



**King County**

# **Best Starts for Kids Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative Implementation Plan**

---

*Response to Ordinance 18088*

**Department of Community and Human Services**  
*March 1, 2016*

The Best Starts for Kids (BSK) Levy includes \$19 million for a Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative that is intended to “prevent and divert children and youth and their families from becoming homeless.” The BSK ordinance approved by the voters of King County, Ordinance 18088, directs the King County Executive to submit to Metropolitan King County Council for review and approval, an implementation plan relating to the Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative by March 1, 2016, which to the maximum extent possible, shall be developed in collaboration with the oversight and advisory board, referred to in this report as the Children and Youth Advisory Board.

The Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative is based on a highly successful pilot program implemented by the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Medina Foundation.

This implementation plan provides: (I) the background showing the need for a homelessness prevention program in King County, (II) a description of the successful Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence Housing First Initiative, (III) the proposed BSK Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Model and (IV) the community process for developing the plan.

## **I. Youth and Family Homelessness in King County**

During the 2016 annual One Night Count of people who are homeless in King County held on January 29, 2016, 4,505 people were found to be unsheltered, that is, living in places unfit for human habitation such as the streets, cars or Metro buses. Although the detailed demographic data from the 2016 One Night Count is not yet available, the 2015 detailed data is available through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). The HMIS is the county-wide database that collects data on individuals and families receiving homeless services (e.g., shelter, case management and housing).

The 2015 One Night Count data reported that over 2,000 of the 9,776 people who access shelter or other homeless services were under age 17. Twenty-eight percent of the homeless population is families with children (approximately 2,800 people). Count Us In 2015, the survey of homeless youth and young adults, counted 134 unsheltered homeless young people and 824 that are unstably housed. These numbers represent young people who are in places unfit for human habitation, shelters or transitional housing.

The federal government uses a broader definition for counting homeless youth in the schools. In addition to defining homelessness as living in a place unfit for human habitation, shelter or transitional housing, under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act, homelessness is defined as lacking a fixed, adequate place to sleep. This broader definition would include families or youth who are doubled up or “couch surfing.” Under this definition, over 6,000 students in King County public schools are homeless. Approximately 15 percent of these are not accompanied by an adult. Homelessness can have lasting effects on children.

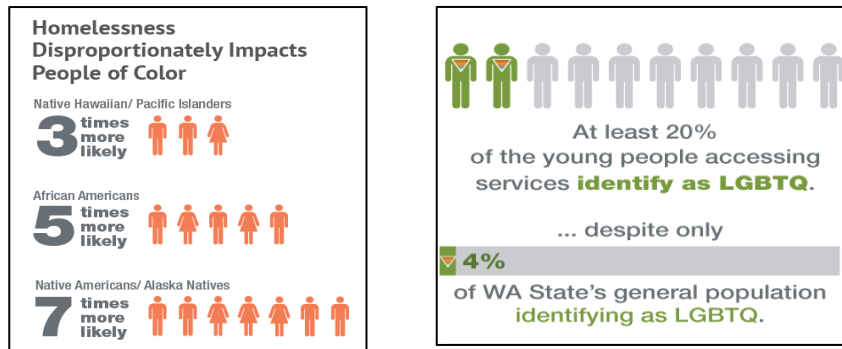
According to the 2013 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress:

- 83 percent of homeless children have witnessed a serious violent event
- 47 percent have anxiety, depression or withdrawal
- 43 percent have to repeat a grade
- Homeless children are far more likely to have significant health issues.

The HMIS also showed that half of all people who become homeless were homeless for the first time, which is the case for 46 percent of all homeless families. An even higher number of unaccompanied youth were homeless for the first time, 64 percent. Accordingly, if homelessness can be prevented, the number of people who are homeless would decline substantially.

Demographic data from the HMIS demonstrates that there are several issues that must be addressed in developing a youth and family homelessness prevention program – the disproportionate numbers of Native American/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Asian Pacific

Islanders and African Americans who become homeless and the disproportionate number of homeless youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer (LGBTQ). Native Americans are seven times more likely to become homeless. African Americans are five times more likely to become homeless and Native Hawaiians/Asian Pacific Islanders three times more likely. Of the youth who are homeless, at least 20 percent of young people accessing services identify as LGBTQ, compared to 4 percent of the general population.



