

STUDY OF HOMELESSNESS OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES IN SNOHOMISH COUNTY

by

**The Children's Services Committee of the League of Women Voters
of Snohomish County**

2018

Executive Summary

The Children's Services Committee of the League of Women Voters of Snohomish County researched the situation of homeless families and unaccompanied youth in the county by posing several central questions:

1. What are the conditions that lead to homelessness of children, youth, and families?
2. What are the needs of Snohomish County homeless children, youth, and families?
3. What interventions are needed to address these needs?
4. What is currently being done to supply the needed interventions?
5. What are the effects of homelessness on children and youth?
6. What are the community, social, political, and environmental impacts of homelessness of children, youth, and families on Snohomish County?

The Committee found that homelessness, including of families, children and youth, is a widespread problem in the County. Families can become homeless due to a variety of crises: a rise in rent, the loss of a job, a medical expense or car breakdown that cannot be covered in a limited budget, or an abusive family situation. Many people experiencing homelessness are working, sometimes holding more than one job. Youth may end up unaccompanied on the streets due to an abusive or otherwise untenable situation in the home. Once a family loses its home, regaining that security is very difficult.

Although a lack of reliable, complete, and nuanced statistics prevents us from determining the exact numbers of homeless families, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction figures showed nearly 4,000 school children experienced homelessness during the 2017 school year. Their families are far from the stereotype of the homeless person as a panhandler with mental health and/or addiction problems. The fact of being without a home is traumatic, though, and can be the cause rather than the result of addiction issues.

Families without a home still need food, clothing, sanitary facilities including toilets, showers and laundry equipment, a place to prepare and eat meals, a secure place to store belongings, transportation, health care, and a safe place to sleep. Children need a place to prepare school work. Many public and private agencies in the County provide for these needs, including food banks, shelters, two small car camps, showers available at the YMCA, meals provided at

churches and the like; a sampling of them are listed in the study. However, none of the available services is sufficiently funded to help all the people in need. Cocoon House for youth, with its drop-in shelter U-Turn, and Housing Hope for families provide a range of counseling and educational services to help people transition into permanent housing, but again, they are unable to help all those who need their services.

Experiencing homelessness is generally traumatic for anyone, but children are especially affected. Studies have shown that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) affect not only the long-term health of youngsters, but even their physical brain development. Interruptions in schooling have a negative impact on education, especially but not only if students have learning difficulties. Experiencing homelessness can involve poor nutrition, which further impacts health, as does a lack of dental and medical care.

The entire community is negatively affected by the presence of unhoused people. Lack of access to sanitary facilities means untreated waste enters the water system, parks are compromised by tent camps leading at least to the perception that they are less safe, vegetation that is desirable is sometimes cut back to discourage people from camping out. Less healthy people are a burden on health care systems.

Homelessness is a crisis that should be treated as such. The ultimate solutions are the same as the solutions for poverty itself: better jobs at higher wages, lower costs for housing, and affordable medical, dental, and mental health care, including addiction treatment. Those who cannot work (or cannot find work) should be provided enough aid to live in a reasonable manner. Society as a whole would benefit from having everyone properly housed. More affordable housing could be promoted by policies such as requiring developers to include lower-cost units in development plans and giving tax incentives to landlords to limit rent increases to the cost of living index.

Short-term solutions are already in place but require far more generous funding at all governmental levels. Organizations that provide a range of services, including counseling and job training, are especially important.

The study refers to solutions like the Housing First approach of the state of Utah and the country of Finland. It is also suggested that rapid rehousing is desirable to minimize trauma to children. Instead of starting with the individuals who have waited longest for help, it might be more productive to start with those most recently made homeless to minimize trauma.

Note: Underlying information and statistics are from 2017 and 2018. For more recent information, consult HART Report and Five-Year Action Plan, published by Snohomish County, January 2020 <https://snohomishcountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/71290/HART-Report-and-5-Year-Action-Plan?bidId=>

Introduction

When we think of homeless people in the United States, we picture an ill-dressed man begging by the intersection near the freeway or a ragged woman panhandling at a bus stop. Whether or not we donate a few coins, we assume that the homeless are unemployed, possibly alcoholics, addicted to drugs, or mentally ill, and we may secretly wish they would beg somewhere else. However, many of today's homeless people have jobs, sometimes working more than full-time, and some are raising children as best they can without being able to afford a decent home for them. Others are young people brave enough to have left dysfunctional or dangerous home situations to survive on the streets. Others lost their homes in the mortgage crisis of the recent recession. And, indeed, among them are the mentally ill, the victims of the opioid epidemic, and a continuing population afflicted by alcoholism. And many of them hide their homelessness as much as they can.

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The Children's Services Committee of The League of Women Voters of Snohomish County, Washington began its Study of Child and Family Homelessness in the county in June, 2017. To start with, we asked ourselves six basic questions:

1. What are the conditions that lead to homelessness of children, youth, and families?
2. What are the needs of Snohomish County homeless children, youth, and families?
3. What interventions are needed to address these needs?
4. What is currently being done to supply the needed interventions?
5. What are the effects of homelessness on children and youth?
6. What are the community, social, political, and environmental impacts of homelessness of children, youth, and families on Snohomish County?

We looked especially, under Question 5, at the barriers to learning caused by homelessness. We gave ourselves a year to do the research. As is always the case with the view from the beginning of any large study, we had little idea of what the problems would be. Each question generated other questions.

The first (and continuing) problem we ran into was simply finding out how many homeless children and families there are in Snohomish County. The schools' count, collated by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), of course does not include any preschool children or indeed any minors who are off the grid or have dropped out. Another type of count is the Point in Time (PIT) count, conducted by employees and volunteers for the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) throughout the country each year on a specified night in January. It surveys people found out of doors, in abandoned buildings, and in vehicles, and who complete the paperwork involved. It includes anyone sheltered that night (included in a separate count for those in official shelters) but not anyone couch-surfing or on a

relative's/friend's floor on a possibly stormy and cold January night, nor does it count those who do not want to be found. The count is also affected by the number of volunteers available to find the homeless people. The Committee immediately saw that while it is desirable to have such a survey, it is grossly inadequate for getting at the reliable number of homeless children and families. The count for Snohomish County for 2017 was 1066 homeless of whom 515 were unsheltered, 462 were in emergency shelters, and 89 in "transitional housing." The overall age range was 7 months to 76 years.

Mostly we found that the trend is getting worse. Between 2013 and 2017 there was a 50% increase in the numbers who were unsheltered. In January 2018, the numbers were lower, due, perhaps, to particularly inclement weather that night (so fewer were outdoors if they could possibly find a place), as well as there having been some changes in rules for the count.

Clearly Snohomish County has a large number of homeless children. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) for the State of Washington has numbers for school age children. Each school district tracks children in each grade who are eligible for assistance as homeless under the rules of the McKinney Vento Act. (See Appendix A.) Their numbers are not comparable to the PIT Count because they are interested only in school age children who are actually in school. The OSPI recorded just under 4000 children as homeless in the fifteen school districts in the county in 2017. (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, <http://www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/Data.aspx>) The numbers range from 1149 in the Everett School District to 149 in Monroe and 9 in Darrington.

1. Some Causes of Homelessness

On the community level, the factors that contribute to homelessness include, but are not limited to, a lack of affordable housing; unemployment; a lack of adequate or affordable health care; a lack of support for immigrants and refugees; racism and forms of discrimination which impede access to employment, housing, justice, or other services; and a bail and incarceration system that is clearly discriminatory. There are many additional factors stacked against the poor in the USA.

For any individual (and we are all individuals), a personal crisis such as job loss; a traumatic natural event like a landslide, an earthquake, or a very bad wind storm; a loss of physical health leading to disability or the need for long term care; addiction to alcohol or drugs (this includes brain injury or fetal alcohol syndrome); family violence; and abuse of any kind can all lead to homelessness. Many poor people are without any support network, just one bill away from homelessness. Poverty in general is a cause of individual homelessness, when there just isn't enough money to pay those bills despite working full time or more.

It is often the interaction of many of these factors, not just one of them, that contributes to homelessness. Very often people can get by if just one family member is an addict or has lost a job. But when a license needs to be renewed and the fee can't be paid because it is just one bill too many and there is no money to pay it, or yet another family member is deported or dies, the situation spirals. Soon there are fines on top of fees, or more hospital and care bills, and then children or youth end up on the street.

