



The Face of Homelessness in East King County

Eastside Human Services Forum
Summer 2007

“I want to thank you so very much for all the help. There were years that I was without a job and hope. Now I have a good job, a nice place to live and a smile in the morning.”

–Donna, at risk of eviction, assisted by Solid Ground Housing Stability Project

“I’m happy... because our family is finally happy.”

–Daquan, formerly homeless child, assisted by Hopelink

“You were there for me when no one else was. I can’t thank you enough.”

–Laurie, homeless due to domestic violence, assisted by Eastside Domestic Violence Program

Dear Friend:

Homelessness is a problem that doesn't respect boundaries.

It's not confined to the soup kitchens and shelters of downtown Seattle. Instead, it affects people throughout the region, even here on the Eastside.

We don't typically see homeless people in our Eastside neighborhoods – people sleeping in doorways or asking for spare change – so it's easy to think we don't have a problem. But homelessness is here.

Homelessness just has a different face on the Eastside. It might be a mom and her kids shuttling between motel rooms and domestic violence shelters. It might be a family forced to double up with another because the rent for their own apartment was too high, or someone got sick. It might be a veteran sleeping out of sight in the woods or a single woman sleeping in her car. Or it might be a family not yet homeless but paying more than half their income for housing each month, and praying that the car won't need repairs.

Yes, homelessness is here. And it won't go away on its own. In fact, the 2007 One Night Count of the Homeless found 128 people on the Eastside sleeping unsheltered in January, a 30% increase from 2006.¹ Even here, in our prosperous communities, people are in need.

That's why a group of local human services and housing providers, governments, and businesses have come together to take action. We've helped fund shelters, housing, and the services people need to get back on their feet. And we're doing our best to end homelessness in our neighborhoods.

Homelessness has a different face on the Eastside. But it's here, and we need to end it before it gets worse. I hope you'll help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James Lauinger".

James Lauinger

President, Eastside Human Services Forum Board of Directors

Mayor of Kirkland

Did you know...?

- Since 2005, the estimated homeless population has decreased slightly for King County as a whole, but has increased on the Eastside.
- Over 8,300 people in King County are homeless on a typical night.² Approximately 17% of homeless single adults are from the Eastside.³
- In January 2007, 223 households living in emergency shelter or transitional housing reported that their last address was in East King County.⁴
- Between 2000 and 2004, the estimated homeless population in King County increased by nearly 30%, ten times the rate of population growth experienced by the County as a whole.

What causes homelessness?

There are many reasons people become homeless. One of the key reasons, though, is the most basic: **the cost of housing**.

That's a particular problem here on the Eastside: nearly one-fifth of East King County households pay more than 30% of their monthly income for housing expenses.⁵ And the percentage of households who pay too much of their income for housing is higher on the Eastside than anywhere else in King County.

When people pay too much of what they earn for rent or a mortgage they're at risk of homelessness every month. A medical problem, job cutback, or any other unexpected expense can quickly turn into a housing emergency. And once that happens, it can be very difficult to find another place to live.

Loss of housing can quickly lead to larger problems: when a family becomes homeless, adults can find it difficult, if not impossible, to keep their jobs. And children often miss school for long periods or have to change schools frequently, both of which can cause academic and behavioral problems. Yet far too many families live at constant risk of homelessness, many cycling in and out of shelters, motels, and transitional housing as they try to regain stability.

This **gap between wages and housing prices** is the primary reason families on the Eastside become homeless: more than half of all families who are homeless (52%) lost their home because of high housing prices; another third (34%) became homeless because of lack of a living wage.⁶

One look at the real estate pages in the paper or apartment ads on the Internet clearly reveals the problem: both rents and home prices on the Eastside have risen faster than income, leaving many people behind.

