

Responses to Homelessness in Four Western United States Cities

Research conducted by Eileen Bidwell, One Truckee River AmeriCorps

DESIGNATED ENCAMPMENTS

Project: Seattle Housing and Resource Efforts

Location: Seattle, Washington

Overall population: 3,939,363 (Seattle/Tacoma/Bellevue)

Estimated population unsheltered: 5,228 (2019 PIT Count)

Project established: In the 1990's, Seattle's Sanctioned Tent Camps (with tents and restrooms) were established on land owned by local churches and managed by the nonprofit SHARE/WHEEL, organizations consisting of homeless and formerly homeless men and women. The City of Seattle is the first in the country to offer public land and funding to support permitted encampments, many of which have transitioned into Tiny Homes Villages. Eight villages, classified by HUD as Enhanced Shelters, now exist throughout the city, and more are planned for areas outside Seattle.



Project managed by and legal landlord: SHARE/WHEEL, selected by the city, continues to operate sanctioned camps with the Low-Income Housing Institute (LIHI) as fiscal agent. Local churches provide the land.

Serving: Single adults experiencing homelessness who (before the Seattle Sanctioned Tent Camps) lived in greenbelts, on the streets, in cars and in hazardous situations. Today, eight sanctioned camps remain on church property, each with approximately 100 residents. Navigation Center and First Presbyterian Shelter provide 175 additional safe spaces, including storage, with 24-hour case management, for the most vulnerable people experiencing chronic homelessness.

Key rules: In the past, city permits required that camps move every six months. The current ordinance allows camps to remain in the same location for two years. No time limit for residents of sanctioned tent camps. No fees at Tent Camps.

Governance model: Self-governed and self-managed with staff oversight. Paid staff do not vote on camp decisions. The encampment's self-managed governance structure offers residents a way to positively contribute to day-to-day operations and community engagement efforts while building individual confidence and leadership skills.

Facilities: Varies for individual tent camps; all camps are required to provide access to restrooms and trash removal.

Programs provided: Service-enriched case management and supportive services and access to services. Health care is provided by the nonprofit, Healthcare for the Homeless.

Further evaluation would be beneficial to determine potential changes in the level of case management as the make-up of permitted encampments shifts to serve more people who have been living unsheltered for long periods of time.

Impact on the community: The Seattle Sanctioned Tent Camps reported in 2016, 85 (26%) of the

individuals who left the encampments moved into permanent housing and 41 (13%) entered a transitional housing program. Overall, neighboring communities have responded positively. No significant increase in crime when a permitted encampment moves in.

Data collection contributes to success of the programs. LIHI collects data through King County's Coordinated Entry for All (CEA) program. Of the 403 adults served during 2016, 93 (23%) reported a history of domestic violence. 15 of those were part of a family with children. 31 survivors reported they were fleeing a domestic violence situation at the time.

Crime and Safety: Has 24-hour security shifts, with each adult participating. Seattle Police Department data shows no significant increase in crime because of the project. There is some evidence of increased numbers of people who come to the camps in search of a safe place to stay.

Challenges: At tent camps, staff turnover led to challenges for residents in receiving consistent access to case managers. Many tent camp residents who stay for short periods may not interact with staff, and therefore are not captured in the HMIS data system. High caseload levels make it difficult for case managers to effectively work with individuals to create housing plans. Outreach workers and SPD officers who work with the city's Navigation Team need better access to trauma-informed care and other training. Budget and program resources restrictions and limitations. Data collection process had some limitations. Since this was a new program with no previous experience or model as a guide, disconnected communication and miscommunication sometimes occurred. Changes were made to improve communication channels, especially clarity of roles, expectations and procedures.

Successes: City of Seattle staff: In addition to successful outcomes in efforts to end homelessness, partnering with a non-profit organization with lots of experience in low-income housing contributed greatly to the success of this project.

Information Source: Planner/Liaison, Seattle Human Services Department, and Director of Advocacy and Community Engagement, Low-Income Housing Institute

Another project worth mentioning: The City of Eugene enacted a "Rest Stop Ordinance" overnight sleeping program, and legal parking for RVs in designated areas on public and private land. Sanctioned camps are sponsored by churches throughout Eugene. City ordinances require that churches provide bathrooms and trash removal.

Information source: Project Director of Square One Villages

TINY HOMES VILLAGES

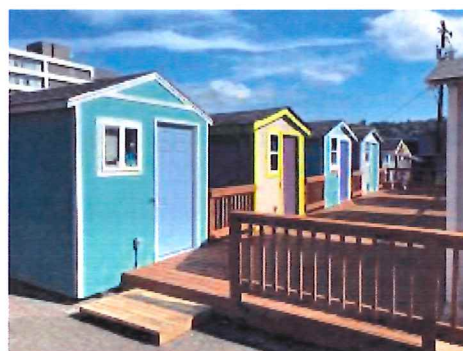
Project: *Quixote Village in Olympia, Washington*

Location: In an industrial area near downtown Olympia owned by Thurston County.

Overall population: 174,363 (Olympia/Lacey/Tumwater region)

Estimated population unsheltered: 319 (2019 PIT Count), 800 to 1,000 (estimated locally)

Project established: 2013 (evolved from a legal tent camp developed in 2007). Has grown to include two additional Tiny Homes villages for veterans experiencing homelessness.



Serving: Single adults experiencing chronic homelessness with 30 tiny home units.

Project managed by and legal landlord: Panza, a non-profit doing business as Quixote Communities. Thurston County leases the land to Panza for \$1 per year on a 41-year lease.

Staff includes: Three full-time and one part-time staff.

Total capital to start project: \$3.05 million including land valued at \$333K and pre-development expenses. Each tiny home costs \$19,000.

Funding sources: Village receives 25 project vouchers from local Housing Authority. Many services were donated. Additional funding came from the State Department of Commerce's Housing Trust Fund, Federal Community Development Block Grant, Thurston County funding from state document recording fees, and major donors including Nisqually and Chehalis tribes, the Boeing Employees fund, Medina Foundation, and the Community Foundation of South Puget Sound. *Breakdown of amounts available upon request.*

Legal and environmental issues: Lawsuit filed by downtown businesses against Tent City inspired the project to evolve to a Tiny Homes Village. No other legal or environmental problems were encountered by the project. Permitting and building code regulations were and are followed.

Individual facilities on-site: Each tiny home includes electricity, running water, a twin bed with linens and a pillow, a ½ bathroom, closet, table, stool, intercom phone, WIFI, heat, windows, a porch and storage space.

Communal facilities on-site include: Showers, a full kitchen with pots/pans, dishes, and utensils, dry food storage and several refrigerators, a common living room area, large dining room, and a library.

Governance model: Self-governing model. Staff works with Resident Council (an elected body of residents) and its elected Village Life Committee to select new residents.

Programs provided: Case management, peer mentorship and support, connection to community resources, drug and alcohol recovery support, and permission to have pets and vehicles on-site.

Key rules: Residents sign lease agreement with Panza. Rules and policies are developed, in a cooperative effort, by the Resident Council and Panza together. All residents meet with the Resident Council once a week. It is a drug and alcohol-free village.