A brief survey of the causes of homelessness includes:

A. Poverty

Poverty is the obvious underlying cause of homelessness at any age. Housing costs include rent or mortgage payments plus energy costs – electricity, heating, and possibly air conditioning, as well as water, sewer, trash collection, and access to DSL/internet. In addition, any household that lives from month to month, expending a high percentage of family income for housing and its accompanying costs, is at risk of homelessness if a crisis occurs, as the family has no possibility of accumulating savings. Such crises include full or partial job loss, loss of transportation to work, an accident or illness that prevents a household member from working, or medical bills resulting from accident or illness of any family member. A house may be lost to fire or a mudslide in a local catastrophe. If you are living very close to the poverty line and any of a hundred unexpected disasters happen, you and your family can be on the street.

B. The housing situation in Snohomish County

Rent increase is a major reason for homelessness. If a family is already cost-burdened, meaning if their rent plus their power and heating bill is already more than 30% of their income, then an increase in rent cannot be absorbed, and the family must seek a less expensive home. A rent increase of \$100 in an area equals a homelessness increase of six to thirty-two per cent. (Homeless Prevention & Response System Strategic Plan, Causes of Homelessness in Snohomish County, Snohomish County Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), 2016, p. 2; State of Washington Department of Commerce, “Why is Homelessness Increasing?” 2017, <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/office>, <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/hau-why-homelessness-increase-2017.pdf> p.2)

In Snohomish County, housing costs have been rising steadily for a number of years without a corresponding increase in minimum or average wages. According to the Snohomish County Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), between 2010 and 2015 “the average rent for a two-bedroom unit in Snohomish County increased by 27.2%”, but the median household income went up only 6.7%, and the hourly wage saw an increase of 4.9%. In Snohomish County, it was estimated that a full-time \$25.90 hourly wage would be needed to afford a 2-bedroom unit in 2017, according to the Snohomish County HMIS. (Strategic Plan, p. 2) This phenomenon of rising rents has been accompanied by low vacancy rates, making it difficult for authorities to implement solutions such as rapid re-housing of homeless families. (Strategic Plan, p. 3)

C. Lack of housing

The Washington State Department of Commerce cites low vacancy rates as a major determinant of the numbers of homeless. Vacancy rates below 5% are generally considered too low, resulting in housing inflation. There is a 3.3% vacancy rate in the state. (“Why is Homelessness Increasing?”) Snohomish County reported a 3.7% vacancy rate on the average 2-bedroom housing unit as of 2016 measures. (Strategic Plan, pg. 3) Already at that point, 52,931 units were needed in the county for households with extremely or very low income.

D. Other causes of homelessness

Individual problems besides those associated with poverty mentioned above can lead to a family becoming homeless. Domestic violence and family conflict are the immediate cause of homelessness in 22-57% of Snohomish County homeless women, according to the US Department of Health and Human Services 2016 domestic violence report: “According to multiple studies examining the causes of homelessness, among mothers and children experiencing homelessness, more than 80% had previously experienced domestic violence,” (the Aratani study done for the National Center for Children in Poverty: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/resource/dv-homelessness-stats-2016> Source cited: Aratani, Y. “Homeless Children and Youth, Causes and Consequences,” 2009, http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_888.pdf). Also, or perhaps as the cause of some domestic violence, substance abuse is involved when a family or an individual becomes homeless, but it may not always be clear whether the substance abuse has led to homelessness or whether it is a result of self-medication for the stress involved in surviving without stable housing.

E. The particular situations of unaccompanied youth

The same low wages and high rents affect young homeless people, but there are additional reasons for the homelessness of unaccompanied minors. Children obviously do not choose to live on the streets unless they are forced out of their homes or perceive their families’ circumstances to be worse than the hardships of a homeless life. Underage children may leave their families due to behavioral/mental illness or addiction problems on the part of the child, the parent(s), or other child(ren) in the family. Abuses, physical, sexual, and emotional, are also the frequent causes of youth having to leave their homes. And with few other options, they then become homeless. Some children are abandoned by their families. A significant number of homeless children are transgender or LGBTQ youngsters. Youth leaving treatment facilities or aging out of foster care at age 18 also swell the homeless population.

Social conditions contributing to the demographic characterization of Snohomish County homeless youth, cited in the Landscape Assessment of Homelessness in Snohomish County are based on the current Point-in-time Counts. (Strategic Plan, p. 4ff.) The age of unaccompanied homeless youth varies depending on which study is consulted.

Social conditions of homeless youth age 14-21:

- Seeking safety from abuse and extreme conflict cited by 90% of youth seeking shelter
- Family conflict of all kinds cited by 90% of youth seeking shelter
- LGBTQ issues cited by 40% of youth seeking shelter
- Previous foster care aging out cited by 51% of youth seeking shelter
- Exiting juvenile detention: 26% will experience homelessness within the next 12 months

- Exiting chemical dependency treatment: 48% will be homeless within the next 12 months (There is only one recent grant for treatment in Snohomish County.)
- Aging out of foster care: 28% will experience homelessness within the next 12 months

A 2017 Department of Commerce paper on why youth homelessness is increasing in Washington State says that those youth in a family experiencing financial instability may “age out” of the family shelter in their teenage years, or choose to detach from a family to lessen the family financial burden (<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/resource/dv-homelessness-stats-2016> Source cited: Aratani, Y. Homeless Children and Youth, Causes and Consequences, 2009, http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_888.pdf)

2. The Needs of Homeless Families and Youth

We found three interlocking types of needs of the children and families whom we studied: physical, academic, and emotional.

A. Physical needs: Everyone needs a safe place to sleep, food and a place to prepare it, access to a toilet, sink and shower. Children need appropriate clothing and shoes. Babies need diapers and wipes. In winter people need some covering like a blanket. In order to keep their clothing clean they need laundry facilities. For the environment as well as themselves they need a place to dispose of trash. And of course they need medical and dental care, transportation to and from school or to and from a job, and in order to get or keep a job they may need child care, probably cell phones, and a secure place to store belongings. Also, the jobs they need must be livable wage jobs.

B. Academic needs: For children, a stable school situation is essential, and they also need a place to study, possibly tutoring, counseling, and/or ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. Parents may need job training, ESL training, and/or parenting education. Other academic support services, such as special education (See Section 5 below), may be needed as well. They frequently need references to mental health professionals.

C. Emotional needs: Children in particular need stability and security. They need safety from bullying in the school situation. They and their families need to be treated with understanding, respect, and kindness. (See Section 5 below.)

The needs of unaccompanied minors without a stable home include all of the above, with some additional help when they are novices in activities like laundering their clothing or selecting and preparing food. They also need, even more than homeless children living with their families, reassurance that there are people who care about them, that they have inherent worth. They may show signs of suffering from fetal alcohol syndrome more often than children with secure homes. They are particularly at risk of succumbing to the lure of drugs and/or of prostitution for survival.

3. The Interventions That Are Required to Meet those Needs.

Many of the needs of the Snohomish County homeless population could be met at least partially by adequate permanent housing. Adequate housing would not only provide shelter, it would provide secure storage of one's belongings, a place to store, prepare and eat food, sanitary facilities, and, likely, a place to launder clothes. However, providing enough low-cost or subsidized housing for all low-income people would be very expensive. It could be done through some combination of building, renovation, and a form of rent control. Housing vouchers are frequently used, and they help, but a sufficient number of units is still required, as well as a way to be sure landlords are willing to accept vouchers. Encouraging and incentivizing shared housing is a possible interim step, also forms of tiny houses or modular, stacked, movable units. But unaccompanied minors, not just families, need safe, consistent shelter. According to the Child Trends report of the OSPI, the number of children in shelters had more than tripled just between 2005 and 2013. Five years later the problem is much greater, and shelters are more than stretched to capacity.

Having a permanent home gives children more stability and reduces the stress that results from a homeless existence. Having a permanent home can reduce long-term physical and mental health problems. Although capital expenditures to provide enough housing for all homeless people would be significant, the medium- and long-term costs of continuing the current situation of large numbers of children and youth who are homeless is far higher. (See Section 6, below.)

Unless or until permanent housing can be provided, temporary shelters are required; ideally families could stay 24/7 at a shelter from the point of losing their home until a stable, new home could be provided, but, failing that, places for children to study and for people simply to be safe are necessary. Safe, well-maintained public toilets, freely available, shower facilities, places to do laundry affordably, and places to dispose of trash would not only help the homeless, but also provide a safer and more pleasant atmosphere for the public in general. Medical and dental care, donated food, clothing, shoes, diapers, wipes, and blankets and pillows can keep people alive while they camp temporarily in tents or cars or simply live on the streets. Prepared meals and/or restaurant vouchers would mean homeless people would not be restricted to breakfast cereal and cold canned food.

