



COMMUNITY PROFILE

Seattle-King County, WA

COMMUNITY CONTEXT	
Community population	652,405 (Seattle); 2,044,449 (King County) (U.S. Census 2013 estimate)
2014 Point In Time (overall homeless)	9,294 (King County)
2013 CoC award	\$24,149,352 (Seattle/King County)
2013 WIA formula grant allocation	\$11,518,444 (King County)
Unemployment rate (2013 annual average)	5.2% (King County)

DESCRIPTION

In 2014, Seattle recorded 9,294 people experiencing homelessness: 3,123 people living on the streets without shelter or transitional housing, 2,906 individuals in shelters, and 3,265 individuals in transitional housing. To address the significant number of people requiring sustainable housing, Seattle recognizes the importance of integrating employment strategies and housing assistance programs and has a history of championing employment initiatives for individuals experiencing homelessness.

- In 1988, the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County (WDC) began leading a consortium of local service providers as administrator for the Homeless Intervention Project (HIP). Funded by a McKinney-Vento grant, HIP facilitates homeless adults' transition to reliable housing and provides customized employment and job training services to help individuals gain the skills and incomes necessary to become self-sufficient. Today, the HIP strategy is managed by the WDC and implemented by a coalition of partner agencies: the YWCA of Seattle-King-Snohomish Counties (YWCA), FareStart, and Neighborhood House. The WDC provides contract management, monitoring, oversight, and technical assistance.

The service providers offer direct employment services, employment training, case management, housing stabilization services, mental health services, individualized assessments, employment training, job search, and job retention services.



- Seattle’s Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness, released in 2005, made the coordination of the various systems with which homeless families interface an essential community-wide priority. The plan, created by the Committee to End Homelessness, furthered the development of a network of “one-stop” access points through which people experiencing homelessness receive employment training and placement assistance.
- Since 2004, Building Changes (formerly AIDS Housing of Washington) has administered the Washington Families Fund (WFF), a public-private partnership between funders of community-based housing and support services for homeless families in need. In 2006, Building Changes led a collaborative effort with local government agencies, the Gates Foundation, the WDC, and other stakeholders to increase a collective emphasis of employment as a necessary service for people experiencing homelessness.

COLLABORATION

In 2010, the WDC, with administrative support from Building Changes, created an *Employment Navigator* model tailored to meet the needs of individuals and families who were experiencing homelessness or who had recently been homeless. Based on the WDC’s original conception of the Employment Navigator in 2000, this pilot project supported residents in WFF housing units in King County, acting as a bridge between the WDC’s WorkSource employment centers and the WorkSource system’s capacity to connect its customers to needed housing.

At its core, the Employment Navigator serves as a knowledge resource and relationship broker to staff and employers, while also bridging any gaps along the continuum of services provided to individuals experiencing homelessness. Employment Navigators are dedicated staff who coordinate

direct referrals and services with partner housing programs, establish cross-system partnerships, build the WorkSource system’s ability to serve jobseekers experiencing homelessness, and vocationalize housing programs. This cross-system partnership is essential to better serving the needs of homeless jobseekers.

Cumulative data measuring the Employment Navigator project from inception, April 2010 through June 2013, shows a total of 82 individuals enrolled in the pilot—the original goal was 40. Among them, 35 (43%) entered employment earning an average wage of \$10.56 per hour and 29 or (35%) obtained permanent housing. For the pilot, there were no pre-determined performance measures as this was considered a learning grant.



Currently, King County funds three agencies offering employment navigation services in the WorkSource system. The YWCA HIP program employs an Employment Navigator who is based out of the Downtown Seattle WorkSource Affiliate (One-Stop Center), which is funded through Workforce Investment Act funds. The YWCA is an example of how Seattle is integrating homeless employment services with other wraparound supports.

INNOVATION

The WDC convened the *Connecting Homeless Jobseekers* National Advisory Group in 2011 and 2013, which included representatives from seven WIBs and their local counterparts whose focus was the coordination and delivery of services to people experiencing homelessness. Since then, the National Advisory Group has met quarterly via conference calls to continue to share experiences and evaluate best practices.

Through this initiative, we have identified a number of common challenges in our various urban areas, as well as strategies that can be replicated or adapted in other communities. These strategies include the co-location of services, utilizing Employment Navigators, and federal policy change. Group members have focused their efforts on policy change at both the federal and local levels; out of these discussions came a list of best practices to improve services for jobseekers experiencing homelessness. Those best practices include:

1. **Develop shared regional vision and goals.** Create multiple cross-system partnerships to leverage capabilities of all member organizations.
2. **Support. Don't duplicate.** Stay in your own lane, but create cross-system partnerships that complement one another and improve knowledge sharing of member organizations.
3. **Allow time to create partner systems and shape effective collaborations.** It takes time to build trust and understanding. Create common systems of data, communication, and language to overcome cultural differences.
4. **Emphasize employment in 10 year plan.** Think practically by integrating employment as system level prevention.
5. **Focus on crafting employer relationships,** awareness, and supports. Find and educate employers so that they are willing to work with homeless customers and ex-offenders.
6. **Innovate to improve services and increase access.** Use flexible funding sources, including both private and public, standardize data sources, and focus on outcomes.