Key policies: No time limit for how long an individual can stay. Residents pay 30% of their income. Residents with no income and no voucher pay no rent.

Overall project goal: To have those in need gain a new footing in their lives through tiny house communal living.

Challenges: Lack of funding for maintaining the Village. Most maintenance is done either in-house by staff or with volunteers. Sometimes licensed contractors are needed, mostly for electrical and plumbing, due to funding source requirements.

Successes: In the past two years, 90% of Quixote Village residents have moved to another form of permanent housing.

Impact on the community: "This work is a commitment and one that can immediately show its value in alleviating the suffering of those experiencing homelessness in the community, but any other value that the community is placing on the project is likely going to be one that takes time to demonstrate. Patience is vitally important." --Quixote Village Program Manager

Information source: Program Manager of Quixote Village

Project: *Opportunity Village in Eugene, Oregon*

Location: In an industrial area on one acre of city owned land.

Overall population: 168,916

Estimated population unsheltered: 1,633 to 2,165 unsheltered (2019 PIT Count)

Project established: Opportunity Village evolved following the eviction of a legal tent city in 2011. In 2012, the City of Eugene passed a resolution to identify a site for individuals experiencing homelessness to live. A space was chosen, and Opportunity Village, a tiny homes community based on the Dignity Village, Portland model was built in 2013.

Serving: Adults, including singles and couples experiencing homelessness with 30 tiny homes units.

Project managed by and legal landlord: Square One, a non-profit formed in 2012. The City of Eugene leases the property to Square One for \$1 per year. The city continues to renew the lease and reports no issues or concerns.

Staff includes: Part-time project coordinator

Total capital to start project: \$98,000. Each tiny house costs up to \$4,000.

Funding sources: Funding was raised through grass roots efforts and many volunteers. Source notes it was easy to raise money through private donations once the first home was built with volunteer labor. The city pays nothing for operation and maintenance of the Village.

Legal and environmental Issues: Source notes legal issues in Eugene's unsanctioned camps. No legal problems at Opportunity Village. No environmental concerns. Permitting followed land use process.

Individual facilities on-site: Each tiny home unit is 80-square-feet with furniture, electricity, and heat.

Communal facilities on-site include: Trash pickup and recycling, access to shared kitchens, restrooms and showers, a community room/shared living room with computers available.

Governance model: Self-governed and self-managed model with Square One staff oversight and management to ensure the project meets its agreement with the city.

Programs provided: Ability to have pets and vehicles on-site. Support for residents to work on their own plans to obtain permanent housing.

Key policies: Resident committee approves new residents and enforces policies. No time limit for how long an individual can stay. Average stay is one year. Residents renew community agreement every six months and are required to set goals and work toward achieving them. Residents pay \$35 per month per person.

Overall project goal: A Tiny Homes Village community that provides a safe space for people experiencing homelessness to sleep, keep their belongings, participate in a village community, and receive supports to help them stabilize and transition into permanent housing.

Impact on the community: Opportunity Village has fulfilled its goal of creating a more inclusive model. The collaboration between self-government and non-profit oversight has proven successful. Oversight is needed to support self-government model. Two additional Tiny Homes Villages were built, including Hope Village in Medford, Oregon, operated by the non-profit Rogue Retreat, and a Veterans Village in Clakamas County.

Information source: Project Director, Square One Villages



Project: Tiny Homes Villages in Seattle, Washington

Location: In eight neighborhoods throughout the city

Overall population: 3,939,363 (Seattle/Tacoma/Bellevue)

Estimated population unsheltered: 5,228 unsheltered (2019 PIT Count)

Project established: In 2012, the first Tiny Homes Village was built. This evolved from the tent cities established in Seattle in the 1990's that remain today, hosted by local churches. Tiny Homes Villages were built on land owned by the city, other agencies (ex. utility companies), and private companies.



Serving: 300+ individuals with 270 units in eight villages. Four villages allow families, couples and youth. Four allow singles only.

Project managed by and legal landlord: Low-Income Housing Institute (LIHI), a non-profit organization that contracts with the Seattle Human Services Department. LIHI secured funding and permits for Villages, coordinated construction, and recruited volunteers.

Staff includes: Varies by community

Total capital to start project: \$250,000 to 300,000—less if people donate and build homes.

Total annual cost: During 2016, the City of Seattle contributed \$559,600 of a total budget of \$755,000 for the operations and case management budget for three Villages. Cost per person exited from the program in 2016 is \$2,310; the city's investment is \$1,711 per person exiting. Total program cost per individual exiting the program to permanent housing is \$8,888; \$6,584 is the City of Seattle's investment.

Funding sources: City of Seattle contracts with the Low-Income Housing Institute, which led the effort to raise funds to construct the tiny houses, reaching out to hundreds of donors and volunteers, including the Seattle Police Department and Human Services Department, which funds LIHI for operations and services.

Legal and environmental issues: Source reports that insurance and legal representation are essential. In all villages, a code of conduct emphasizes harmony and the smooth operation of each village. Residents sign waivers, agreeing not to sue the city or LIHI. A clear agreement is also essential.

Individual facilities on-site: Each tiny house unit is 100 square-feet with locks, heat, insulation, electricity, and storage.

Communal facilities on-site include: Trash pickup and recycling, access to restrooms and showers, and a community kitchen.

Governance model: Self-governed and self-managed model in collaboration with LIHI. A democratic decision-making model gives each member an equal vote.

Programs provided: Case management and access to services and resources, including childcare, transportation (including school transportation for children), health care (including mental health and substance abuse programs), vocational training and education, legal services. Permission to have pets and vehicles on-site. No time limit for how long an individual can stay but residents are required to follow rules and make progress toward finding permanent housing, employment, and accessing services. No fees for residents.

Overall project goal: To offer an interim, temporary solution for homeless individuals with access to case management and supportive services.

Challenges: While not everyone was supportive of the project, community members were all provided detailed information on the management plan and code of conduct and were invited to serve on a

community advisory committee.

Successes: Empirical evidence and experience shows more people find permanent housing through this model.

Impact on the community: Partner agency staff report increased neighborhood resident engagement and support, including donations, enjoyable community interactions and other positive experiences, relationship building, involvement by neighborhood faith communities, and increased understanding of homelessness and poverty in their neighborhoods. Village residents participate in their communities through neighborhood cleanup efforts and safety walks.

Crime and Safety: Has 24-hour security shifts, with each adult participating. Seattle Police Department data shows no significant increase in crime because of the project.

Recommendations: Engage many different groups and individuals to work on various aspects of this project. This includes ordinance and land use experts, police, government, the faith community, the Department of Neighborhoods, non-profits, and service providers. Work closely with the community, especially people with lived experience, to design and implement the programs. Self-management works well with additional staffing from a contracted agency for oversight. Be sure to offer adequate resources, including designing for people who need support for physical (ex. hospital discharges) and mental health issues.

Information Source: Planner/Liaison, Seattle Human Services Department, and Director of Advocacy and Community Engagement, Low-Income Housing Institute

Project: Dignity Village in Portland, Oregon

Location: On two acres of city-owned land in an industrial park 10 miles from downtown, near a river, a wildlife refuge, and the airport.