Beyond housing, from everything our Committee learned, it is clear to us that providing adequate housing would be only one important step in solving much of the homelessness situation. Housing alone cannot be a complete answer, necessary as it would be, to the problem of homelessness. Even when housed properly, low-income families who were recently in danger of homelessness or were actually homeless continue to need other support services such as low-cost transportation, food and clothing support, child care, tutoring, and parenting education. They may also need treatment for physical and medical health, including addiction treatment. Without these interventions as well as housing, the cycle of homelessness can be endlessly repeated, at the repeated high costs to society outlined above. (See Conclusions below.)

4. Institutions in Snohomish County Currently Working to Meet the Needs of Homeless Families and Youth

However well-intentioned and well-organized, none of the current efforts to aid homeless children and youth in Snohomish County is adequate to provide enough help. No one effort can solve all the problems of the homeless, or of society in dealing with the consequences of a growing dispossessed segment of our population. This section of our report gives a general idea of the kinds of bodies operating, without any claim to being exhaustive. New, although limited, programs are being opened from time to time.

The first line of defense for the homeless is Coordinated Entry through the Snohomish County Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), which they can access by calling 211, a regional call center operated by the United Way of Snohomish County to connect individuals to health and human services available in the county. If a family or youth loses their home, or is about to do so, they can telephone **211** for referrals to organizations that are providing housing, food, and other help, and that have been properly certified. (This of course presupposes they have access to a phone.) If the family is not yet homeless but in a situation that threatens homelessness, the solution may be mediation with a landlord; if that is not feasible, then the family may be referred to a shelter. Unfortunately, most of these forms of help have long waiting lists, three to four months, if one can even reach them on the phone. Every effort is made to be fair in the distribution of the scarce resources, but the resources are in fact extremely scarce. Priority is given to situations of physical abuse, but even then there is a lack of accommodation that leads to waiting lists.

A. Shelters:

Within Snohomish County the Interfaith Association of Northwest Washington operates a Family Shelter. There is no faith requirement for the shelter, which is supported by a number of local faith organizations and individuals. From the success stories it is clear that the families that can be accommodated receive valuable support, physical and emotional. It is equally clear that even those who are helped have waited months or even years for that help. According to their website, since 2011 they have helped 262 families, 383 adults, and 570 children. These numbers clearly fall far short of the population in the county that needs such services.

Housing Hope (see below for further information) also operates two shelters, with a 90-day limit on stays, and provides services aimed at helping homeless families obtain suitable, affordable housing.

B. Emergency shelters:

Nine cold-weather shelters operating at various locations within the county are listed on the Internet, with a reference to the 211 number for further information. These shelters, which provide a warm place to sleep, and typically dinner and breakfast, open when the temperature drops to 32 degrees F for four hours or more. The website gives phone numbers so homeless people can find out whether they are open, and addresses, but no information on possible transportation to reach them. It is also unclear whether together they provide enough beds to shelter all the homeless people in the County. We suspect they do not. Some youth interviewed at Cocoon House indicated that they did not feel that such shelters were safe places for them.

They did not specify reasons.

C. Car camping

There are two designated car-camping areas as of the end of 2019. The first to open in the county is run by the Edmonds Unitarian Universalist Congregation (EUUC). There are ten spaces available, and families using it are carefully vetted before being allowed in. A partnership with the local YWCA gives these car campers access to other facilities, including showers. In a study of the car camp by EUUC, they found that the car camp's peak season each year appears to be from July to early December. Car-camping in the coldest months, this would indicate, is difficult if not impossible. It isn't clear why the number of car-campers creeps up only slowly in the spring, but possibly because that is often the rainiest time of the year. Getting from a car to the one portable toilet on site in the rain and dark can be challenging. The Unitarian Universalist Congregation that runs the car camp is careful to refer to the clients there as "houseless," not "homeless." (Kleinman, Vicky, and Nicholas Maxwell, Report to the Edmonds Unitarian Universalist Congregation Board, 2018, Unpublished.)

The second camp, with five spaces for families living in cars or campers, with similar vetting and social services, opened in July 2019 at Cascade View Presbyterian Church in Everett, sponsored by the Interfaith Association of Northwest Washington and Everett Faith in Action with grants from the Rotary Club and others to make services possible.

D. Food

Food banks provide food to those in need, homeless or not. However, there are often requirements before using a food bank. Sometimes clients must register or prove that they are not undocumented immigrants. The Lynnwood and Mountlake Terrace food banks, for instance, require adults to produce a picture ID or a bill containing an address. If a client is under 18 they need a birth certificate or some evidence of citizenship. But some people come with no ID of any kind, and they are not turned away. The Lynnwood Food bank is open seven days a week, but Mountlake Terrace is only open Tuesdays. The former has about 120 volunteers assisting with food distribution every week, with special provision for homeless people getting a basic weekly no-cook box containing bread, fruit, and some vegetables. Mountlake Terrace has about sixty volunteers. Clients in its system sign in with a volunteer who makes it a point to find out what other services may be needed.

The Snohomish County Food Bank Coalition brings together 20 member-organizations that collect donations from grocery stores and individuals across the County. Making an effort to provide nutritious food, they state that they serve 425,000 visits yearly. One limitation, although they cover the territory of the county, is that they are open for restricted hours, some of them just two hours a week, during daytime hours, so that working poor people may not be able to leave their jobs, and in general only adults are allowed to pick up the food. (See <http://snohomishfoodbank.org/get-help/additional-resources-3/> for information about food banks in Snohomish County.)

However, if people do not have transportation, in fact if they do not have a car in which to transport enough food for a week or two, they may not be able to access these services. For the homeless, these problems are further complicated by the nature of the food sometimes provided,

since they may not have the cooking or proper storage facilities necessary to prepare many kinds of food. If you live in your car, you do not have a stove or refrigerator or, possibly, even a can opener.

Everett has a Hot Meals Consortium which has 14 participating locations providing free breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day of the week. Some of those meals are available simultaneously at more than one location. Additional information is available at the Everett Help Link website. (<https://www.everetthelplink.org/food>)

E. Sanitation/hygiene

The YMCA provides shower facilities for some homeless families. Some churches also have programs to help homeless people with showers and laundry facilities. Public toilets available in parks and public buildings are sometimes a help, but often they are locked at night. Even grocery stores that are open late at night lock their lavatories earlier, and as mentioned, efforts have been made, for example in the Everett Public Library, to prevent people from washing up in the restrooms. In limited cases schools in Snohomish County provide laundry facilities for children/families, and some laundromats have programs where people can donate the money for homeless families to pay for washing their clothes. Homeless teens can shower and wash their clothes at the U-Turn drop-in center in Everett.

EdCC has removed sanitary products from their restrooms because of vandalism. One can see the holes in the walls from where the screws were used. School districts do provide these items at no cost for homeless students.

[See Appendix B for a list of some assisting agencies.]:

F. Housing Hope

Established in 1987 by the North Snohomish County Council of Churches, Housing Hope is a non-profit organization seeking to help homeless people and low-income individuals at risk of homelessness. Currently, according to its website, it has “479 residential units at 22 locations and 301 homeownership houses”, with plans to open Phase II in 2019. Besides their two shelters, Housing Hope has transitional housing, Service Supported Homeless Housing, for which families pay 30% of their income while having access to a range of kinds of assistance, from child care to legal help to guidance in education and life and job skills. They also help families achieve housing independence by contributing “sweat equity” to the building of homes their families then own. Such homes, based on a federal program called Mutual Self Help Housing, are built in groups of five to ten builder/owners with professional help and guidance; the group forms a small community, in which all the families work together according to their various abilities, and they move into their new homes only when all are completed. They must have a steady source of income so that they are able to make mortgage payments, which begin only when their home is complete and they move in. According to their website, 267 families own homes built through the program.

Housing Hope’s affiliated organization HopeWorks trains people in job skills through paid internships in businesses established for this purpose, currently including a café called CafeWorks; GroundWorks, which “provides commercial landscape construction, maintenance, and installation,” as well as irrigation systems; and ReNewWorks Home & Décor. Their aim is

to lift people out of poverty by ensuring that they have skills that will earn them a living wage and ensure a secure future.

For many families Housing Hope provides a long-term solution to homelessness. However, they do not have enough resources to solve the problems of all the families that need them. If there are, by the schools' count (see final paragraph of the introduction above), nearly four thousand children without homes, even if we assume there are four children per homeless family, that comes to an estimated 1,000 homeless families in 2017. Therefore, the 479 units and 301 homes Housing Hope has provided in all the years since 1987 would not house all the homeless families of even this one year.

G. Cocoon House and U-Turn Services

Cocoon House has been providing comprehensive services for homeless youth and their families for over 25 years. Their vision is to ensure safety for the homeless youth of Snohomish County. The mission is to provide services that will further the youth's development toward young adulthood and break the cycle of homelessness.