For rental housing, the cost of the average one-bedroom apartment in East King County is currently \$1,120 a month, an amount that would require 109 hours of work a week for a minimum wage worker to afford.⁷ In fact, the “living wage” in Washington for a family of three is \$23.39 an hour, more than three times the minimum wage.⁸

Home prices have also increased. The median sales price for Eastside homes and condos in April 2007 was \$510,500, up nearly 7% from 2006,⁹ and more than double the “affordable” price for a median income family.¹⁰

With housing prices so high, some turn to “subprime” lenders. The initial low interest rates later adjust to much higher levels, leaving homeowners overextended and threatened by foreclosure.

Our communities are prosperous and thriving, and rising home values attest to this. But too many people – many of them working full-time here on the Eastside – haven’t shared in this prosperity. And their problems affect us all.

Homelessness has become surprisingly widespread in our region. In 2006, in a poll conducted by United Way of King County, a full 49% of respondents said they knew someone outside their family who was homeless at one point in his or her life. That’s probably why homelessness ranked third on that poll as a crucial problem we must solve, just behind transportation and education.¹¹



Spencer and Theresa never thought they'd be homeless. Theresa had a full-time job, and Spencer, though between jobs, had good prospects. They worried about bills, of course. But, like most of us, they spent their time managing daily life, juggling the schedules of their three children – Daquan, 10; Cornelius, 8; and Amya, 5 – and getting involved in their schools... not worrying about losing their home.

And then Theresa got sick. It turned out she had developed a reaction to black mold in the family's apartment. But, with no money for a deposit at a new place, the family couldn't move.

Theresa became too sick to work and too sick to be left alone. Without an income, they fell behind on their rent, and soon were evicted.

"We didn't know where to go," Theresa remembers. "We were in big trouble."

Without help, they might have quickly spiraled downward, with the kids moving from school to school, Theresa getting sicker and sicker, and Spencer unable to leave his family to work.

Luckily they found help. They moved into Hopelink's Kenmore shelter, and then transitioned into an apartment at Hopelink Place in Bellevue.

With a safe and stable home and support from Hopelink staff, Spencer and Theresa were able to get back on their feet. They enrolled their children at the neighborhood school, where they've made friends and caught up academically. Spencer found a union job at the *Seattle Times*, making good money. And Theresa's health steadily improved, allowing her to go back to school to get a daycare license.

Spencer and Theresa and their children never planned to be homeless. And luckily they weren't homeless for long. But without help at the right time, they might have been.

Family Crises Can Lead to Homelessness

As Spencer and Theresa's story shows, a family crisis such as a medical emergency or domestic violence, when combined with poverty or low wages, can far too often lead to homelessness. And although their family is now stable, thanks to the help they've received, too many other families are at risk of homelessness if something in their lives goes wrong.

Homeless families on the Eastside face a particular challenge: because of the lack of affordable housing in our communities, and the years-long waiting lists for the housing that does exist, many families have trouble finding anywhere to live. Some remain homeless for years, moving from shelters to transitional housing and then back again as they reach the time limit they're allowed at each place.¹²

Spencer and Theresa know they were lucky to find an apartment at Hopelink Place, as service providers must turn away five families or more for each one they are able to house. Current estimates, in fact, show an immediate need for 930 subsidized apartments for homeless families on the Eastside.¹³

Even after families find housing, they still need support so that a new problem doesn't threaten to make them homeless again. In Spencer and Theresa's case, for example, even with Spencer's salary the family may need help with a security deposit or an ongoing rent subsidy when the time comes for them to move to an un-subsidized apartment. The gap between what they are paying to live at Hopelink Place and what they would have to pay to find another apartment in the neighborhood – near their children's school and Spencer's job – is so great that they may not be able to manage it without help.



Charles was doing well in high school and looked forward to starting college. But he didn't have a supportive family to help him get started toward his goal. Charles' older brother was a drug user, a fact his mother refused to face. And Charles himself, possibly in response, had started drinking heavily.

