



DISPATCH FROM THE FRONTLINES OF SEATTLE'S HOMELESS CRISIS

Transitioning Out of Homelessness - the psychological shift toward safety and stability

Doorways fill at night with cardboard and blankets. Tents have become a fixture on Seattle's sidewalks. Cars and RVs gather beneath bridges, forming ad hoc neighborhoods of homes on four wheels.

Read local headlines and you'll discover two versions of our Emerald city: Seattle that is blessed with breathtaking economic growth. And standing in the shadows is its disenfranchised sister, where, as described by Seattle Magazine, ["a second city of tents and tarps is booming."](#)

More than a year on, Seattle city and King County leaders have mobilized resources and put forth a strategy focused on longer-term solutions to help people "exit out of homelessness."

As these initiatives gain traction, the hope is that homeless residents will start to find their way home in new communities and among new neighbors. For many, stable housing after years on the street is an adjustment that is layered, complex and often not fully understood. "Transitioning out of



The expanding footprint of Seattle's homelessness crisis is impossible to ignore and just over a year ago, the long-simmering crisis finally came into sharp public focus.

"I thought we were on a path (that) would lead to better results," Seattle Mayor Ed Murray conceded when the city declared a [state of emergency](#) in November of 2015. "It hasn't," he admitted.

homelessness is both a physical and psychological process," explained Justin Phillippi. His insight comes from the frontline of Seattle's escalating homeless crisis—six years at Seattle's Downtown

Emergency Service Center homeless shelter and now as program manager for Compass Housing Alliance (CHA) at Nyer Urness House, an 80-unit housing complex for the chronically homeless in Seattle's Ballard



neighborhood. “It’s a shift and it takes getting used to,” he said. “Just imagine that for years, people have been actively ignoring you. Then suddenly you meet someone who is reaching out to you with compassion.”

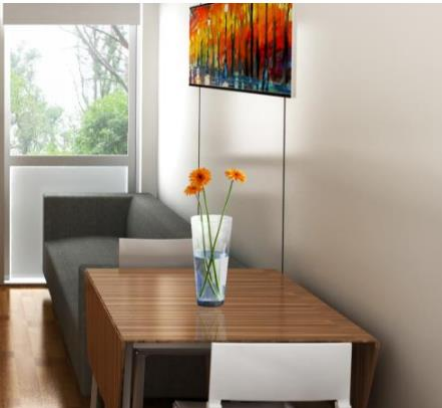
To illustrate his point, Phillippi recounted the six-week, incremental move-in process of an elderly woman, who had lived on Ballard’s streets for decades. When housing became available, she was reluctant to sleep in her new apartment. Case managers went into the neighborhood to check in on her to encourage her to come in to eat meals. “It took a while for her to feel this was a safe place,” Phillippi explained. Once she had her basic needs met on a daily basis, Phillippi observed that a transformation was underway. “It was clear she was starting to look at herself a little differently, she began exploring new possibilities, she’s now even wearing make-up.”

ACCELERATING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mental and physical health challenges, alongside the lack of resources, usually make certain populations within the homeless population more vulnerable, Phillippi noted. Yet there are other obstacles. “Partners pets and possessions are barriers that are present to the individual but not usually given much thought when thinking about solutions as a whole,” he added.

To tackle the critical need for a rapid, responsive and scalable solution, CHA launched a groundbreaking project in Columbia City—Compass Crossing. Compass Crossing is an innovative, steel-frame, 13-unit, modular housing community. By design, it will bring together dignified housing— that residents can share with partners and pets—and people-centered services.

“Without a doubt, a holistic approach is the most important component to the transition out of homelessness,” Phillippi noted. “It’s about helping the whole person.” Among Compass Crossing’s residents, there will likely be some that haven’t had stable housing for over a decade. According to Phillippi, this often gives them great pride in their new space as well as a desire to find connection with and be useful to the community. He sees great potential for mutual support among existing neighbors and new residents who are navigating a path toward stability. “Once we break down some of the barriers, there’s a lot of opportunity for meaningful engagement for everyone.”



MORE ABOUT COMPASS CROSSING

Compass Crossing is an innovative steel-frame modular housing community that brings together dignified housing and people-centered services to add 13 new housing units in Columbia City in response to Seattle’s homeless crisis.

By creating a supportive community for residents that is respectful of racial diversity and gender equality, Compass Crossing removes the most pressing barriers to accessing shelter housing and services. Residents will enjoy safe and dignified housing they can share with their partners and their pets. Housing units and services can easily be adapted to meet the specific needs of different homeless populations including veterans and victims of domestic violence.

Compass Crossing’s steel-frame modular housing units—developed at one-third the cost, in one-third of the time and using one-third of the environmental resources—are constructed off site and can be installed rapidly to ensure minimal disruption to the community. Units can be relocated, repurposed and reconfigured to meet evolving community and resident needs.