Overall Population: 657,100

Estimated population unsheltered: 2,869 in Multnomah County (2019 PIT Count)

Project established: Dignity Village began as a tent campground and transitioned into the nation's first Tiny Homes Village in 2000. Now there are over seven additional villages in Portland, based on Dignity Village model.



Serving: 45 tiny home structures house 50 – 70 single adults. Many more rely on Dignity's day services.

Project managed by/legal landlord: Dignity Village is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Village is democratically operated through an annually elected membership council (See Governance Model).

Staff Includes: One full-time staff

Total Capital to start project: Unknown. Organizers accessed donated materials and established relationships with non-profit recyclers, community organizations and religious groups. Villagers, if able, built their own structures and found free materials. A grass roots campaign eventually led to the city offering property at no cost.

Total annual cost: \$30,000. Includes garbage/recycling, WIFI/cable/phone, water, electricity, portable toilet servicing, miscellaneous expenses, and liability insurance.

Funding sources: As a non-profit organization, Dignity Village funds itself through a combination of donations from individuals and organizations, grants, the village's collectively run small businesses, and the \$50 monthly insurance fee paid by residents.

Legal and environmental issues: Primary challenges involved identifying an existing law to support the model and battling stereotypes about homeless people. Founders used existing laws from the Great Depression era which granted the city permission to set up shanty towns. Popular support eventually overcame opposition, and the city granted a contract for the use of the site near the airport.

As a non-profit, Dignity village is required to maintain liability insurance, paid for by resident fees, and accepts all liability. There have been no claims in the Village's 20-year history. The city has encountered no legal problems related to Dignity Village.

Exhaust and noise pollution from military jets has caused lung and hearing problems for long-term residents. Rats have been an issue due to the nearby river. Waste management can be a problem for people with hoarding behaviors. Flooding, intense heat and high-water usage result from being located on a tarmac instead of soil or gravel.

Individual facilities on-site: Each structure is made from recycled materials and includes gas heat and solar electricity.

Communal Facilities on-site include: Operational buildings include kitchen with running water, a large meeting/social hall, living room, two offices, donations processing center, storage area, greenhouse, guest shelter, showers, computer lab, recycling facility, and four portable toilets. Village also includes outdoor common spaces, garden beds and a security shack. Garbage/recycling is provided, as well as mail service, a shared phone and WIFI.

Governance model: Dignity Village is an autonomous, self-governed, self-managed, low-barrier transitional community. It is a 501(c)(3) non-profit collectively and democratically managed by residents through an annually elected council and the membership body with established bylaws and policies. A full-time program specialist, funded by Multnomah County and contracted through the non-profit JOIN, offers added support and training and acts as liaison and advocate for Village residents. JOIN works in partnership with the council to provide additional social service support but is not involved with Village management.

Programs provided: Non-profit JOIN provides social service support and access to community resources.

Key Policies: Pets and vehicles are allowed, but no camping in vehicles. No time limit for residents. All residents pay \$50 per month to cover liability insurance costs.

Overall Project Goal: To create an autonomous, self-governed, self-managed, democratic community based on advocacy, grass roots organizing, community partnerships, and sustainability.

Challenges: Funding for social services, including shelters and shelter staff, is inadequate. There is a 47,000-household shortage of affordable housing, resulting in longer shelter stays. Housing wait lists are 10 – 15 years long.

Mental health supports are also failing in Portland. Because traditional shelters deny shelter to people with behavioral disabilities, many with severe mental illness end up at Dignity village due to its remote location. The village currently has no mental health specialists.

Successes: The Village has a 20-year history of successfully running itself. Average length of stay is the same or better than at shelters using other models.

Suggestions and Advice: Stay true to your model structure. Social service agencies can work most successfully in partnership with instead of having power over villages. A community can regulate its own behavior more effectively than outsiders with misperceptions such as economic class and racial bias.

Employ dedicated mental health, housing and addiction support workers. Addiction support workers must have a harm reduction lens rather than abstinence only to successfully engage with houseless people.

Provide land closer to homeless resources and services and neighborhoods where low-income

people's natural family support networks are likely to be located.

Do not build structures smaller than 10x12. Provide a small storage shed so residents can avoid using expensive private facilities to store their belongings.

Information Source: Dignity Village Program Specialist

INTRODUCTION

The goals of this report are to, a) determine the extent that City of Seattle temporary, permitted encampments are an effective homelessness response strategy and, b) identify successes and areas of improvement for the permitted encampment model. The majority of the data and financial findings in this report reflect the experiences and results of the Ballard, Interbay and Othello permitted encampments between January 1, 2016 and December 31, 2016.

Background

The City of Seattle is the first in the country to offer public land and funding to support permitted encampments. As of today, the City of Seattle (the City) invests in six permitted homeless encampment programs¹. Based on the most recent HMIS (Homeless Management Information System) data, from September 2015 through May 2017, 759 people have been served through those programs and, 121 people have transitioned into a safe, permanent place to live. These temporary, permitted encampments contribute to the City's efforts to address homelessness.

"Permitted encampments are not a permanent solution to the crisis of homelessness we are experiencing in Seattle," said Murray. "These encampments will provide a safer community environment than sleeping under a highway overpass or on a park bench. Residents will have improved access to services and we hope to open the door to permanent housing as quickly as we can."

Mayor Murray, June 29, 2015

In 2016, the City adopted a strategic plan known as the *Pathways Home* plan as a framework of actions to address homelessness. The person-centered plan includes key data-driven policies and actions that will transform the current system into one that more fully addresses the complex needs of people experiencing homelessness. While the priority actions within Pathways Home are underway, permitted encampment programs that include access to services and case management provide immediate options for people without shelter.

Key Findings

- The City permitted encampments have **met and exceeded the contracted performance measures**.
- The model is successfully **servicing people who have been living outside** in greenbelts, on the streets, in cars and in hazardous situations.
- Overall, the neighboring **communities have responded positively** and, there is no significant increase in crime when the permitted encampment moves in.
- The encampment **self-managed governance structure** offers residents a way to positively contribute to day-to-day operations and community engagement efforts while building individual confidence and leadership skills.
- The success of the first two years of the permitted encampment **validates the value of adding case management and services** to the self-managed encampments.
- More research is needed to provide insight into any **detrimental racial equity practices or program barriers** that may exist at the permitted encampments for Black/African American, American Indian or Alaska Native and Hispanic Latino people experiencing homelessness.
- It would be beneficial to evaluate the potential changes needed for the **level of case management, staffing and supportive services offered** as the make-up of the permitted encampment shifts to serve more people who have been living without shelter for long periods of time.

ⁱ Identified as: Ballard, Interbay, Othello, Georgetown, Myers Way and Licton Springs

THE MODEL

Background

In late 2014 Mayor Murray convened an Emergency Task Force on Unsheltered Homelessness to identify a set of immediate, short-term action steps to address the growing number of people experiencing homelessness. The task force was made up of leaders from the housing/ homelessness services sector, funders, neighborhood and business districts, faith community, and advocates. Over a two-month period, the task force developed a set of proposals for the Mayor's consideration. One of those proposals was for the City of Seattle to permit organized legal encampments to be sited on public land or privately owned, non-religious property.