As discussed in more detail in the program model section, the Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative must address the disproportionality in race and LGBTQ identification of people who become homeless.

## II. Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence Housing First Initiative

As King County explored approaches to prevent youth and family homelessness, a local model – the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence Housing First Initiative – was reviewed. This model, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, has been rigorously evaluated and found to have successfully prevented family homelessness. More information about the model can be found at <http://wscadv.org/projects/domestic-violence-housing-first>.

The Medina Foundation added additional funding to several agencies participating in the pilot and expanded the model to additional agencies that were not part of the original Gates cohorts.

This model was attractive to local funders because domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness for families.

The Domestic Violence Housing First Initiative is a homelessness prevention program for survivors of domestic violence and their children, including survivors actively fleeing a domestic violence situation, and those who are on the brink of homelessness. At program entry, many were facing unemployment and a lack of income due to the domestic violence situation they were experiencing. The Domestic Violence Housing First Initiative was piloted from September 2011 through September 2014 in Washington state with two cohorts. One cohort was in King County and the other was the balance of state. In King County, LifeWire and InterImCDA participated in the pilot.

Flexibility of financial assistance and advocate/case management services are a key component of the program. Financial assistance could be used for a range of needs such as clothing for a job, cost of an employment-related license, a variety of housing and/or moving costs, cost to repair a car, urgently needed groceries and other expenses that may be impacting the safety and security of a family. Case management support could be very narrow and temporary or somewhat longer term to meet the true needs of program participants, using a progressive engagement approach. With very little financial assistance per household (average cost of \$1,250 per household) the safety, stability and well-being of victims and their families were increased through the pilot program.

A study of the Domestic Violence Housing First Initiative programs found successful outcomes related to survivors' ability to get and keep safe and stable housing. Nearly all program participants, including those with very low incomes, maintained permanent housing for a prolonged period of time:

- 96 percent were still stably housed 18 months after entering the program, allowing survivors to become self-sufficient quickly and without need for ongoing intensive services

- 84 percent reported an increase in safety for their family
- 76 percent of survivors requested minimal services from the domestic violence program at final follow-up
- Participants also expressed that housing stability had a profoundly positive effect on their children, improved the health and well-being for themselves and their children, and restored their dignity and self-worth.

The pilot program also focused on ensuring that services were culturally appropriate and delivered by a case manager/advocate who was from the same culture and spoke the same language as the survivors. According to the evaluation, survivors reported that working with an advocate who culturally and linguistically understood them was critical to getting the support they needed to become stable and enabling the survivors to feel understood, accepted and comfortable telling their stories.

While some of the survivors who participated in the Domestic Violence Housing First Initiative programs were youth, the program was focused primarily on adults fleeing domestic violence. There is less research on successful programs preventing youth from becoming homeless. Nonetheless, the All Home Youth and Young Adult Plan Refresh (May 2015) recommends prevention as a strategy to make youth homelessness rare, brief and one time. One of the strategies is “*flexible funding* to help YYAs live at home or with natural supports.”

### **III. Proposed Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Model**

The Best Starts for Kids Ordinance 18088 provides the following guidance for the Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative:

*"Youth and family homelessness prevention initiative" means an initiative intended to prevent and divert children and youth and their families from becoming homeless.*

*It is the intent of the council and the executive that funding for the youth and family homelessness prevention initiative will allow the initiative to be flexible, client-centered and outcomes-focused and will*

*provide financial support for community agencies to assist clients.*

*Out of the first year's levy proceeds:*

*1. Nineteen million dollars shall be used to plan, provide and administer a youth and family homelessness prevention initiative.*

Based on this guidance, stakeholder input and research on successful prevention models, King County Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) staff worked with a Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Model Planning Committee (Planning Committee) and the Children and Youth Advisory Board (CYAB) to develop the framework for the King County Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative. This section discusses both the overall program model, as well as specific implementation details that were recommended by the Planning Committee and CYAB.

The proposed Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative has a strong client-centered focus, including mobile case management coupled with flexible financial assistance that is intended to address the immediate issue that is placing the family or youth at imminent risk of homelessness and build trust with the client. The model is based on the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence Housing First Initiative, a successful model to preventing family homelessness in King County.

Key components to the Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Model include:

- Client-centered intervention
- Progressive engagement approach to case management
- Flexible funding to prevent homelessness
- Targeting approach to address the root causes of homelessness among youth and families.

