



# SAFESTREETS

April 6, 2016

## Taking “Housing First” to scale: City’s Safe Streets team reports from national conference

EVERETT - *Less than two miles away from the nation’s biggest concentration of homeless people living and sleeping in scattered camps on downtown Los Angeles public sidewalks, human service and housing leaders and practitioners [gathered in March](#) to understand and collaborate on how to implement Housing First as a tool to address homelessness. Snohomish County sponsored attendance at the third Housing First Partners Conference for a number of community members, including City Planner Rebecca McCrary, who is part of the Safe Streets housing team. Rebecca provided this recap of the conference:*

Housing First was introduced to City leaders and the community last year at a forum where Lloyd Pendleton discussed Utah’s journey and success housing and caring for their homeless population. Lloyd encouraged the community to continue to engage elected officials and agency leaders to adopt housing first as a policy, enabling them to make bold affordable housing and human services decisions.

At last month’s Housing First Partners Conference, attendees came from around the world to learn about opportunities and challenges associated with Housing First, including political will, community understanding and acceptance, early and long-term financing, and the service work force need. Of the many themes presented throughout the L.A. conference, none was more important than supporting the need to get homeless people a place to live without creating barriers and unrealistic restrictions. It is about stability, respect and hope as much for the individual as it is for the community.

Everett [embarked on a scattered-site program](#) in January. The YWCA of Seattle King and Snohomish County manages the current program through rental assistance and case management funding. The City is also preparing to build a [permanent supportive housing facility](#) in Everett.

### Successes and struggles

Practitioners and community members shared real-life examples of the daily inter-workings of supportive housing facilities and the hopes and struggles of folks putting their lives back

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#### Learn more:

For more information on the Community Streets Initiative, visit [www.everettwa.gov/streetsinitiative](http://www.everettwa.gov/streetsinitiative).

For more information on the Safe Streets Plan, visit [www.everettwa.gov/safestreets](http://www.everettwa.gov/safestreets).

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together. What was evident during the L.A. conference is that Housing First works and is being implemented successfully in many different ways throughout the country.

Presenters explained that although both scattered-site models and single-site facilities are effective, each presents its own challenges. Support and cooperation among a number of entities in the community is necessary to ensure success, including engagement by service agencies, civic leaders, housing providers, faith-based organizations, landlords, funders and local government. Housing First is the guiding principle, but the size and scale of specific facilities and programs are community driven.

## **Housing**

A number of the conference discussions included takeaways that will be important as Everett continues its work to house the chronically homeless:

- It's important to help tenants connect to their community/neighborhoods in both scattered sites and single site models. Typically case managers will lead their clients in this effort. It takes a somewhat stronger effort to accomplish this in the scattered-site models since the individuals are separated in distance, but nonetheless very important for integration of the tenant into a different life.
- Communities were encouraged to look outside the box for innovative housing placement and to keep models/programs flexible so they can evolve with the needs of the community and tenants.
- Many areas are having landlords step forward especially when they see examples of positive performance in other communities.
- Developing sustainable financing for early and long-term housing and services continues to be challenging.

## **Services**

Providing services coupled with housing is at the base of every successful Housing First program. Service providers discussed using the harm-reduction approach to substance users rather than a complete abstinence requirement, even if abstinence programs are available to tenants. Inspiring stories were shared about service providers not giving up too soon on tenants and attendees were encouraged to keep trying to find innovative solutions for each individual.

An underlying theme throughout the conference was the importance of remaining faithful to the Housing First/low-barrier philosophy, and ensuring that all community partners are on board. Some presenters shared experiences of well-intentioned service providers developing responses to problems, which eventually became restrictions that presented barriers to housing, in conflict with the Housing First approach.

The conference confirmed that Everett is right where it needs to be in developing more effective housing strategies, and yet we still have a journey ahead to care for our community's homeless individuals. We'll need even more of our community to become involved as we move forward.

Learn more about the [Community Streets Initiative](#) or the [Everett Safe Streets Plan](#).

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