The Mayor accepted that recommendation and, in early 2015 the full City Council unanimously adopted an ordinance related to land use and zoning to permit transitional encampments as an interim use on City-owned or private property. A related joint Director's Rule was adopted by the City's Human Services Department (HSD) and Department of Planning and Development (DPD) to establish compatible requirements for community outreach, encampment operations standards, and coordination with the permit process for new transitional encampments on any selected site meeting the requirements of the ordinance.²

The ordinance includes restrictions around the number of persons to be served at each site and limits the permitted use for one year, with the possibility of permit renewal for an additional year. Further, the joint Director's Rule directs the permitted encampment operational standards. These include budgeting and fundraising, site management, maintenance and security protocols, required resident supports, and public health and safety goals. The joint Director's Rule also outlines community outreach standards and requires the creation of Community Advisory Councils (CAC) to provide neighborhood and business input on proposed encampment operations. The CAC's also identify methods for handling complaints or concerns relating to the encampment site or its residents.

The program regulations and guidelines for the operation of the sites are further outlined in the Project Service Agreement, which is executed by agency and HSD authorized representatives. Program oversight is maintained by HSD through a monthly *Contractor Invoice Form* and *Monthly Status Report* that document progress towards the contracted performance commitments and line-item reimbursement. Additionally, HSD staff meet regularly with the staff, in person and often on site, to assess the program progress and work collaboratively on addressing issues.

Leveraging Expertise of Local Operators and Service Providers

A qualification review process was used by HSD to select the operators of the encampment sites. The organizations selected to partner in the permitted encampments bring to the program decades of experience in supporting unsheltered and low-income people. Longtime and nationally recognized tent city operator SHARE (Seattle Housing and Resource Effort) was selected to manage the Interbay encampment and established operator Nickelsville was selected to manage the Ballard site. In March of 2016, Nickelsville began operating the third permitted encampment, named Othello. The Low Income Housing Alliance (LIHI) was invited to act as fiscal agent for the two organizations and to provide the case management services for the residents at the three encampments.

² Council Bill No. 118310, Ordinance No. 124747, DPD Director's Rule 20-2015, HSD Director's Rule 01-2015

KEY FINDINGS

Elimination of the 90-day Relocation Requirement

In the past encampments, or tent cities, were only permitted to stay in one location for a 90-day period. The disruptive nature of the 90-day limit placed a burden on the encampment community. The encampment leaders were constantly searching for the next host congregation. Each 90-day move meant many residents had to abandon progress made with a service provider or agency to begin with one that was closer to the new location. The City's permitted encampments are now allowed to stay in place for a one-year period with a second-year option based on successful operation. This longer-term siting means residents can make greater progress towards their stability goals and build stronger relationships with the surrounding community.

Bringing together the Self-Managed Model with Case Management Services

What makes the Ballard, Interbay and Othello permitted encampments different from other non-sanctioned or unpermitted encampments is the incorporation of structured case management services into the self-management model. The model was without historical experience or comparisons, which meant much of the operating norms and expectations were created simultaneously with the physical setting up of the sites. More than one person interviewed described the experience using an analogy like, "We were building the airplane in the air."

The encampment self-managed governance structure offers residents a way to positively contribute to day-to-day operations and community engagement efforts while building individual confidence and leadership skills. The residents support and encourage each other, which adds to the increased sense of well-being that contributes to positive outcomes. Residents tell stories about how they help each other out and, how they celebrate successes and milestones.

"The people in the encampment are very proud of what they have accomplished in creating the encampment. One man said at the low barrier encampment that this place was the last chance for many people."
Healthcare for the Homeless staff reflection

Although each of the organizations uses slightly different methods, the core tenets are similar. The primary elements of the governance model are:

- Democratic decision-making with every member having an equal vote. Paid staff does not have a vote in camp decisions.
- All residents contribute to the day-to-day operation of the encampment. This includes contributing to camp security, participating in neighborhood service activities and other operational duties.
- Residents hold each other accountable for individual actions. A grievance procedure is used to resolve conflicts.
- Residents can be barred from camp for serious violation of the rules. Barred individuals are asked to leave the camp property. Re-entry can be petitioned depending on the severity of the offense.

The permitted encampment case management is provided by the Low Income Housing Alliance who has more than 20 years of experience identifying and developing affordable housing programs. The agency also holds demonstrated expertise in providing person-centered, service enriched programming to a wide range of low-income and homeless populations. LIHI is also responsible for the administrative, financial

Permitted Encampment Evaluation

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and data collection activities that contribute to the success of the programs. The permitted encampment service-enriched, case management model includes:

- Entry into King County's Coordinated Entry for All (CEA) program
 - Referrals to diversion programs and local shelters when appropriate
 - Coordination with local affordable and homeless housing providers including rapid rehousing programs
 - Connection to legal services to clear up outstanding issues that create barriers to housing and employment
 - Employee training and educational referrals
 - Help covering transportation costs for job searches, education and accessing resources
 - Family reunification and homeless diversion assistance
 - Childcare subsidies for working parents and coordination with McKinney Vento Act transportation for school aged-children
 - Refugee and immigration services including interpretation resources
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- Access to healthcare, mental health and substance abuse programs through the Healthcare for the Homeless mobile medical van and other programs that enrich the experiences of the camp residents

Even with the inevitable challenges faced by most startup programs that pioneer new ideas, one of the biggest outcomes of the first two years is the validation of the compatibility of the self-management and case management models. Although stakeholders consistently mentioned the lack of clarity in roles and poor communication as the biggest challenge they face, each expressed commitment to finding solutions and improving processes.

The "A" family has been at Othello since it opened and have become sober, employed and regained custody of their infant son. They are saving money and waiting for housing. Their goal is to "restart their lives".

Three additional permitted encampments were opened in 2017 (Myers Way, Georgetown and Licton Springs). The City of Seattle and its partners are committed to continuous learning and flexible program development as they pioneer new methods of employing person-centered responses to homelessness and poverty. This includes periodic evaluation and program adjustments based on data and real-time learnings which were utilized in the deployment of the 2017 sites. Therefore, the new sites benefited from the experiences and learnings observed in this report.

Permitted Encampment Evaluation
June 28, 2017

People Served

The three permitted encampments are programmatically designed to serve single men, single women, couples and adults with children who are part of a family unit. Unaccompanied children under the age of 18 are not served at the encampments. Operational procedures are in place to quickly and safely refer any unaccompanied children to the appropriate agency.

During 2016³, 403 adults over the age of 18 and 64 children as part of a family were served at the permitted encampments. These individuals equaled 323 households, with 37 of those containing children. Of the total population, 60% were male and 39% female. The other 1% includes two individuals who identify as transgender, one who selected 'doesn't identify as male, female or transgender' and two who declined to share their gender identity.

"My stay at Tent City5 allowed me to stabilize and recover from a horrible situation. The social immersion, responsibilities and opportunities that the camp and SHARE provided helped me to regain my footing and functionality. I'm now working for SHARE and have stable shared housing."