Cocoon House provides housing for short and long term situations along with case management and support services to facilitate their eventual independent and sustainable life situations.

Their services include supporting educational goals, employment, housing, and the skills to maintain independence.

Cocoon House's prevention effort focuses on educating and working with youth and families to prevent homelessness and reunite families when possible. The education they provide is not only for the youth and their families, but also to begin to prepare for the young people's future children and families.

Outreach is provided through U-Turn, a house that is the center of services for youth 12 through 24 who are on the street. Every effort is made to provide the referral sources that will eventually move them to permanent housing. Many youths' families and life situations will not make it possible for them to return home. Daily needs are provided-- from the most basic food, clothes, and hygiene supplies, to transportation, temporary shelter and referrals for other life needs. As the numbers increase, consistent nightly shelter continues to be an unmet need. And, without housing, moving forward toward independent and productive young adulthood is challenging and often finds youth in cycles that become harder to escape as they age. (See Appendix B for a list of some Agencies working with the homeless.)

In 2017 Cocoon House served 184 youth in housing and shelters, and 1616 youth in their outreach department, according to an interview with their Director of Programs, Rachel Mathison. The top reasons they gave for youth becoming homeless were much like the general reasons given above: family conflict or crisis, lack of affordable housing, and mental health or substance abuse issues for youth or parent. The most pressing needs for youth were affordable housing, according to Mathison, longer term and low barrier shelters, and some housing options for youth with mental health or addiction problems.

In 2019, Cocoon House has built new facilities which for the first time will include

housing for youth aged 18-24. This group includes many who were formerly placed by DHS with foster families. They age out at 18 to be on their own but often are without resources to supply their own housing.

H. Schools

For our study we contacted a sampling of the school districts within Snohomish County, looking for a variety of situations from urban to more rural districts, to determine the scope of homelessness within the population of their districts and to find out how the schools are helping families cope. Because the schools track students eligible in particular for McKinney Vento Aid (See Appendix A), their statistics for services to that population round out the picture of homelessness among families in the county. The schools are also able to provide a range of the services available to families in need. The Edmonds, Snohomish, Granite Falls, Monroe, and Everett districts responded with detailed information about trends and about the services provided to homeless children.

From 2017 to 2018 there was no change or only a slight increase in the number of homeless families in some districts, but Everett noted a continuous, sharp upward trend (714 in 2014, 1,105 in 2018). Snohomish estimated that more secondary school students were impacted. In the Monroe district 60% of the homeless children are secondary students, while Edmonds noted more affected elementary school students; the Edmonds source suspects that secondary school students are more likely to hide their homeless status. In Everett there are approximately even numbers of homeless children at all grade levels. In Granite Falls more than 10% of students are homeless.

All five school districts help students participate equally in activities by waiving fees or giving scholarships for Activities Fee cards, athletic fees, uniforms for Life Fitness courses, and band trips or other field trips.

Access to space and computers to study after hours varies. Granite Falls and Snohomish students depend upon the public library for computers and internet access, sometimes with help from teachers, while Edmonds students are allowed to stay on school property as long as staff remain. Edmonds provides some laptops to students based on a lottery system. Individual teachers also provide help. Some academic support is provided through Title I, and students have access to general tutoring programs available in the district. Everett is in the process of supplying laptop computers for all students, which they can use at school or check out and take, beginning with high school. Two of the high schools were provided with computers in 2017-18, and the other two will be covered in 2018-19. The following year the middle schools will be supplied with laptops, and students can use an internet hotspot. Elementary school students will have laptops to use only at the school, and computers are provided during lunchtime, homework club, and after-school academic support.

As of September 4, 2019, Lynnwood Elementary handed out Chrome books to all students at every level: K through 6th grade. Grades 3rd and under may not take them home daily. Chrome books were introduced to the middle schools beginning about four years ago. High school students in Edmonds now receive their computer upon entering high school and continue to use the same one unless upgrades are necessary. They are allowed to buy them upon graduation for something like \$20.00. This has really changed the access for students. Students

may also sit outside of local libraries to use the wifi when they are not open. Libraries have been providing critical access to computers for the homeless in Snohomish County.

District programs for weekend and holiday support in all five districts include backpacks with food sent home for the weekend, holiday food drives, and gifts. Granite Falls has “a room full of supplies (hygiene, clothing, diapers and formula, bins for storage, etc.) that are available for homeless students.” Laundry is done for them, and a shower room is provided. Local nonprofits supply snacks for Edmonds students, and Snohomish also connects students with agencies providing clothing and shoes as well as school supplies.

When asked about staff member training in Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) [See Section 5], our sources in Snohomish and Edmonds were unsure, but Granite Falls has made this training a priority and has some staff members trained. Some staff members at some schools in the Everett District have had training, and providing more is a goal for the next two years, with aid from a United Way grant. The Monroe District also has staff members who have had ACEs training.

Granite Falls has three full-time “student support advocates (SSAs)” who connect homeless families with food, clothing, medical insurance, etc. and provide transportation to appointments. Many nonprofit organizations were mentioned as providing various kinds of help. Food banks, a Community Coalition and a Family Resource Center in Granite Falls, the Make a Change Foundation, Washington Kids in Transition, Operation School Bell, Hansen Shoe Fund, Clothes for Kids, Shop with a Cop, Back Packs of Hope, and Invest Ed were highlighted. Everett highlights help from a long list: School Bell, Clothes for Kids, SeaMar, Catholic Community Services, the Everett Housing Authority, Housing Hope, Cocoon House, Domestic Violence Shelter, Interfaith Family Shelter, United Way of Snohomish County, Children’s Administration, YWCA, YMCA, Boys & Girls Clubs of Snohomish County, Volunteers of America, Assistance League of Everett, DSHS, Snohomish County Office of Housing, Homeless and Community Development, and Community Transit. To this list Monroe adds Take the Next Step. (See Appendix B for further information).

I. Other programs

Some churches within the county offer help to homeless people on a limited basis. One example is Trinity Lutheran Church of Lynnwood, which has formed Neighbors in Need (NIN) to minister to those experiencing poverty, including but not restricted to people without stable housing. NIN offers a hot breakfast every Saturday morning, prepared by volunteers from different churches and businesses in the area and typically serving from 90 to 160 people. Clients can also receive used clothing, toiletries, and a bag of groceries to last them through the weekend, as well as companionship and spiritual help according to what they want. The affiliated Neighborhood Youth Alliance provides volunteer tutoring to children in reading and mathematics. They have a “listening table” where volunteers learn ways to be helpful in ending a person’s cycle of homelessness and poverty. They refer people to agencies that help with housing, medical/dental services, counseling, job placement, and even legal services. The statistics are staggering. In the most recent four calendar quarters, 7,232 people actually registered at Neighbors in Need, of whom 2,979 were unsheltered. During that time 10,306 breakfast plates were served.

There are also new services in the planning stage by Catholic Community Services at St. Pius Church. This is called Mercy House and will be a clearing house for services that include emergency food. (See <http://snohomishfoodbank.org/get-help/additional-resources-3/> for information about food banks in Snohomish County.)

Dawson Place Child Advocacy Center, in Everett, is peripherally involved in helping the homeless but it is not focused specifically on homeless families. However, since children of families in crisis, including homeless families and the families of homeless unaccompanied minors, are likely to be subject to adverse experiences, it is relevant to their mission. Dawson Place brings together a range of organizations that help children suffering physical or sexual abuse, all under one roof. Children from the ages of 3 to 17 may be referred by law enforcement, medical or school personnel, or they may enter the system through the 24-hour Victim Advocates hotline. Child Interview Specialists elicit abused children's stories appropriately, and they are then guided to needed counseling services; non-offending parents are also counseled.

These are all laudable efforts that accomplish important goals, but we have not found any evidence that anyone has coordinated information about all that is available, and in any case these efforts are, as Trinity Lutheran Church succinctly states, "band-aids", intended to help people in crisis but not able to solve the problem of homelessness.

5. Effects of Homelessness on Children and Youth

The Children's Services Committee found that, as is often the case when doing research, we needed to rephrase our questions and look for information in new places. This section of our report relies on information of a more global nature. It applies nationally, not only to Snohomish County.

Research shows that the education system bears the brunt of a large part of the cost of homelessness of children: Homeless children have twice the rate of learning disabilities and three times the rate of emotional and behavioral problems, so they are twice as likely to repeat a grade. Half of homeless school-age children experience anxiety, depression, or withdrawal by the time they are eight years old. One third of homeless children have a major mental disorder, and one fourth have already witnessed violence at that age.

