

# Homelessness: Busting Myths, Finding Lasting Solutions

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By Bret Anderson

*“Home is wherever you leave everything you love and never question that it will be there when you return.” — Leo Christopher*

How much does it hurt to be homeless?

**Lou Lundquist** led us off with a good bit of optimism in B flat accompanied by multi-talented **Ken Grant**. “The sun will come out tomorrow: Bet your bottom dollar that tomorrow there’ll be sun.”

Invoker **Nancy Cahill** reminded us about the people displaced from their homes due to Hurricanes Irma and Harvey. In areas affected by the storms, 6,000 students and 600 teachers started school today and then went home to the shelters. True grit.

Nancy also reminded us “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8)

**Tom Jaffa** introduced new member, **Lauren Martin**, who sounds like a thoroughly interesting lady. Yes, according to **President Mark**, there’s no such thing as TMI!

**Connie Miller** introduced new member, **Mahnaz Eshetu**, executive director at Refugee Women’s and Family Alliance.

**President Mark** said goodbye to **Consul General James Hill** as he moves on to become Canadian Ambassador to Costa Rica. He also recognized the other Consul Generals who are Seattle 4 members.

**Cathy Gibson** reminded us that the U.N. Day of Peace is on September 21 and will be celebrated by the City of Seattle. See details in the Totem.

**Fedva Dikmen** invited us to a Turkish dinner on Oct 4.

Homelessness- a panel discussion was introduced by Greg Hanscom. Members of the panel were:



- Mark Putnam, Director of All Home and Committee to End Homelessness
- Adrienne Quinn, Director of King County Department of Community and Human Services
- Jean-Paul Yafali, Economics Instructor at Highline College



Jean-Paul Yafali, from Catholic University of the Congo, worked with UNESCO in Congo. He came to the US because of threats to his life. His ESL teacher talked about Seattle as one of the most welcoming cities in U.S. so he decided to come here. Unable to find a job, Jean-Paul ran out of money and became homeless for a full year. Although this was a demoralizing situation, he felt that he still needed to keep providing services to the community. So, even though he was living on the streets, Jean-Paul still taught classes at American Red Cross. He also taught people on the street how to obtain emergency treatment.

Mark Putnam: President Bush asked for a 10-year plan to solve the problem of homelessness. Under that directive, 40,000 people were housed. There is now a new movement to get people into housing first, and then get them to engage in obtaining services. Now, programs are data-driven. We are getting people into houses by rewarding programs that are working. Data about outcomes is used for funding decisions. We can house many people with the resources that we have, but more and more people are becoming homeless. Obviously, we need to continue to identify more resources.

Adrienne Quinn: The homeless crisis response system housed 15,000 this past year. Washington State was 50th for mental health spending in the U.S. King County is increasing the number of facilities to provide mental illness and drug dependency services. The number of people becoming homeless is increasing due to a number of factors including seniors who are on fixed income and rents going up.

The questions from the floor (The two Jan(n)s, the epitomes of style, worked the microphones):

Greg: How much is this a problem of supply and demand? There is no inexpensive housing left in Seattle.

Jean-Paul: How would having a home have affected you when you first became homeless? He responded "Once I got housing, I am going back to myself. Before that, I was lost and couldn't do anything for myself."

Regarding homeless children, we have made progress in housing families. County, city and federal government are all providing funds. All-day shelters are important because they give families a home base. There is a rise in school kids becoming homeless. From 2015 to 2016, there was an increase of 19%. However, we are making progress. The average time that a family was experiencing homelessness was 365 days three years ago, now it is about half of that.

How are the performance studies doing? King County is using the data collected. If a shelter does not meet its goals, the county which provides assistance will then will cut funds. There are only so many resources and we have to put them where they will be used most effectively.

When asked, what surprised international students most about the U.S.? They replied that it is the homelessness. Many don't have it in their own country and ask if the homeless don't have family to help them out.

What are the **myths** about the homeless:

1. ***People who are homeless don't work.*** Many do work or volunteer. Data shows that 30% of homeless do work.
2. ***People are coming to Seattle to get homeless services.*** The survey revealed that 80% of current homeless were last housed in King County. An additional 16% lived in counties nearby.
3. ***Homelessness is a lifestyle choice.*** No one wants to be homeless. Consider abused women with no resources fleeing violence. Another example is people denied housing because of past criminal convictions. Many landlords will not rent to felons. Do children opt to become homeless?

Last question for Adrienne: If we keep doing what we are doing now, will we solve homeless in King County? NO; all of us need to figure out what we can do to help. Can we convert existing housing for homeless people? Can we locate more resources?

A final thought from **President Mark**: We are all not too far away from homelessness. How often have you thought, "There but for the grace of God go I..."? Think about what your life would be like if you didn't have a home. Imagine what that fear and uncertainty would be like for one night. What would this be like for a week, a month a year? We each need to act consistently to work on homelessness.