A total of 25 (5%) of encampment individuals were between the ages of 18 and 24 and, 13 (3%) were over the age of 62. There were 23 children who were under the age of 5 and, 41 who were school-aged (aged 5-17). Of the individuals served 27% are chronically homeless⁴ and 5% are veterans.

The race and ethnicity of the individuals served are described in the table below. One of the primary findings of this evaluation and, recommendations for future study is the high percentage of White individuals (57%) served at the encampment as compared to the City funded Single Adult Enhanced Emergency Shelters (43%). The low representation of Black/African American, American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian people as compared to other programs should be researched to identify any racial disparities and make programmatic changes that lead to racial equity.

Race	Total	
White	265	57%
Black/African American	88	19%
Asian	5	1%
American Indian or Alaska Native	30	6%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	7	1%
Multiple Races	46	10%
Refused/ Not Collected	26	6%

Ethnicity	Total	
Non-Hispanic / Non-Latino	399	85.5%
Hispanic/ Latino	33	7%
Refused/ Not Collected	35	7.5%

Of the 403 adults served during 2016, 93 (23%) reported a history of domestic violence (DV) in their lives. Fifteen of those who reported were part of a family with children. Additionally, 31 (33%) of those who reported experiencing DV in their lives said they were fleeing a DV situation at that time.

³ Collected in Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), see Methodology for details. Data characterized as people or individuals includes both adults and children.

⁴ To be considered chronically homeless, an individual or head of household must meet the definition of "homeless individual with a disability" from the McKinney-Vento Act, as amended by the HEARTH Act and have been living in a place not meant for human habitation, in an emergency shelter, or in a safe haven for the last 12 months continuously or on at least four occasions in the last three years where those occasions cumulatively total at least 12 months.

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The table below describes the physical and mental conditions reported by the individuals staying at the encampment at program entry. Mental health and physical disabilities are the conditions that were most cited during intake. During interviews with staff and residents, one of the most mentioned areas of success was the Healthcare for the Homeless Mobile Medical Van where people are receiving treatment for physical conditions that would be untreated without that service.

Physical and Mental Conditions	Total Reported
Mental Health Problem	177
Physical Disability	134
Chronic Health Condition	110
Developmental Disability	63
Drug Abuse	25
Alcohol Abuse	20
Both Alcohol and Drug Abuse	10
HIV/AIDS	2

Almost half (45%) of the adults report they have no income when they enter the permitted encampment. Additionally, 36% report other income from sources like the Veteran's Administration (VA), governmental programs such as TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) and SSI/SSDI (Supplemental Security Income) and, 12% of the adults reported earned income or a combination of earned and other income.

Number of Adults By Income Category	Total	
Adults with Only Earned Income*	44	11%
Adults with Only Other Income	145	36%
Adults with Both Earned and Other Income	4	1%
Adults with No Income	182	45%
Adults Refused/Not collected	28	7%
*i.e. employment		

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Performance Measures

The three temporary encampments located in the City's Interbay, Ballard and Othello neighborhoods, met the 2016 contracted performance commitments. Those combined performance commitments were: (a) 125 unduplicated homeless individuals/families meet their emergency or immediate shelter needs and, (b) 45 homeless individuals or families enter transitional or permanent housing.

- **The encampments are helping individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness meet their emergency or immediate shelter needs.** In 2016⁵, 467 people or, 323 households were served at the Interbay, Ballard and Othello encampments. More than half (55%) of the adults served slept the night before in a place not fit for human habitation.
- **Homeless individuals or families are entering transitional or permanent housing.** Of those who exited the encampments during 2016, 85 (26%) moved into a permanent place to live and 41 (13%) entered a transitional housing program.

System Comparison

The following section describes how the permitted encampment performance for adults compares to City funded Single Adult Enhanced Shelter programs that similarly provide 24/7 access, storage, services and case management.

Last Place Slept (Adults)	Encampments		Enhanced Shelter	
Place Not Meant for Human Habitation	222	55%	407	29.5%
Shelter / Safe Haven	82	20%	666	48%
Staying with Friends/Family	41	10%	70	5%
Hotel/Motel	15	4%	22	2%
Transitional Housing	13	3%	20	1.5%
Institutional Setting	8	2%	88	6%
Permanent Housing For Formerly Homeless Persons	0	0%	3	0%
Rental or Owned	7	2%	21	2%
Refused / Not Collected	15	4%	84	6%
Total	403		1381	

Length of Stay	Encampments		Enhanced Shelter	
	Left During 2016	Still There 12/31/16	Left During 2016	Still There 12/31/16
Average	88	123	61	104
Median	69	71	15	60

⁵ 12 months of data for Interbay and Ballard, 9 months of data for Othello

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Exit Destination	Encampments		Enhanced Shelter	
	Total Exit		Total Exit	
Permanent Housing	85	26%	207	18%
Place Not Fit for Human Habitation	43	13%	53	5%
Transitional Housing	41	13%	87	8%
Shelter / Safe Haven	17	5%	175	15%
Institution	7	2%	30	3%
Other Temporary Situation	5	2%	75	7%
Deceased	0	0%	3	0%
Missing/ Refused	129	39%	504	44%
Total exited	327		1134	

Cost Summary

It is challenging to evaluate the cost effectiveness of the permitted encampments because there are no historical comparisons or standards with which to compare. This report summarizes the total cost of the program for 2016 and offers a baseline for future evaluation.

During 2016, the City of Seattle contributed \$559,600 of a total program budget of \$755,500 for the operations and case management costs for the Ballard, Interbay and Othello permitted encampments. The cost per person exited from the program during the year is \$2,310 and the City of Seattle’s investment is \$1,711 per person exited. The total program cost per individual who exited the program to permanent housing in 2016 is \$8,888 or, \$6,584 of the City of Seattle Investment.

Tents on Platforms Compared to Tiny Structures Performance

The three permitted encampments are comprised of sleeping areas that are both tent and wooden structures (also called tiny houses or tiny structures). The following table describes the configuration of sleeping areas for each of the three sites being evaluated in this report. The capacity of each site was gradually built up during 2016 and this configuration reflects the final capacity of the permitted encampment sites as of December 31, 2016.

	Othello	Interbay	Ballard
Tents on Platforms	12	40	12
Tiny Structures	28	0	5

Although there are other factors that could contribute to the results, some preliminary observations can be made between the permitted encampment sites. For example, the data shows a slight difference in the length of stay and exits to housing between Othello (mostly tiny structures), Interbay (all tents on platforms), and Ballard (mixture of tents and tiny structures). The Othello site also has the highest percentage of people moving into permanent and transitional housing. The data shows Othello has a significantly lower rate of exits to a place not meant for human habitation compared to the other sites. Future study is recommended to evaluate the reasons for these differences and identify the most effective way to incorporate the results into future permitted encampment models.