Homeless children get sick twice as often as others (often bringing their illnesses to school), so there are medical costs to their condition. They have four times the rate of asthma, five times the rate of diarrhea and stomach problems, and twice as many ear infections as children who are housed. They are hungry twice as often. And one fifth of homeless preschoolers have emotional problems serious enough to require professional care, but less than one third of that number receives treatment.

When Elysa Hovard, formerly Director of Outreach for Cocoon House in Everett, spoke to our Study Committee, she reported that unaccompanied (non-family) homeless youth are younger and younger. Cocoon House is now seeing 10 to 12-year-olds on their own. Shelters will not accept this age group without parental permission, and there are no age-appropriate programs for them. The programs designed for 15 to 19-year-olds, obviously, are inappropriate.

Typically, unaccompanied youth are from 16 to 22. Major homelessness causes for this age group are family conflicts such as abuse and/or violence, rejection involving LGBTQ issues, strict boundaries, or only poverty, meaning the family can no longer afford to care for this age group. Many of them spend time in foster care and then age out. They are sometimes rejected because they are engaged in sexually risky behaviors or have HIV, STDs, and/or an unintended pregnancy. These days, Hovard also explained, a majority of unaccompanied youth in shelters are female, a change from the days when the majority were male. When they cannot get into shelters, minors are mostly in hotels, motels, or are doubling up, in cars, in abandoned buildings, in doorways, or on park benches. These youths are at risk for sexual exploitation and/or drug addiction.

The physical and emotional damage due to the stresses of their situation is further exacerbated for children and youth by malnutrition, inadequate health care, and interrupted schooling leading to permanent damage not only to the individuals themselves, but also to society as a whole.

6. Barriers to Learning for Homeless Children

The barriers to learning for homeless children start very early with the stressors that add up in their earliest life. The environmental stress of poverty and its continuing physical and emotional stress shows up as early as 9 months and only gets worse as children age. Children must all go through crucial developmental stages, interacting with and exploring their environment as their abilities grow.

A. Brain science: The brain is especially sensitive to experiences from birth to age five as a child moves through stages in preparation for learning. It is critical to provide early intervention for infants. Their brain development is quite amazing. From 6 months to one year their brains double in size. This is an optimum time for learning that is largely ignored. If young children are raised in environments of scarcity, neglect, or abuse, their brains are not given necessary resources to thrive. Intense, chronic stress during sensitive developmental periods can permanently alter how the brain later responds to that stress, holds memory, and learns. This can be labeled “Toxic Stress.”

In sum, Toxic Stress in children

- Is caused by chronic, long-lasting, and/or severe stressors (as of poverty and its effects)
- Puts the stress response on high alert for extended periods
- Is caused when a child has very little control over their environment and what happens to them
- Occurs in the absence of a healthy supportive relationship with a care-giver (“Homelessness, Poverty, and the Brain”
<http://firesteelwa.org/2014/09/homelessness-poverty-and-the-brain-mapping-the-effects-of-toxic-stress-on-children/>)

In extreme cases of Toxic Stress, the portions of the brain responsible for fear and impulsivity grow stronger, while the areas of the brain responsible for behavior control, planning, and reasoning are weakened. The research done on the development of the brain may explain why children raised in stressful environments, for instance homeless children, are likely to have emotional-behavioral disorders or develop anxiety and aggression. Thus, homeless children in the school environment may have problems planning and controlling behaviors (e.g. getting homework or projects done). They may remain upset long after neutral environments solve problems for other children.

Executive Function is another victim of Toxic Stress. The prefrontal cortex -- the outermost layer of the front part of the brain -- is especially sensitive to deprivation during childhood. This is the area of the brain crucial to the important cognitive process called Executive Function. It is central to success in both school and later life.

Executive Function enables children to

- Solve problems, especially those involving multiple components
- Complete or stay on top of long-term assignments
- Problem-solve and handle rule adjustment in doing so.

Essentially, Executive Function is what helps children to learn and be able to use appropriate behavior in the school setting. If Toxic Stress has taken its inevitable toll on executive function, it causes disadvantages and a widening gap in academic achievement. (<http://firesteelwa.org/2014/09/homelessness-poverty-and-the-brain-mapping-the-effects-of-toxic-stress-on-children/>)

B. Diagnoses in the school setting

Another barrier to success in school can have a disproportionate effect on homeless children. If a homeless child has a unique or challenging issue that prevents regular classroom learning, they are evaluated and referred to the Special Education System. This evaluation happens because of concern from a teacher, parent, or professional who has seen emotional-behavioral, learning, or another disability negatively impacting academic performance. An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is prepared. It identifies specific things the child needs to succeed in school and goals for academic growth. An IEP, even when prepared, may well be lost in paperwork if the child moves to different school districts or states. A student must qualify under one of thirteen disabilities and the IEP must show the pinpointed disability to have an adverse impact on their educational performance. Homelessness and poverty can masquerade as a disability. (More Barriers to Learning)

In the 2012-13 school year in Washington State nearly 120,000 students were served in Special Education in grades K-12. The primary indicator of living in poverty in the schools is being eligible for Reduced Lunch. Sixty percent of those students in Special Education were on Reduced Lunch.

There has been a large increase in Special Education needs and budgets, but the challenges to provide educational services include

- Child mobility
- Differences in school law from state to state, even from district to district
- Complex effects of homelessness on child behavior
- Slow assessment and diagnosis and service delivery
- The fact that the requirement for services must rule out environmental causes (poverty/homelessness) as the reason a child is struggling
- The lack of an available parent or surrogate to represent a child or youth. (More Barriers to Learning)

Besides all this, research in this area is limited and, unfortunately, outdated.

C. Racism

It is also the case that racism must be factored into the barriers-to-learning equation.

1. Black families -- In 2013, approximately 48% of sheltered homeless families were African American. (The over-all African American population of US families with children was about 14%.)
2. Hispanic families -- Approximately 23% of sheltered families.
3. Many other ethnic groups are over-represented in the homeless population, but Asian-Americans are, proportionately, under-represented.

These families all face the same issues and challenges in obtaining services for their children once they are in school.

Native American children are another group who have faced generations of trauma, including efforts to wipe out their cultures and traditions, as well as standard discrimination. On the Havasupai reservation in a remote area of Arizona, for instance, a court case had to be brought because all 70 students in the schools qualified for free or reduced lunch. A psychiatrist at the University of Arizona who has worked with the native communities there says, “They agree the root of everything they suffer with is this unresolved grief, loss, trauma, anger, decades of disappointment on a large scale.” (Tribe, Laurence, “Ruling Could Reform US Agency....”)] The case in Arizona was won using current science to prove that the impact of “complex trauma” can affect the ability to learn, read, think, concentrate, and communicate. This case, plus another in 2015 in a district with a majority of Black and Latino students alleging complex trauma are important precedents in the push for reform all over the country, including the Pacific Northwest.

D. Resilience

“Resilience is being able to bounce back from stress, challenges, tragedy, trauma, or adversity.” (Young, Karen, Building Resilience in Children, <https://www.heysigmund.com/building-resilience-children/>) It is a quality too often missing in children who are poor and homeless. As explained above, stress response includes messages sent

to the brain to release chemicals (adrenaline and cortisol) to help the body deal with whatever is causing the stress. It is meant to be a short-term response, but when stress is on-going, physiological changes stay switched on. After an extended time they can weaken the body and brain.

The prefrontal cortex shuts down in a stress situation. So executive function shuts down. Resilience is related to the capacity to keep the prefrontal cortex activated.

Rachael Link (<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/symptoms-of-stress>) lists the following 11 Signs and Symptoms of Too Much Stress, some of which are also cited above:

1. Acne – Studies have found higher levels associated with increased acne.
2. Headaches – Increased stress associated with increased headache frequency.
3. Chronic Pain – Associated with higher levels of stress and increased levels of cortisol (even their hair indicates prolonged stress).
4. Frequent Sickness – increased susceptibility to infection.
5. Decreased Energy and Insomnia – Associated with fatigue and sleep disruptions.
6. Changes in Libido – Some studies have found higher levels of stress associated with less sexual desire and satisfaction.
7. Digestive Issues – Associated with issues like constipation and diarrhea.
8. Appetite Changes – Some studies relate higher stress to weight gain, or a relationship between medications or drugs.
9. Depression – Some studies found high levels associated with depression and depressive episodes.
10. Rapid Heartbeat – Several studies show high stress can cause a fast heartbeat or heart rate, or stressful events or tasks may increase heart rate.
11. Sweating – Stress may cause increased sweating for people with a sweating problem, youths may also develop odor.

All of these may be present to a greater or lesser extent in poor and homeless children, and can indicate stress and barriers to learning for them.