The agencies that demonstrated successful outcomes in the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence study understood the importance of the case management support of the client, and successfully made the shift to having a client-centered focus. That is, the family or youth must be asked, “What do you need so that you do not become homeless?”

This is a significant cultural shift for the agencies administering the program because many government assistance and programs are based on a distrust of clients. For most programs, clients must prove that they meet a raft of program criteria and then are told what specific assistance they are eligible to receive even if they know something else will help them more. Because successful implementation of the model will entail changing organizational culture, training and learning circles will be part of the Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative.

In addition, the Domestic Violence Housing First Initiative programs study found that about one-third of the families needed minimal health supports, one-third needed a medium “touch,” and one-third needed more intensive case management, highlighting the need for a progressive engagement approach to case management.

Progressive Engagement is a nationally recognized best practice that provides customized levels of assistance to participants – providing the services needed, but not more than is needed to achieve housing stability. Progressive Engagement preserves the most expensive interventions for households with the most severe barriers to housing success. Progressive Engagement is a strategy to enable service delivery systems to effectively target resources. The case manager/advocates will work with the family/youth on the underlying issues that caused them to be at imminent risk of homelessness.

Case manager/advocates will be mobile, meeting the clients at locations of their choice. This approach is different than other models where the case manager/advocate tends to be place-based.

In order to ensure that agencies administering the program are equipped with the resources they need to be successful, sufficient funds will be provided to assure that experienced case manager/advocates are hired and are focused on this homelessness prevention program and not spread thinly over many programs. The Best Starts for Kids ordinance specifically states, “It is the intent of the council and the executive that funding for the youth and family homeless prevention initiative ... will provide financial support for community agencies to assist clients.”



## **Need for Adaptation and Flexibility for Preventing Youth Homelessness**

While the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence Housing First Program was successful with youth who were parenting and who were at risk of homelessness due to domestic violence, the research shows that other factors are more predictive of a youth becoming homeless, e.g., LGBTQ, juvenile justice system involvement, school suspensions, and involvement with the foster care system. As a result, the CYAB and the Planning Committee recommended targeting the program to address the predictive factors of homelessness, collaborating with schools, organizations that work with LGBTQ youth and organizations working with youth involved in the juvenile justice system.

While these are the target areas for identifying youth at imminent risk of homelessness, this does not mean that the Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Model would be administered by schools or the juvenile justice system. Rather, it is likely that nonprofits, community agencies or faith organizations would provide assistance and administer the funds, because they could provide services any time of day or night and be able to leverage additional supports. Any organization receiving the funds would have to show strong partnerships with the schools and/or the juvenile justice system.

In addition to providing feedback on the overarching program model, the Planning Committee and the CYAB both provided feedback on the specific program implementation details outlined below.

### **Who is Eligible?**

The program is intended for youth and families who are at *imminent* risk of homelessness. It is not intended for youth or families who are already homeless, nor is it intended for youth or families who are at risk for homelessness, but not facing *imminent* risk. Examples of imminent risk of homelessness are a young person or family who has been staying on friends' or families' couches, but may have exhausted all welcomes and will be on the street next week. Another example might be a youth who the school counselor knows will be thrown out of his parent's house if he comes out, or a youth exiting the justice system whose family refuses to take her

back home. The case manager/advocate will have to utilize judgment and experience in making the determination.

The outcomes measurements will be critically important in determining if the targeting was done appropriately. If people who are at imminent risk of homelessness are prevented from becoming homeless, we will see a decrease in the number of people who are newly homeless.

### **Should the Money Be Divided Between Youth and Families?**

The Planning Committee and CYAB advised that the money should not be divided between population groups. Many youth are parenting, and it is these young families who are often at imminent risk of homelessness. Because this program is intended to step away from rigid requirements, dividing the money and creating definitions and funding formulas for youth and families did not seem prudent.

### **What are the Eligible Uses of Funding? Should Anything be Excluded as Eligible from the Flexible Funds?**

Any expenditure that will prevent someone from becoming homeless should be an eligible use of funds. As noted in both the ordinance and discussion above, case management is an essential element of the Youth and Families Homelessness Prevention Model. Agencies will employ rigorous financial oversight to track where the funds are applied. The County will evaluate whether certain types of expenditures are more or less successful in preventing a family or youth from becoming homeless.