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	Othello 70% Tiny Structures		Interbay All Tents		Ballard 70% Tents	
	Left During 2016	Still There 12/31/16	Left During 2016	Still There 12/31/16	Left During 2016	Still There 12/31/16
Length of Stay						
Average	88	88	84	116	88	165
Median	78	64	63	62	68	112

Exit Destination	Othello 70% Tiny Structures		Interbay All Tents		Ballard 70% Tents	
	Total		Total		Total	
Permanent Housing	47	31%	26	20%	14	22%
Place Not Fit for Human Habitation	10	7%	26	20%	10	16%
Transitional Housing	36	24%	3	2%	2	3%
Shelter / Safe Haven	6	4%	9	7%	2	3%
Institution	1	1%	3	2%	3	5%
Other Temporary Situation	2	1%	4	3%	2	3%
Missing/ Refused	48	32%	60	46%	30	48%

Impact on the Neighborhood and Community

During interviews with partner agency staff, the Ballard and Interbay Community Advisory Committee members (CAC) and permitted encampment residents, one of the most frequently mentioned positive outcomes is the increased neighborhood resident engagement and support. This includes physical donations, enjoyable community interactions and other positive experiences. One of the Interbay CAC members described how the siting of the encampment has brought together the Queen Anne and Magnolia faith communities to more effectively work together to address homelessness and poverty in their neighborhoods.

Each of the encampments has seen increased visits from interested community members and others who want to observe the operations. This has resulted in opportunities for relationship building and, in some cases, increased community understanding of homelessness. One person said, "The camps are considered a place to go to learn about homelessness and get involved."

The permitted encampments are committed to being good neighbors. One way they demonstrate that commitment is through neighborhood cleanup efforts (i.e. Litter Busting), and neighborhood safety walks.

There is no consistent method being used at the sites to capture data around the amount of community interactions, which could include donations, meal preparation and serving, fundraising and volunteer programs (including setting up the encampment and building donated tiny structures). It is recommended that the partner agencies develop a common tool that can capture the types and levels of community support at each site. The quantitative data can be combined with qualitative data collection around the perception and attitudes about the permitted encampments and homelessness in

general leading to a greater understanding of the impact of the permitted encampments on the community.

In the meantime, several indicators illustrate the change in the quantity and type of community responses to the permitted encampments in their neighborhood. For example, there was a significant decrease in the number of phone calls, email messages and in-person meetings during the re-permitting of the three permitted encampments. Although no data was collected during the 2015 public notification process for all three of the encampments, the intensity of negative neighborhood reaction to the siting of the permitted encampments was evident. In comparison, when the public comments for the 2016 re-permitting were analyzed, the number of positive remarks about the neighborhood experiences outweighed those that contained negative responses.

Crime and Safety

The permitted encampment sites operate under a set of rules, codes of conduct and policies that each resident receives as part of the intake process. Although the language varies between Nickelsville and SHARE, the intent is to provide safety and security to the individuals who reside in the encampment and to the surrounding neighborhood. Camp security is a critical part of the successful operation of the permitted encampments. External complaints are handled through permitted encampment procedures that are designed for fast and efficient response. Generally, the permitted encampment staff are the first contacted when a problem is identified.

The permitted encampments have 24-hour security shifts, with each adult resident participating. Security duties include monitoring the environment for dangerous situations and working with camp leadership to identify and address any resident action that is contrary to the established rules of the camp. If a resident is determined to be in violation of the rules, he/she is barred from the premises. Depending on the severity of the situation, the Seattle Police Department (SPD) is contacted. The SPD responds as appropriate and works with the permitted encampment operators to resolve any situation.

In addition, SPD has been collecting data and information about the levels of crime that occur around the permitted encampment. This data shows that there is no significant increase in crime because of the encampment. There is some evidence of increased numbers of people who come to the neighborhood in search of a safe place to stay and this could contribute to some negative public perception of the encampments. Further study is needed to identify trends and impacts of the possible change in foot traffic.

Appendix

Appendix 1: About the Partners

The permitted encampments are designed to offer a safe place where people without shelter can access health and addiction services, find housing and participate in activities that encourage independent living skills, increase income, and promote health and well-being. Each of the partners plays a critical role in reaching the goals of the permitted encampment programs.

Organization descriptions as stated by the partners:

SHARE: SHARE and WHEEL are partnered organizations of homeless and formerly homeless men and women dedicated to surviving and solving homelessness, primarily through self-help, self-managed solutions. SHARE (Seattle Housing and Resource Effort) is co-ed and a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. WHEEL (Women's Housing Equality and Enhancement League) is made up solely of women.

SHARE/WHEEL is committed to providing survival, safety, dignity, empowerment, and leadership development to homeless people in need of shelter. Our shelters, our encampments, and our organization are run by participants themselves. SHARE participants determine the policies, rules and operating principles of SHARE and, take responsibility for the day-to-day (and night-to-night) work of running the encampments and shelters.

This commitment assures that our sites are safe, comfortable, and welcoming to all. Our self-managed model welcomes diversity in all aspects as long as participants adhere to our strict Code of Conduct.⁶

Nickelsville: The Nickelsville Othello Site is a self-managed encampment with a diverse population of homeless men, women, families and pets living in tents and simple wooden structures that is expected to start in March 2016.

Empowerment and dignity are promoted through self-management. The day-to-day operations of the camp are in the hands of leadership elected at camp meetings. Although Nickelsville has staff, they do not live on-site, and can't vote or make motions at meetings.

Nickelsville is a 501(c)3 organization with a goal of educating the public and homeless people, particularly those living in encampments, about the causes of homelessness and with a broader goal of working to solve homelessness. Nickelsville has been in operation since September 22, 2008 providing safe shelter to thousands of homeless people.⁷

Low Income Housing Alliance: Founded in 1991, LIHI has grown to be one of the most productive affordable housing developers in the Northwest. LIHI owns and/or manages over 1,700 housing units at 50 sites in six counties throughout the Puget Sound region.

LIHI provides a variety of supportive services to help residents maintain their housing and develop self-sufficiency. Our efforts include providing residents with case management, life skills training, technology access and training, financial literacy training and savings programs, and access to employment, healthcare, and educational programs.⁸

⁶From the Tent City 5 Interbay Management Plan

⁷ From the Othello Site Management Plan

⁸ From the Low Income Housing Institute Service Management Plan- Encampments

Appendix 2: Methodology

This report contains analysis and findings based on data collected at the Ballard and Interbay encampment sites from January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2016 and, from the Othello site from March 1, 2016 through December 31, 2016 (contracted period). Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI) case managers adhered to King County HMIS Standard Operating Procedures and interview protocol, which include obtaining a “client’s informed written consent” to participate in HMIS. Before any HMIS information was collected, camp residents were informed that access to services would not be tied to participation.

The HUD Annual Performance Report (APR) was the primary data source for this report. The report findings are measured at the individual rate. Head of household measurements were not used due to the complicated structure of the encampment households. Use of head of household race, ethnicity, disability, residency and exit data may not describe the true composition of the encampment residents. (Example: a 2-person family could have the female adult sleeping at an emergency shelter with the male adult sleeping in a place not fit for human habitation the night before entering the encampment.)