The documentary film *Resilience*, directed by James Redford (2016), states, “The Body remembers, the Brain does not.” It confirms the previous information. The film also points out that Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) can mask as toxic stress. A child may react to a situation or event impulsively acting out with anger and/or other strong emotion. This is another reason why it is so difficult to diagnose and place children raised poor and homeless in appropriate special programs. Yet we know that without intervention childhood stress often develops into adult diseases over time. The documentary film also speaks to children, “It’s not what’s wrong with you, it’s what happened to you.”

Resilience can be changed and improved. An exciting find in the last decade says we can change the wiring of the brain through experiences we expose a person to.

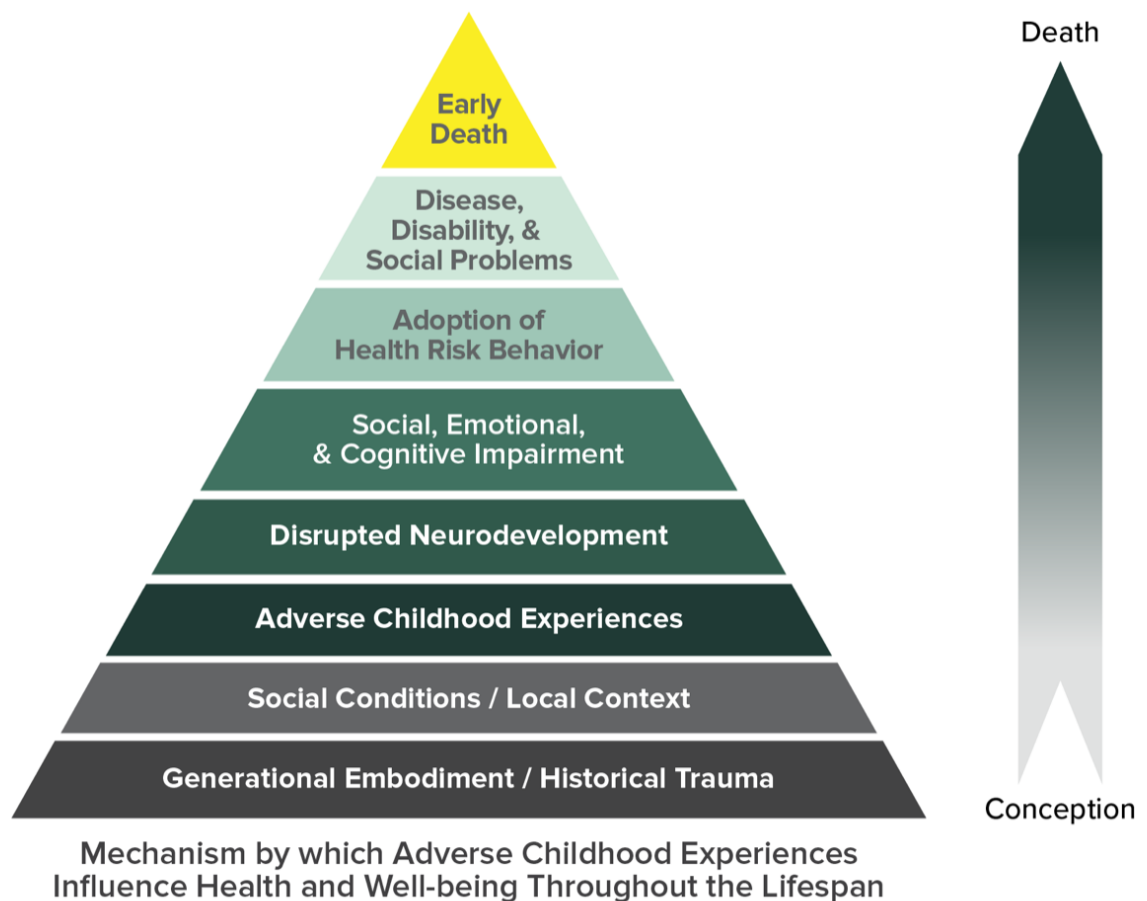
Karen Young in “Building Resilience in Children” provides many practical and powerful strategies:

1. A child needs a caring relationship – an adult in a loving relationship with a child who can help reverse physiological changes as a result of toxic stress. Therefore it is important to expose children to people who care about them.
2. It is possible to build Executive Functions by helping children manage their own behavior and feelings, thereby developing coping skills.
3. Encouraging a mindful practice supports a healthy response to stress, strengthens a calming effect on prefrontal cortex regarding decisions and behaviors.
4. Exercise can help – anything from throwing a Frisbee, kicking a ball, or walking the dog.
5. It is possible to nurture optimism. The brain can actually be revised to be more optimistic through experiences.
6. An important skill for a child to learn is to focus on what they have, rather than what they’ve lost. This is referred to as “reframing.”
7. By acknowledging a child’s strengths and accomplishments, it is possible to encourage making their own decisions.
8. A teacher or parent can model resilience – Imitation is a powerful way to learn, show how you deal with disappointment, and bring them into your emotional world.
9. Facing fear – with support. Move toward it gradually with feelings of support.
10. Encourage taking safe risks – Age-appropriate freedom lets children learn boundaries and think about their decisions and how to cope when things go wrong.
11. Build children’s abilities at problem-solving – Self-talk is important, giving them a language to solve their own problems.
12. There must be time for creativity and play – It is important to provide space and time for curious and inquisitive children to get creative.
13. Above all else, children need to know they are loved unconditionally. This gives a solid foundation to come back to. A big part of resilience is believing in oneself.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente conducted the original study investigating childhood abuse and neglect and later-life health and well-being between 1995 and 1997. Data was collected from 17,000 Health Maintenance Organizational members from California who received physicals and then completed confidential surveys

regarding childhood experiences and their current health status and behaviors. The CDC has continued assessing these study participants with updates.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Pyramid represents the conceptual framework for the ACE Study. It was with this information ACEs found how strongly adverse childhood experiences related to development of risk factors for disease as well as well-being throughout life.



<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/about.html>

From this study, we know ACEs can have lasting effects on health, as evidenced by increased incidences of obesity, diabetes, depression, suicide attempts, STDs, heart disease, cancer, stroke, COPD, and even broken bones; and also on behaviors with serious consequences such as smoking, alcoholism, and drug use; and, perhaps most important on life potential, since ACEs can affect graduation rates, academic achievement, and lost time from work.

An ACE score can indicate that the rougher your childhood the higher your score, and the higher your score, the higher your risk for later health problems. However, the ACE score does not track positive experiences in early life that can build resilience in a child.

The main types of ACEs are:

1. Abuse – Physical, emotional and sexual
2. Neglect – Physical and emotional
3. Household Dysfunction – Mental illness, incarcerated relatives, mother treated violently,
4. Substance abuse, and
5. Divorce

(“About Adverse Childhood Experiences, CDC”)

Research at Harvard suggests interventions can build resilience in growing up with adverse experiences, but suggests trauma as a result of poverty or chronic stress may also be worse because of racial or gender discrimination. The research does suggest that even one caring, safe relationship early in life gives any child a better chance at growing up healthy. (“About Adverse Childhood Experiences, CDC”

http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about_ace.html)

7. The Environmental, Societal, and Political Effects of Homelessness

A. Effects of a homeless population on the natural environment

As we have seen, living without an appropriate stable home is clearly harmful to the individuals and families that are homeless, but the presence of homeless people also negatively affects not only the rest of society but also the physical environment. We live in Snohomish County, a beautiful part of the world with parks and other green spaces, including amenities like the Interurban Trail. Like other natural areas, though, our region is a sensitive environment and requires some care. Due to homeless people forming encampments in and around parks and camping out in wild areas, resources that should go to further beautifying these spaces must instead be spent on cleaning up the trash that naturally accumulates where people live.

We would prefer to see pristine nature, but the damage goes beyond the aesthetic aspects. When park officials cut down brush or fields of tall grass so that people cannot conceal their shelters, they are making our parks a little safer, but they are also harming our watershed. (Karen Stewart Interview).

Open grasslands, trees, and marshes act to cleanse some pollutants out of flowing water before it reaches Puget Sound so, if the vegetation is minimized, the cleansing and decontamination effect is reduced. Cutting back on natural foliage also allows invasive plant species like blackberry bushes, Scotch broom, and Japanese knotwood to get a foothold and crowd out other plants. (Interview Kyle Legare) Cutting back bushes near waterways also

reduces the shade on the water, negatively affecting the fish that live there. The contamination gets in, the shade is gone, and the fish start dying.

In addition, everyone has to be somewhere, and if somewhere is out of doors a first effect is that they lack sanitary plumbing. This means human waste ends up untreated in the potential water supply, again with negative effects on the streams and rivers and ultimately on Puget Sound. Pollutants may lead to increased instance of disease in the human population as well as among the water dwellers. (Johnson, pg. 8) The soil is also being degraded with pollutants.