Seeking a way out, Charles ran away. He had a job, and was optimistic about his chances, but he soon found he couldn't support himself, and by his 18th birthday was living in his car.

Charles managed to graduate from high school, but didn't know what to do after that. Luckily, he met a street outreach worker and learned about Friends of Youth's New Ground program for homeless young adults. Staff at New Ground helped Charles find housing and a higher-paying job, enroll in community college, and begin working toward a degree.

Homeless Youth Need Help Living Independently

Charles has found help, but he still has a difficult time ahead. Young people who become homeless – whether because they run away or are kicked out, become too old for foster care or are escaping abuse – have fewer resources than adults. They're too young to be on their own, and need time and help to learn how to live independently.¹⁴ Because they typically don't have enough education to get a living wage job, they need to be able to go back to high school, earn a GED, or take classes at a community college.

Homeless youth like Charles need special attention. They need transitional help, to learn to live independently and manage money on their own. They need education and job skills. Many need help learning to be a parent. And they often need counseling to recover from past abuse.

When **Laurie** left home to escape domestic violence, she didn't have anywhere to go. She and her children lived in her car for several months, but finally, with no other options, they returned home.

The abuse escalated, but Laurie was afraid to leave. At least her children had a roof over their heads again, she reasoned. One day, though, she saw a flyer for the Eastside Domestic Violence Program's (EDVP) crisis line and decided to call.

EDVP helped Laurie and her children with an emergency hotel voucher, and then found them space in a long-term shelter. While in the shelter, Laurie connected with legal resources, childcare, and social services, and got help finding a permanent home for her family.

Domestic Violence Often Leads to Homelessness

Like Laurie, many women fleeing violence don't just have to leave home. They also have to sever ties with friends and family, stop using credit cards, and quit their jobs, avoiding anything that could help an abuser find them.

In Laurie's case, it meant that she and her children went from living in a comfortable home to being homeless overnight; and it means that domestic violence victims are often isolated, without a home, job, money, or support network. Domestic violence is the primary cause of homelessness for nearly one quarter (24%) of homeless families on the Eastside.¹⁵



Laurie and her children will need help to remain safe and independent. She, and other victims of domestic violence, will need confidentiality, in the housing she finds and the services she uses; legal help, possibly to secure a divorce and custody of her children; job help, including training for a living wage job; childcare; and counseling, for herself and her children, to help them recover after living with violence at home.



Judy had looked forward to retirement. But a chronic health problem combined with her small fixed income had exhausted her savings. She was sharing an apartment with a friend to save money but when the friend moved, Judy found herself, at 75, with nowhere to go.

Judy lived in her car for three weeks before turning to the YWCA Eastside Women’s Center. Staff there helped with Judy’s immediate needs – a hot meal and a shower – and gave her a motel voucher. YWCA staff also found Judy an apartment and helped her find affordable health care.

Single Adults Face Unique Challenges

According to the Committee to End Homelessness in King County, about 60% of the 8,000 people who are homeless each year are single adults.¹⁶

Some single adults simply face economic problems: with rents increasing, it’s more and more difficult to find an apartment with only one wage earner. But many face more complex challenges: those with a criminal history or past evictions, for example, are generally screened out by landlords. And those with mental illness (about 20% of homeless single adults) or alcohol or chemical dependency may not be able to work, pay rent, or behave appropriately, and have trouble finding and keeping housing.

Single women like Judy, who make up as many as 30% of all homeless adults are even more vulnerable. There are few resources for single women, and both shelters and the streets are more dangerous for women than for men. And, like Judy, many have health issues or other problems that must be addressed.

The Committee to End Homelessness estimates that East King County needs 815 housing units with supportive services for homeless single adults.¹⁷

Hank, a disabled veteran, couldn't manage the rent at his Kirkland apartment and faced eviction. But he couldn't bear to leave: he loved his home and was able to walk to the store every day. Kirkland Interfaith Transitions in Housing (KITH) helped by supplementing his rent payments so he could afford to stay. KITH owns a number of apartments for people who have become homeless. But the organization also helps people at risk of becoming homeless by subsidizing their rent payments and helping with emergencies.