Qualitative Information

This report is supplemented by information collected during interviews with key stakeholders within the city of Seattle. Additionally, informational interviews were conducted with people from the following organizations/ programs:

- Community Advisory Committees (Ballard, Interbay)
- Nickelsville, SHARE staff, camp leadership and residents
- Low Income Housing Institute (case managers, fundraising, data management, volunteer coordination and other staff)
- Seattle-King County Public Health (Healthcare for the Homeless, Solid Waste/Rodent/Zoonotic Disease Program)

WHAT CHALLENGES EXIST?

Communication

Communication is an integral part of any new program, especially one that was created within a short time frame with no previous experience or model to use as a guide. As noted above, the City permitted encampments were a response to the growing crisis of homelessness. There was little time for extensive planning sessions and, much of the decision-making was done in real-time. This resulted in disconnected communication channels and, in some instances, miscommunication around policy and procedures. While it was the most mentioned challenge, almost every person interviewed described some changes that were put in place to improve the communication channels. There was also a clear commitment from all parties to find ways to improve, especially around clarity on roles, expectations and procedures.

Data Collection Challenges & Limitations

Data collection challenges were identified that, with creative approaches could be reduced or eliminated. These include:

- **Short-stays:** While the permitted encampments operate on a 24-hour timetable, the case managers hold scheduled office hours. Campers who stay for short periods may not have interacted with a case manager and therefore, not be captured in the HMIS data set. There should be a mechanism for collecting basic information about these individuals including reasons for leaving before connecting with case manager.
- **Staffing turnover:** During periods of staffing changes and turnover, camp residents reported challenges receiving consistent access to case managers. This could also limit the quantity and quality of data collected.
- **Data collection:** As with any new program start, the process for data collection included multiple iterations. While every effort was made to utilize HMIS, the data set may contain gaps from early program start up challenges.

Services / Operations

- **Staff training:** The permitted encampment model serves people who have spent many years living outside in hazardous conditions. The City's Navigation Team, comprised of outreach workers and SPD officers who are trained to work with this population, rely on the permitted encampments as an option to offer to people with high barriers to housing. This means the staff and case managers at the permitted encampments need access to training on trauma-informed care and other trainings that will help them give the most effective services possible.
- **Caseload levels:** The case managers at the permitted encampments work with each resident to create a housing plan. With high caseloads, it is sometimes difficult to make progress with people who have multiple barriers to obtaining housing or other issues. The case manager to client ratio should be evaluated and adjusted as needed.
- **Budget analysis:** During interviews, the operators consistently mentioned the restrictions they face with the program resources available. It was recommended there be a review of the budget allocations and determination if adjustments could be made to increase or redistribute the funds available for administrative activities and case management costs.

CONCLUSION & FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

The City permitted encampments have met and exceeded the contracted performance measures. The model is successfully serving people who have been living outside in greenbelts, on the streets, in cars and in hazardous situations. The neighboring communities have responded positively, and crime does not increase significantly when a permitted encampment moves in.

The challenges identified in the previous section should be researched further and plans made to address them in the next operating year. Additionally, research and attention is recommended in the following areas:

- Although the percentage of permitted encampment **missing responses** (*Client Doesn't Know/Client Refused, Data Not Collected*) are within the range of the single adult enhanced programs, efforts should be made to research the reasons people exit the program without providing destination information. This research could point to program gaps, service barriers or, racial bias.
- More research is needed to provide insight into any **detrimental racial equity practices or program barriers** that may exist at the permitted encampments for Black/African American, American Indian or Alaska Native and Hispanic Latino people experiencing homelessness.
- A low percentage of residents at the permitted encampments are between the ages of 18-24. Research should be done to determine if there are any barriers to **Youth and Young Adult** use of the permitted encampments.
- Inquiry should be made into the services offered to residents with a history of, or who are fleeing **domestic violence** to ensure connection to City of Seattle funded DV legal assistance and mobile flexible advocacy programs.
- There should be deeper research into the reasons for the **differences between tiny structures and tent** results.
- It would be beneficial to evaluate the potential changes needed for the **level of case management, staffing and supportive services offered** as the make-up of the permitted encampment shifts to serve more people who have been living without shelter for long periods of time.
- There would be a benefit to a study around the presumption that there is an **increase in "foot traffic"** in a neighborhood because of the camp and its potential impact.
- A public perception survey and data collection tool should be developed to capture **levels of community support and perception** by neighborhood.

Tiny House Villages in Seattle: An Efficient Response to Our Homelessness Crisis

By Sharon Lee - March 15, 2019



Six tiny houses share a common deck in Lake Union Village. Photo courtesy of LIHI.

In 2017, I wrote a piece for *Shelterforce* on Seattle's then-emerging effort to build tiny houses to shelter homeless families, couples, and singles. Over the past three years, Seattle has led the country in piloting this response to the homelessness crisis. There are now 10 tiny house villages located throughout Seattle on government, private, nonprofit, and church-owned properties.

The villages are sponsored by the Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI), where I am executive director, and nine tiny house villages receive financial support from the City of Seattle.

We've come to see that tiny house villages are an effective crisis response to homelessness, and have proven to be a rapid, cost-effective response with better outcomes than traditional shelters.

Quick Set Up

Seattle's mayor and city council have been tasked with addressing the needs of unsheltered homeless people. Last January, the Seattle/King County Point-In-Time Count tallied 12,112 homeless men, women, and children, with over half of them living in unsheltered situations. The unsheltered population in the city of Seattle makes up 71 percent of the county total.

When Mayor Jenny Durkan took office in January 2018, she authorized the first tiny house village exclusively for homeless women. The Whittier Heights Village is located on property owned by Seattle public utility City Light and shelters single women, same-sex couples, seniors, pregnant women, and women with pets. The mayor also funded two additional villages: True Hope Village, which is church-sponsored and focuses on people of color including families with children; and Lake Union Village (LUV), for singles and couples, located on a city-owned parking lot. All three villages were planned, constructed, and opened in 2018, and together shelter 155 homeless people.

Accept

Finance and Administrative Services (FAS) to compile an inventory and identify vacant city-owned sites, including those owned by city utilities that could be prepared quickly for the villages.

A village requires anywhere from 6,000 to 30,000 square feet of vacant land, depending on the number of tiny houses and common facilities to be placed there. There are suitable urban infill sites zoned for residential and mixed use, as well as larger commercial and industrial sites. It takes careful research and help from local government to identify good sites, and we were quite surprised to find a large inventory of publicly owned underutilized and surplus sites held by the city, county, state and even the Port of Seattle. We also found multiple nonprofit, private, and church-owned properties that could be used. Nonprofit housing organizations own land that they hope to develop in the future, and these can be used on an interim basis, from two to four years, for a tiny house village.



Each village needed only four to six months' lead time to be constructed. Staff at FAS partnered with our organization, the Low Income Housing Institute, and coordinated with other city departments to bring in water, sewer, and electrical connections to the sites. There are 15 to 34 tiny houses at each village, plus shared community kitchens, community meeting space, counseling offices, storage, donation huts, security huts, and plumbed bathrooms, showers, and laundry facilities.



A volunteer paint party at True Hope Village. Photo courtesy of LIHI.