Because unsheltered people do not have waste management pickups, trash is a by-product of the fact of homelessness. All of it is unsightly, and some is very harmful; Kyle Legare notes that the PUD picked up more than two thousand used needles from the PUD properties alone in 2017. Needles that are not found may be making their way into our waters and thus further contributing to the traces of opioids found particularly in mussels from Puget Sound, according to numerous news sources. The cost to taxpayers of all the necessary steps involved in cleanup is extremely high. Adding this to the many other costs of homelessness, our study committee asks, wouldn't it be cheaper to build housing?

Before closing this section of our study, it is important to note that the environment has a profound effect on the incidence of homelessness in our population. The recent developments in weather because of climate change have affected the homeless. The rains nowadays come down in drenching amounts, not the misty light rains that used to be the norm. Storms will get worse. The smoke from forest fires is already affecting Snohomish County, making air quality in summer a real hazard for those who live outdoors all the time. And of course our gradual rise in temperature will only get worse. Not only will the homeless affect the environment for those of us lucky enough to have a roof over our heads, but climate change will continue to affect the homeless. Ignoring climate change has a detrimental effect on our ability to deal with the issue.

B. Societal effects of homelessness

Let us speculate on the likely consequences of continuing the current ways of dealing with our homeless population. If nothing changes, we will go on allocating vastly insufficient resources to housing, and supporting affected families in such a way that a few are eventually helped, while many just scrape by, living as best they can in cars or tents or doorways, and getting some help with food, clothing and other supports. Children who grow up in poverty will have disadvantages affecting their ability to do schoolwork that few of them will ever overcome. They will live with the Toxic Stress that comes with their situations.

All the harmful effects of homelessness on individuals ultimately also affect society. Although homelessness, like poverty, is not one of the ten adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) studied, both conditions are very often associated with those that are, and homelessness is certainly a source of stress, possibly Toxic Stress, in itself. As noted above, it is likely that children who have experienced periods of homelessness will have greater physical and mental health problems throughout their lives, both because of the long-term effects of stress in childhood and because they likely do not have timely health care that would prevent future problems. Their nutrition will probably be negatively impacted as healthy food is expensive and requires some equipment to prepare. Dental care is likely to suffer, and dental problems can affect overall health.

Because difficulties in learning are magnified when schooling is interrupted, even when children do not have any learning disabilities, and being without a home may mean not having a good place to study, children with periods of homelessness may be less educated than their more fortunate peers. These educational disadvantages will affect their future job prospects, minimizing their later income. At a time when jobs are going to require more education and training, homeless children are likely to learn less; the place in society for unskilled workers is growing smaller, so society will not benefit from a larger pool of unskilled labor. We could be creating a virtual army of undereducated people who will not find jobs because the only work they are capable of doing is no longer needed.

If the current trend of a widening gap between wages and the cost of living continues, especially of housing, the economic cost to society will be high for many reasons. Perhaps most important is the cost of lost potential, which cannot be accurately estimated, but is high. There are other costs as well.

Caring for a physically unhealthy population is expensive. Our healthcare system already feels the effects of this, as poor people account for a high percentage of emergency room visits, and therefore a disproportionate part of hospital expenses. (Winslow, Homeless Patients, <https://shnny.org/images/upload/1998%20wsj.pdf>) Cost-burdened people may put off regular doctor visits and treatment of conditions until they really begin to suffer, and later treatment is both more expensive and less effective than preventive or early treatment. Dental care is often neglected, but homeless people list it as their number 1 need over medical care. They feel that it impacts their ability to become employed and accepted in society if their teeth are not well cared for or improved. Lack of adequate dental care causes health issues which in turn affect longevity. Simply failing to care for those who are ill is not a good option, even if we were hard-hearted enough deliberately to deny care to the less wealthy. Infectious diseases are a threat to the whole population; for example, San Diego and Seattle have both reported rising rates of Hepatitis A among the homeless, and intestinal diseases are on the rise. Increased diseases will ultimately affect those who do have proper homes as well.

Every person must eat, sleep, and eliminate bodily wastes somewhere. If they do not have a home and no other facility is provided, these activities will take place in public. Many public policies exacerbate the problems unnecessarily. For example, most of our public parks have lavatories, which is commendable, but they are closed from early evening until morning. One suspects that this is done precisely so that homeless people cannot avail themselves of the facilities, but this begs the question of where they are expected to go. In the Everett Public Library the mirrors have been removed from the restrooms and the stall walls are quite low, presumably to prevent people from cleaning up and changing clothes in the restroom. If we do not want these activities to take place in the library, should we not provide some appropriate place for homeless people to shower and change and launder their clothing? The consequence of not doing so to society is that all of us have to deal with the unwashed and the health problems attendant on that. To the extent that untreated waste affects our water supply, even diseases that have been virtually eliminated, at least in the US, could return, such as cholera for example.

An unhoused population lowers property values in any neighborhood where they camp out because of the excess litter produced. Customers are deterred from patronizing businesses if homeless people are present nearby; this is problematic in particular for small retail businesses. Parks, trails, and other public spaces are unsightly if the belongings of homeless people or the

litter produced are present. Tourism, including use of local trails and parks, is discouraged by the presence of unhoused people. Refuse may be dangerous, especially if it includes drug paraphernalia.

In direct costs, policing resources that could be devoted to keeping people safe are diverted to cleaning up after homeless people or moving them along. To the extent that homeless people might be more likely to develop substance abuse problems or otherwise be tempted or feel forced to engage in criminal behavior, a homeless population leads indirectly to higher policing costs. All these costs are the effects of homeless population on the society in general.

C. Political effects of homelessness

Homelessness is both a political issue and a policy quandary in the U.S. It brings forth questions for political leaders at the federal, state, county, and municipal levels. Health and Human Services (HHS) is the US government's principal agency for protecting the health of all Americans. Delivery of services to persons experiencing homelessness is included in the HHS mandate.

The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness is supposed to coordinate the Federal response to homelessness by bringing together nineteen federal agencies with state and local governments, advocates, service providers, and actual people experiencing homelessness to achieve the goals in their strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. One can only hope that this large bureaucracy can achieve its goals. So far, it is having a hard time doing so.

The Office of Homeless Youth, a Department of Commerce effort, is working to understand the challenges faced by Communities and to find solutions that work for vulnerable young people. This office, too, has a difficult task.

Locally, it is clear that “while the government, agencies, and individuals ... all work to provide more comprehensive solutions, a growing number of children rely on their schools and communities to keep from falling further through the safety net.” (Snohomish County Tribune graphic sources: Map, Washington State GeoServices, Data: Compiled from school districts. February, 2018.) Despite all the political efforts of various governments, clearly the schools are taking the brunt of the problem.

Homelessness has effects on the whole range of government and politics, not only in monetary terms (tax dollars spent), but on the strains felt by individuals, families, and social agencies, indeed by our society as a whole. We ignore or we try to help the person lying in a doorway or begging on a corner. No matter which attitude we each personally choose, we are part of a larger public that is also choosing. This puts political pressures on leaders who would like nothing better than to make homelessness go away. Public policy issues faced by local governments are not going to go away.

Only about 10% of homeless Americans vote each year. If they voted in higher proportion, they might make a difference in local elections, for instance, and their pressure could have a greater effect on policy decisions. “Low income and homeless individuals vote at a lower rate than people with higher incomes, despite the fact that many policy decisions directly impact people who are economically disadvantaged.” To counter this, “the National Coalition for the

Homeless and other national advocacy groups are collaborating to co-sponsor National Homeless and Low Income Voter Registration initiatives.” (www.nationalhomeless.org)

Conclusion and Possible Solutions to Homeless Families, Children and Unaccompanied Youth in Snohomish County

Homelessness is a systemic problem and a serious crisis. It cannot be reduced, much less eliminated, until the root causes are eradicated. In our study we have dealt with families, children and youth, but any real solution will take in all categories of homeless individuals. Ultimately the solution would be a society where no one is poor, which would involve salaries or wages for all working people in line with the prices for all their living expenses, and for those not able to work, support at a level that would actually cover their needs.

A. Tackling the causes to prevent homelessness

Access to government/insurance-paid healthcare, including mental and dental health and vision care, would eliminate one significant cause of homelessness. It would also eliminate one significant cost (currently borne by taxpayers) by greatly decreasing expensive emergency room visits. A combination of universal basic income indexed each year to the cost of living together with comprehensive healthcare covered by government taxes would be a gigantic step that might solve a major problem of poverty.