### **How Much Money Should Be Awarded in 2016?**

The CYAB recommended that approximately \$3.1 million be spent in the first year of the levy, with a ramp up during the second and third years to significantly reduce the numbers of families and youth who are becoming homeless. The CYAB was cognizant that the money would likely run out prior to the end of the levy. However, they recommended that more money was needed to firmly demonstrate that the model was effective.

Building organizational capacity and creating the organizational culture change will take time. As a result, the Planning Committee and CYAB recommended that the funding awards be three-year contingent commitments to agencies, meaning the agency will receive the money for all three years provided that the agency is achieving outcomes, participating in the learning circles and implementing the evaluation. It is hard for agencies to staff up and plan with annual commitments, and a three-year commitment will enable better staff recruitment and continuity for the agency and individuals seeking assistance. Finally, by making the three-year commitment contingent on achieving outcomes, the County will be able to reallocate the money if necessary.

Extensive training, ongoing learning circles and a rigorous evaluation will be part of the program design assuring agency and program success. Therefore, it is anticipated that reducing the commitment will be a rare occurrence.

In the initial stages of the program, it is likely that the domestic violence organizations that have been operating this program successfully for several years with the Gates and Medina Foundation money will be able to be up and running before organizations for which this initiative is new. Rather than awarding those agencies more money, the Planning Committee recommended that not all of the money be awarded at once in the first year, since the initiative will begin midyear anyway. Some of the funds from the first year will be reserved to grant additional funds to agencies that run out of the flexible funds before the next year's allocation.

The CYAB provided extensive feedback on how to assure that funds will truly address racial and LGBTQ disproportionality in homelessness. Their advice included:

- For many communities, including Native Americans and Asian Pacific Islanders, County staff making personal contacts and going to community leadership will be important.
- Meet with faith community leaders in the African American community.
- Ask that culturally-specific communities include funding/grant/RFP announcements in their newsletters.

- Send information to leadership tables for targeted populations such as the Minority Executive Directors or Pride Foundation and ask that they disseminate information.
- Use social media.
- The frequency of the ask is as important as where and to whom the ask is made.
- Use the CYAB to disseminate information.

### **Should All Recipients Have Data Entered into the Homeless Management Information System?**

All agencies receiving money will be required to enter client data into HMIS. It is only by entering client data into the HMIS system that we will know if a youth or family who receives services from the Youth and Family Homeless Prevention Model successfully avoided homelessness. Some agencies will need to be trained on HMIS and the County may need to provide additional funding for computers or other information technology support.

### **Should a Common Client Intake and Assessment Form Be Utilized?**

By utilizing HMIS, it assures that a common intake form will be utilized for program participants so that there is consistent information collected for evaluation purposes. In addition, it is likely that the common assessment form used for Coordinated Entry for All (a new approach adopted by the All Home Coordinating Board) to access homeless housing will also be utilized.

### **How Will Initiative Success Be Measured?**

The two key components for measuring success are 1) the individuals served do not show up in HMIS for homeless services; and 2) there is a reduction in the number of youth and families who are newly homeless. It is essential that both outcomes are measured because if the program measures only whether individuals show up in HMIS for homeless services or not, there is no way of knowing whether those individuals ever would have become homeless. However, if there is also a reduction in the number of newly homeless youth and families, it is clear that agencies are targeting the right individuals and families.

In addition, the CYAB and the Planning Committee recommended that the County evaluate at least one other factor besides “not becoming homeless.” Some of the suggestions included additional outcomes for youth such as no further engagement with criminal justice system or increased educational attainment. For families, additional factors suggested include safety and self-determination. The Department of Community and Human Services evaluation team will analyze which factors are measurable and work with other BSK evaluation teams to have consistent measures of success. Additionally, several CYAB members recommended training so that all fund recipients understood LGBTQ issues.

### **How Will Providers Be Trained?**

Training will be provided to agencies receiving money under this initiative. The experience of the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence program was that developing a client-centered and outcomes-focused agency culture took extensive training and intentional organization effort and buy-in. For that reason, learning circles for agencies administering the funding will also be part of the program.

### **What Type of Agencies/Organizations Should Be Targeted for the RFP?**

Since the goal of the Youth and Family Homeless Prevention Model is to identify and intervene with youth or families who are at imminent risk of homelessness, the agencies receiving funding should be those most likely to already be working with families or youth most at risk of homelessness. When directly asked, the CYAB provided significant advice regarding the best way of assuring that the model funds were placed in agencies, organizations and geographic areas that would be able to identify families and youth *before* they became homeless and address the racial disproportionality in family homelessness, and the racial and sexual orientation disproportionality in youth homelessness.

