a week.

So things like that, they do matter and they are very helpful. Passing cash out helps the problem that we're trying to end. So please help us by not doing the panhandling. Thank you.

01:22:27 ***MODERATOR***

Thank you, Seanna.

I'm going to end with just four words on what we can do: volunteer, advocate, donate, self-educate. If you pick any one of those four paths, we'll be on the way to putting together a better community fabric to help with these issues.

We've come to the end of our time this evening. If you're looking for more information on this topic, you're going to find links to resources on the back of the program. You'll also find them at, of course, the Sno-Isle Libraries website.

Sno-Isle Libraries would appreciate any suggestions on how to improve Issues that Matter forums, and any ideas you might have for future topics. Can we just thank them for this tonight? I thought it was awesome. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

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