For Snohomish County in particular, all the problems of poverty are exacerbated by continuous rapid increases in the price of housing and an overall lack of affordable units. Rules requiring developers to create a proportion of affordable units as well as high-cost units could be made and strictly enforced. Nonprofit developments should also be encouraged.

Mediation and counseling to help families in the precarious situations that lead to homelessness before they are actually on the streets should be expanded. Job counseling should be widely available and free of charge, and lead to jobs that yield a living wage.

Snohomish County is currently facing an absolute shortage of affordable housing. In 2017, according to data published by the county, there was a shortfall of nearly 30,000 housing units affordable for low-income families. (Strategic Plan, pg. 3) Incentives to build affordable housing should be available to, and in some cases required of, housing developers.

Owners of rental units could be prohibited from increasing rents beyond the increase in the cost of living, and in return could have their tax assessments for affordable units capped at the cost of living increase. At entry level and when moving, the requirement of first and last month's rent plus a damage deposit that is often imposed could be prohibited for affordable units, as it creates an insurmountable barrier to obtaining housing for lower-income individuals and families; there could be a requirement that landlords be limited to imposing only a reasonable damage deposit. Landlords could be protected by insurance, and renters could be required to carry renter's insurance – which should also be available at affordable prices.

B. Rapid help for people experiencing homelessness

The steps above can be considered long-term solutions. For the time being, however, efforts to deal with the homeless crisis for families and youth are stymied by a lack of knowledge of the real extent of the problem, as well as a general lack of funding. Reliable and accurate data collection at all levels is needed, since as we have seen the data is neither complete nor sufficiently nuanced. We know only that the problem is extensive and complex. In our county the basis for central coordination of services, service providers, and organizations has been established but not sufficiently funded and staffed to be adequately accessible; ideally a family in crisis could immediately be helped, and there would be shelters or transitional housing available for all homeless people. This would require increased staffing of the current Coordinated Entry Program, accessed by calling 211.

The homeless need to be moved from transitional shelters into long term housing as quickly as possible. Traditionally, scarce resources have been allocated to those who have been in need the longest, but one suggestion to minimize the trauma caused by homelessness is to reverse that process and place the easiest, most recent cases first.

Low-barrier shelters would ideally be provided for mentally ill or addicted people, but provisions should be made to keep young and vulnerable homeless people safe in shelters. Far more beds are required in both low and high-barrier shelters than are currently available or even in the planning stages.

Food banks help many people living in poverty, including homeless people. Existing facilities for hygiene, however, should be greatly expanded. Easy availability of public restrooms would benefit all residents of the family, as well as the environment. Places where homeless individuals could shower and wash clothes would benefit homeless people by making them more employable as well as healthier, and would make life pleasanter for the rest of the population.

Mental health and addiction treatment should be greatly expanded and government funded. Support for homeless children and youth should include ACEs- (Adverse Childhood Experiences) trained teachers in all public schools. All schools with a significant homeless population need more nurses, social workers, and psychologists. We perpetuate the cycle of homelessness if we do not help the children suffering in the current generation.

This study has profiled some of the services currently available to the homeless families of Snohomish County. Of these, Housing Hope seems to us to be the most promising model. Beyond its home-building work, its broad range of services can help meet several of the challenges faced by impoverished families, from filling in gaps in child raising and education to training for work with a future. Housing Hope's model should be expanded greatly and funded lavishly rather than with the meager budget that currently constrains it. Another model is the "Housing First" approach. Utah and Finland, for example, have successfully dealt with homeless populations using this approach, and the city of Houston is also using it. [See Appendix C]

More foster homes and safe secure shelters are needed for unaccompanied youth ages 12-21. Cocoon House provides a variety of short- and longer-term housing and services for youth as well as transitional housing. It also provides two shelters for teen mothers and their children. Like Housing Hope, the shelter services are augmented by counseling and mentoring

services to encourage real solutions to the young people's problems. Unfortunately, the need is far greater than the beds available, so further funding is desirable. As long as the systemic homelessness crisis is not resolved, a variety of funding sources will be needed to provide shelter and support for homeless families and unaccompanied youth: Federal, State, County, City, corporate, and private donations.

Homelessness will continue to escalate and be a drain on our public services and institutions -- schools, police, hospitals, and sanitation departments. It will not get better unless there is some major intervention, not only to help those already experiencing homelessness, but also to prevent more people becoming homeless. We think it would be immoral not to intervene as soon as possible, using a systems-based approach designed to alleviate the suffering of our large and growing population suffering from homelessness.

Appendix A

The McKinney Vento Act

The McKinney-Vento Act, according to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the state of Washington, “defines homeless children as ‘individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.’” Furthermore, it enumerates the kinds of places that fall under the McKinney-Vento rubric to include:

- Shared housing due to loss of housing, economic hardship, etc.
- Motels, hotels, trailer parks, or campgrounds due to lack of alternatives
- Emergency or transitional shelters
- Hospitals because they were abandoned there
- Places not ordinarily used as residences, like park benches
- Cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations. (OSPI)

The McKinney-Vento Act provides for tracking homelessness and providing certain services. According to the education portion of the Act, reauthorized in 2015 as Title IX, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act, children who become homeless, including preschoolers, have the

- Right to immediate school enrollment even when records not present
- Right to remain in the school of origin, if in the student’s best interest
- Right to receive transportation to and from the school of origin
- Right to receive support for academic success

Each state receives federal funding as long as it complies with the requirements of the Act. The state must appoint a coordinator to review policies and procedures, and must ensure that homeless families are informed of shelters and services for homeless families. Each school district has a Local Education Liaison who keeps the lines of communication open.

Appendix B

Some Agencies That Work with Families, Families with Children, and with Unaccompanied Youth

This is a list of some of the services available to the homeless in Snohomish County:

2-1-1 Call Center: An information and referral service. Provides a community resource advocate or navigator. Administered through Volunteers of America.

Assistance League of Everett: 425-252-3011

Babies of Homelessness: 866-442-6443 Collaborates with churches, businesses, and Rotary clubs to provide essential items to babies living with families in shelters, cars, and homeless camps. Connects families to shelters and support services.

Cocoon House: 425-259-5802

Domestic Violence Shelter: 425-252-2873

Edmonds Unitarian Universalist Congregation's Car Camp: An emergency, nighttime shelter with space for 10 cars for women and children. Provides a sheltered port-a-potty and the YWCA provides a month's membership to each camper where they may shower.

Everett Gospel Mission and Day Care Center: 425-740-2501 or 425-252-1297 A residential program with room for 100 women and children that provides access to food, clothing, and support services.

Friends of Youth: 866-442-6443

Housing Hope: 425-347-6556 Provides emergency shelter, transitional housing, affordable rental apartments, family support services and parent education. They also run a child development center serving children from 4 weeks to 12 years.

Interfaith Family Shelter: 425-200-5121 Provides safe, secure emergency housing and support services for families for 90 days.

Pathways for Women: 425-774-9843 An emergency shelter of the YWCA for women and families.

Salvation Army: 425-259-8129 Provides families with food, housing and utility assistance and emergency shelter.

Snohomish County Center for Battered Women: 425-252-2873

Volunteers of America: 425-259-3191

Washington Kids in Transition: 206-697-3385

YWCA: Helps women and families find safe, stable housing. Provides emergency shelter, permanent housing, and housing support, advocate or navigator. Administered through Volunteers of America

Appendix C

One promising solution to the homeless crisis is the “Housing First” approach. Finland went to a Housing First policy at national level in 2007. While homelessness has increased in other European countries, by 7% in the last year in the UK, and 35% in Germany in the last years, rates are decreasing in Finland. “There are no more homeless shelters in Finland. They have all been turned into supported housing.” Finland’s policy is based on findings that having a stable home helps people deal with problems of addiction, for example, so rather than insisting that homeless people solve their problems and then be given housing, Finland starts with the housing and then moves on to the other problems. They have been working on their chronic housing shortage through a combination of public and private spending.

Utah has also had excellent results with the Housing First concept. According to Natasha Bertrand, “Utah Found a Brilliantly Effective Solution for Homelessness” in February 19, 2015 *Business Insider*, (<https://www.businessinsider.com/this-state-may-be-the-first-to-end-homelessness-for-good-2015-2>) by 2015 the state of Utah had reduced the numbers of homeless to 300. The article describes the concept as originating at New York University, where psychologist Sam Tsemberis started a trial in 1992, offering chronically homeless people a place to live and all the services they needed to deal with mental health and/or addiction problems.

Both Finland and Utah have replicated the results found in the study. Not only have these programs reduced the numbers of homeless people, they have also reduced the costs to the respective governments.

The city of Houston, Texas is also finding the housing first approach very helpful. See the article <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2019/1118/Houston-we-have-a-solution-How-the-city-curbed-homelessness>

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