An effective partnership between multiple departments in the city and LIHI was key in setting up the villages. Staff at LIHI worked closely with the city and our architects to plan each village. LIHI staff led the effort to raise funds to construct the tiny houses, reaching out to hundreds of donors and volunteers. We applied for permits, led work parties to build

including the Seattle Police Department and the Human Services Department, which funds LIHI for operations and services. While not everyone was supportive, they were all provided detailed information on the management plan and code of conduct, and were invited to submit their names to serve on a community advisory committee. Each village, staffed 24/7, has Village Organizers and dedicated case managers to assist people in obtaining long-term housing, employment and services.

Tiny House Villages vs. Other Options

Unlike developing and building a new emergency shelter—which could take many years for siting, permitting, and construction, plus millions of dollars in construction costs—creating a tiny house village can be done in less than six months and costs between \$100,000 and \$500,000. (A large variable is the cost of connections for water, sewer and electricity.) Each village can serve 20 to 70 people on an annual budget of \$60,000 to \$500,000, depending on staffing and services. We also partner with homeless resident organizations to operate six self-managed villages where residents are organized to manage day-to-day operations and employ democratic decision-making. This model reduces overall operating costs.

The Seattle Human Services Department has documented the village's cost effectiveness: "Spaces in tiny home villages represent approximately 12.5% of all shelter beds and safe places the City supports and make up less than 3% of all homelessness response investments made by the City of Seattle."

Among other local options to shelter homeless people, many are more expensive and take more time to set up than a tiny house village. The City of Bellevue's effort to identify a site for a new shelter for single men has taken six years because of community opposition. Financing, permitting and construction will take another two years, for a total of eight years before the shelter *might* open. King County just announced a plan to open and renovate an unused portion of the county's jail to shelter 100 people. It is budgeted to cost \$2 million to convert the space plus \$4 million to fund the next two years of operations. Concerns include not only the optics of putting homeless people in a jail facility, but the cost per person is more than double that of a tiny house village.

Compared with other options, tiny house villages have presented a quicker, more humane, and cost-effective solution.

What About Shelters or Tents?

According to Seattle Police Sgt. Eric Zerr of the city's Navigation Team, tiny houses are the preferred option for people who are removed from the street by law enforcement, as well as those living in RVs and cars. In situations of forced removal, people will gather their tents and belongings and relocate to another neighborhood, or move away and then return to the same spot after a short time rather than enter a shelter.

Due to the sheer number of homeless people and the city's inability to meet that need,

camping on the street or under bridges will refuse to move into a shelter, but will agree to move into a tiny house.

“Tiny house villages play a crucial role in helping the City move unsheltered people from dangerous conditions on the streets and into a more safe and supportive environment... and on a path to stable housing,” states the Seattle Human Services Department.



A tiny house at True Hope Village. Photo courtesy of LIHI.

Living in a tiny house is much more comfortable and healthy than trying to survive in a sleeping bag or a cold, wet tent. Each tiny house is 8 by 12 feet, the size of a small bedroom, and is insulated and heated. A small family can live in a tiny house, and a large family can live in two tiny houses side by side. Each furnished house has a locking door, windows, electric light, electrical outlet, and smoke detector.

Hundreds of dedicated students, volunteers, churches, and businesses have built and donated over 325 tiny houses at an average cost of \$2,500 each for construction materials. Volunteers make the houses comfortable and home-like by adding flower boxes, porches, curtains, artwork, and furniture. The tiny house built by a local Girl Scout troop included a bed, comforter, dresser, rug, art, and even boxes of cookies. Last year at Seattle’s CenturyLink Event Center, over 400 Vulcan employee volunteers, along with pre-apprentices and contractors led by Associated General Contractors of Washington, built 30 tiny houses in one day.

Tiny houses are changing people’s lives for the better. People living in a tiny house can keep themselves, their family, and belongings safely indoors and not worry about frequent moves between shelters. Having a secure place to live day and night, with access to showers, laundry, and a kitchen enables homeless people to find work, maintain a job, attend school, improve their health, and access services.

The average length of stay in a tiny home village is four to five months, and there is no time limit. An important factor has been people’s engagement with case managers in order to get “housing ready” with proper ID, Social Security cards, completed housing applications, and steadier income support or employment. A number of the villages are now

According to the King County Medical Examiner, 191 homeless men and women died in 2018 from exposure, chronic health conditions, violence, accidents, and suicide. The stability of tiny houses helps to alleviate these conditions.

Successful Outcomes

An important feature in the operation of the villages is the presence of dedicated case managers and social workers who link residents to services. The rate of successful housing placements in 2017 was 39 percent. LIHI worked closely with the Human Services department to bring more case management capacity to the villages in 2018, which is paying off.

During 2018, the villages served 879 homeless men, women, and children. Of the 491 who exited the villages, a total of 166 people, or 34 percent, were successful in obtaining permanent housing. If we include the additional 42 individuals who moved into transitional housing (receiving up to two years of Section 8 subsidies and help in moving to permanent housing), the percentage who obtained housing is 42 percent. In comparison, data provided by the Seattle Human Service Department (third quarter 2018) shows the rate of exits to permanent housing from city-funded shelters at only 4 percent, and enhanced around-the-clock shelters at 20 percent.

What We Have Learned

Tiny houses are a *bridge* to permanent housing. Our case managers have been very successful in finding subsidized housing, permanent supportive housing, and private housing for families and individuals who engage with them.

But what about those who refuse to cooperate or meet with our case managers? At the start of the program, a “low barrier” or housing-first approach was employed, where it was optional to meet with the case manager. Some people ended up living in a tiny house for over a year, refusing to obtain identification, get a Social Security card, or sign up for public assistance, Social Security, VA benefits, or TANF. The newer villages now require that people meet with a case manager to get on a path to secure housing.

Having people live long-term in a tiny house is not our goal, and so we quickly found out that it made sense to clearly define the target population for each village. In Seattle, we offer villages for women only, three for single adults and couples, five for a mix of families with children, and singles. Three villages are operated on a harm reduction, low-barrier model, and seven prohibit alcohol and drugs in or around the villages.

The Human Services Department completed an evaluation of the effectiveness of tiny house villages and said, “The City-permitted encampments have met and exceeded the contracted performance measure. The model is successfully serving people who have been living outside in greenbelts, on the streets, in cars and in hazardous situations.”

Olympia City Council agreed to fund Plum Street Village and the City issued a challenge to local faith-based organizations to establish tiny houses on their property. Three churches and temples are participating, and will receive funding from the city. LIHI will help establish the three new villages and will provide case management support.

We believe that LIHI's successful partnership with the City of Seattle to provide its homeless residents shelter in tiny houses can translate well to other municipalities that lack sufficient affordable housing and shelters. We invite homeless service providers, housing nonprofits and local government officials to come to Seattle and visit these villages.

For more information on Tiny House Villages visit: LIHI.org or www.seattle.gov/homelessness/city-permitted-villages.

For a different perspective on Tiny Homes, see [Tiny Homes—Not a Big Enough Solution](#).

Sharon Lee

Sharon Lee is the executive director of the Low Income Housing Institute, which owns and manages over 2,200 units of affordable housing.