Donna, though younger than Hank, was also unstable. She too had trouble paying her rent, and worried about what would happen to her. Solid Ground helped her with case management, a budgeting class, and financial assistance for a deposit on a new apartment. Part of the money Donna received was a loan from the Housing Stability Project, which she has been able to repay so that it can be used to help others.

Homelessness Can be Prevented

As Hank and Donna learned, housing troubles don't have to lead to homelessness. In many cases, targeted but ongoing help – a rent subsidy, or help with a high winter heating bill – can be enough to prevent someone from losing their home.

Helping people before they become homeless is significantly more cost-effective than providing shelters, transitional housing, and the support and supplies people need to become stable after they've lost their home. Unfortunately, people who are in crisis and facing eviction or foreclosure often don't know where to turn for help. In many cases, in fact, they don't find help until after they have become homeless. In addition, quickly increasing housing prices mean that many people are at risk... often more than can be helped with the resources that are available.

The Committee to End Homelessness in King County has identified 46,000 extremely low income families countywide who are at risk of homelessness because of a combination of low wages and high housing costs.¹⁸



What Can We Do?

Many of the stories shared in this booklet have happy endings. But not all of them do.

And that's one of the problems with homelessness: not knowing what tomorrow will bring. When people are homeless they can't plan; they can't prepare; and they can't rely on any of the routines and expectations that support most of us from day to day. All they can do is hope: that something will change, that someone will help.

A little help can mean a happy ending. But not being noticed means not getting helped.

Many of us have started to notice the face of homelessness here on the Eastside. We've seen it in the residents of Tent City, as they move from neighborhood to neighborhood. We've seen it in our local schools, where poverty is becoming more obvious: in 17 schools in Bellevue and Lake Washington, for instance, more than 25% of students are poor enough to qualify for the free and reduced lunch program.¹⁹ And we've seen it in the people many of us know, who, while struggling with illness, a bad marriage, or an unlucky break at work, temporarily lose their way.

Noticing homelessness is the first part of the challenge. But now we need to act. We can learn more about the face of homelessness. We can support the organizations that are working to end homelessness here on the Eastside. And we can act as individuals, offering our time and skills to those who are homeless.

Learn More

Committee to End Homelessness in King County (CEH): www.cehkc.org

Seattle/King County Coalition for the Homeless (SKCCH):
www.homelessinfo.org

United Way of King County: www.uwkc.org

Eastside Human Services Forum (EHSF): www.eastsideforum.org

Support Local Organizations

A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH): Through ARCH all 15 Eastside cities financially support the work of local organizations providing housing for low and moderate income individuals and families. For more information: 425-861-3676 or www.archhousing.org

Catholic Community Services: Helps with shelter, eviction prevention emergency financial and move-in assistance. For more information: 425-384-2211 or www.ccsww.org/familyservices/kingcounty/east_king_county/index.php.

Congregations for the Homeless (Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns Council): This cooperative of Eastside congregations provides food and shelter for single adult homeless men. For more information: 206-295-7803.

Cultural Navigator Program: Helps immigrants and refugees access needed services. The program focuses on the Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, Chinese and East Indian communities. For more information: 206-624-5633 x4131 or www.zeesource.net/maps/map.do?group=32495.

Eastside Domestic Violence Program: The largest provider of services for domestic violence victims in Washington. 24-Hour Crisis Line: 425-746-1940. Business Phone: 425-562-8840 or www.edvp.org.

Friends of Youth: Provides a variety of services, including shelter, housing, utility assistance, food, case management, and transportation. For more information: 425-869-6490 or www.friendsofyouth.org.