Both the Planning Committee and the CYAB recommended targeting the issues and systems that lead to homelessness, e.g., domestic violence, juvenile justice and the populations most likely to become homeless, e.g., Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Pacific Islanders and LGBTQ youth. It will be imperative for any agency receiving the funds to be able to

demonstrate how the organization will administer the funds in a way that will address the extreme racial disproportionality of people of color who enter homelessness at a rate significantly greater than the general population. Similarly, organizations will have to show how they will address the disproportionality of LGBTQ youth who are at imminent risk of homelessness.

The Children and Youth Advisory Board also emphasized that small cultural or ethnic organizations should be targeted for the initiative. Suggestions ranged from partnering large and smaller organizations during the Request for Proposal (RFP) process, assuring application support. The Department of Community and Human Services has already been working toward implementing some of the suggestions to reduce barriers for small organizations. For example, staff have been partnering with the county's Risk Management Division to reduce insurance barriers for small agencies.

Examples of types of agencies that the CYAB suggested would be appropriate fund recipients or partner entities included:

- Domestic violence agencies
- Agencies serving youth, including youth homeless agencies
- Schools (particularly school counselors and those addressing absenteeism, expulsions and suspensions)
- Public utilities agencies, since delinquent utility payments can be a predictor of housing loss
- Culturally-competent/focused organizations
- Organizations serving LGBTQ youth
- Public Health and other health facilities and clinics
- King County education and employment programs
- Faith-based organizations
- Youth clubs and recreation centers
- Agencies serving families, particularly new moms
- Agencies serving youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system

- Food banks
- Regional Access Points for accessing housing/homelessness services
- “Natural helpers” in community, e.g., libraries, first responders as referral sources.

In addition to targeting specific types of organizations, the CYAB also discussed the need to recognize the difference between delivery of services in rural versus urban contexts. In order to make funds available to all areas of the County, County staff are considering releasing separate regional RFPs so that the initiative will be available county-wide and to account for the differences in how services may be delivered in an urban versus a rural area.

### **Administration, Fiscal Management, Monitoring and Evaluation**

The Department of Community and Human Services will administer, monitor and evaluate the Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative. Monitoring will consist of both financial and programmatic audits.

With respect to data and evaluation, the data that will be collected will mirror what is being collected for other programs or strategies in the community so that this initiative will not introduce a new data set being collected in the community.

## **IV. Collaboration with the Children and Youth Advisory Board and Homelessness Prevention Model Planning Committee**

Ordinance 18088 directs the County Executive, to the maximum extent possible, to develop the Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative in collaboration with the Children and Youth Advisory Board (CYAB). The Children and Youth Advisory Board members were approved by King County Council and became official on January 25, 2016. The Executive convened the CYAB on February 9, 2016, for an orientation, at which time the CYAB reviewed the Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative in an unofficial capacity. The Children and Youth Advisory Board reviewed the initiative again at its first official meeting on February 23, 2016, at which time they made formal recommendations about the Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative.

Because of the short time between approval of the CYAB and the March 1, 2016, deadline to submit the Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Implementation Plan, executive staff also convened a Youth and Family Homeless Prevention Model Planning Committee (Planning Committee) to advise on the design for the plan. The Planning Committee met three times in January and February 2016 to help guide the implementation plan. Members of the committee (an \* indicates that the individual is also a member of the Children and Youth Advisory Board) include:

Alison Eisinger	Seattle King County Coalition on Homelessness
Edith Elion	Atlantic Street Center
Melinda Giovengo	YouthCare
Terry Pottmeyer*	Friends of Youth
Kira Zylstra	All Home
	King County Department of Community and Human
	Services
Hedda McLendon	
Colleen Kelly	City of Redmond
Jason Johnson	City of Seattle
Linda Olsen	Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Katie Hong*	Raikes Foundation
TJ Cosgrove	Public Health
Maria Williams	LifeWire
Barbara Langdon*	LifeWire
Calvin Watts*	Kent School District
Isabel Munoz	City of Seattle
Leilani Della Cruz	City of Seattle
Merrill Cousins	King County Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Aana Lauckhart	Medina Foundation