Hopelink: Provides a variety of services, including shelter, housing, utility assistance, food, case management, and transportation. For more information: 425-869-6000 or www.hope-link.org.

Kirkland Interfaith Transitions in Housing (KITH): Provides case management, transitional housing, and rent assistance for homeless individuals and families. For more information: 425-576-9531 or www.kithgive.org.

Salvation Army: Provides food, transportation, motel vouchers, and emergency financial assistance vouchers to prevent eviction or utility shut-off. For more information: 425-452-7300 or www.salvationarmy.nwusa.org.

Solid Ground Housing Stability Program: Provides move-in assistance, as well as loans and grants to prevent eviction or foreclosure. For more information: 206-461-3200 or www.fremontpublic.org.

YWCA East King County: The YWCA provides a day-time drop-in center for single homeless women, as well as transitional and permanent housing for families. For more information: 425-556-1350 or www.ywcaworks.org.

Get Involved

- Acknowledge that homelessness is becoming more prevalent on the Eastside. Help agencies serve this growing need.
- Advocate for the needs of the homeless in East King County in regional planning and funding efforts; support state and local elected officials in their efforts to end homelessness in King County by 2015.
- Donate money or needed supplies, including: diapers and other baby items to the Eastside Baby Corner (425-865-0234), sweatshirts and socks to Congregations for the Homeless (206-295-7803), or women's workplace clothing to the YWCA (206-325-3453).
- Volunteer at Tent City IV or at a local homeless shelter or program.

Notes

1. Seattle King County Coalition for the Homeless. The 2006 Annual One Night Count: People Who are Homeless in King County, Washington. January 27, 2006. And 2007 One Night Street Count Results. January 26, 2007.
 2. King County. King County Benchmarks, Affordable Housing 2006. December 2006, p. 5.
 3. Clegg & Associates, May 2007 draft of East King County Homeless Strategies Report for Eastside Homelessness Advisory Council, p. 5.
 4. Seattle King County Coalition for the Homeless. Data from January 26, 2007 One Night Count results. Provided by Kate Speltz, Homeless Housing Programs, King County Housing and Community Development.
 5. King County Consortium Consolidated Housing & Community Development Plan for 2005-2009, Appendix A Needs Assessment, pp. 90-97.
 6. Causes of homelessness identified by case managers at Sound Families intake, cited by Clegg & Associates, May 2007.
 7. Clegg & Associates, May 2007 draft of East King County Homeless Strategies Report for Eastside Homelessness Advisory Council.
 8. Northwest Federation of Community Organizations. Searching for Work that Pays: 2007 Northwest Job Gap Study. P. 12.
 9. Northwest Multiple Listing Service, April 2007. Breakouts—King County Sectors. Res + Condo totals.
 10. Based on a May 2007 7% interest rate, 3% down payment, HUD 2007 Seattle-Bellevue median income of \$70,100.
 11. United Way of King County. 2006 United Way of King County survey on attitudes and perceptions of homelessness in King County - KEY FINDINGS. March 2006.
 12. Committee to End Homelessness in King County. A Roof Over Every Bed in King County: Our Community's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness. March 2005. p. 34.
 13. Clegg & Associates, May 2007, p. 11.
 14. Committee to End Homelessness in King County. p. 42.
 15. Causes of homelessness identified by case managers at Sound Families intake, cited by Clegg & Associates, May 2007.
 16. Committee to End Homelessness in King County. p. 1.
 17. Clegg & Associates, May 2007, p. 5.
 18. Clegg & Associates, May 2007, p. 4.
 19. Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, School Population Data from October 2005 student count, found in 2005-06 school report card for individual schools.
- Photo on page 4 by Scott Aitken

Eastside Human Services Forum Members

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Catholic Community Services
City of Bellevue
City of Issaquah
City of Kirkland
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The mission of the Eastside Human Services Forum is to foster strong public and private partnerships to assure a stable network of health and human services for the benefit of all East King County residents.

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