The development of this best-practices list improves on earlier approaches to address homelessness by identifying a need for more integrated services. Earlier models often operated in isolation without comprehensively responding to individual needs, making the goal for sustainable self-sufficiency less likely. For example, an individual might have received transitional housing, but a plan for self-sufficiency to include sustainable employment or health issues would not be addressed in conjunction with housing assistance.

Together, the member WIBs noted that early models for providing housing placed too little emphasis on employment. Employment is now accepted as key to sustaining self-sufficiency because it provides an answer for how to develop a sustainable income stream that enables an individual to secure and pay for housing. Every housing assistance program needs a plan for sustainable employment.

FUNDING FOR INITIATIVE/PROJECTS

The expansion of the model has been funded to date primarily with private funds through Building Changes and DOL Workforce Innovation Fund grant funds, primarily replicated in the Tacoma-Pierce County region. In Seattle, the WDC currently receives a grant from HUD that directly supports the Homeless Intervention Project (HIP). All WDC HIP funds are slated for employment services for individuals experiencing homelessness. In 2014, the WDC McKinney-Vento funds total \$645,000. Part of this funding supports the employment navigator at the YWCA. Other providers have been able to access and leverage a range of services funded by different streams including BFET, WorkFirst, and King County Homeless Employment Services. The King County effort, funded at approximately \$1,090,000 annually, supports a homeless and employment navigator presence in each WorkSource office. WIA funds remain a small portion of the funding available to homeless individuals and do not directly target any homeless initiatives.

CONNECTION TO EMPLOYERS

The WDC builds a demand-driven workforce system that aligns the skill development of workers with industry demand as the foundation for economic growth and individual prosperity. Through its business services team, talent pipeline research, and cohort models, The WDC cultivates business relationships and identifies industry specific workforce development needs to tailor career pipelines. In 2013, the WDC's Business Services Team organized 87 career events and communicated over 7,500 openings to WorkSource and WIA youth partners.



Within the Employment Navigator programs there has been a focus on connecting families to career pathways using short-term sector training. The employment navigators work with housing staff and workforce providers to prepare and support families as they select and complete training programs and transition into employment.

In many communities, social enterprises are cropping up as a solution to employment and training services for individuals experiencing homelessness. One of the WDC service providers is Fare Start, a social enterprise business that hires and trains individuals who experience homelessness in restaurant work. Social enterprise businesses actually create jobs while simultaneously training and building skills for the individuals they hire.

Fare Start has also developed a reputation of developing quality job candidates ready for employment, which means restaurants often reach out to the enterprise directly for new hires. Through establishing good relationships with employers and developing a reputation for producing job-ready candidates, employers can depend on service providers to help bridge the gap in their hiring needs.

DATA AND RESULTS

The WDC of Seattle-King County participated in a [national study](#) funded by the Butler Family Fund. The report found that employment services for homeless job seekers generally have the following attributes: increased intensity; involve assertive engagement efforts; progress at a more deliberate pace; and involve integration within housing and workforce services—indicating specific needs beyond the needs jobseekers who are not homeless. The report also found that among homeless employment service programs integrated with One-Stop Career Centers, rates of employment 90 days after exit range from 36% to 54%. According to the Butler funded report, this is on average about 13% lower than the general One-Stop population.

Utilizing our own data systems to measure outcomes for jobseekers experiencing homelessness for WDC projects focused on homeless employment services show job placement rates of between 50% and 60% for individuals experiencing homelessness.



For the Employment Navigator program, outcome data between 2010 and 2013 is reflected in the following table:

Employment Navigator Results	King county Employment Navigator Project (April 2010 – June 2013)	Pierce County Employment & Housing Navigator Project (Jan. 2011 – Dec. 2013)
Individuals Enrolled	82	73 (61% of participants were on TANF)
Individuals Who Entered Employment	35 (45%)	37 (50%)
Average Wage of Individuals Who Entered Employment	\$10.56	\$11.00
Individuals Who Obtained Permanent Housing	29 (35%)	Not measured

SUGGESTIONS FOR REPLICATION

Replication would require designated, required housing programs to identify homeless households, while local workforce providers identify staff and resources needed to serve specific referrals. There would also need to be some approach to integrate other programs, such as TANF and Vocational Rehabilitation. We know that programs most successful at helping individuals who are homeless find good jobs are those that:

- Make services as accessible as possible
- Are responsive to the multiple needs of people experiencing homelessness
- Coordinate employment services closely with housing and other interventions.

Beyond these basic components, however, the WDC sees the national advisory group as an opportunity to discuss best practices in greater detail within the context of replication. The national advisory group is an ideal format for considering implementing new programs or practices that build upon the work that has already been done.



SUCCESS STORY

Undocumented migrant, single-mom

C.G., an undocumented migrant from Mexico, and her three-year-old son were homeless for a year and a half when C.G. was referred to the Seattle-King-Snohomish Counties (YWCA) Homeless Intervention (HIP) program. HIP helped C.G. overcome barriers like employment gaps, lack of references, effective job search strategies, and job techniques. HIP helped her obtain an ID, revise her resume, gave her job leads, and develop her interview skills.

After C.G. accepted a full time job paying \$16/hour, HIP then provided resources to C.G. to manage the stress of a new job and identify professional goals. Once she started earning money, she was provided with budgeting and money management assistance so that she could save money and pay first and last month's rent on a new apartment. She managed to stay in the transitional housing program before HIP referred her to the YWCA's Landlord Liaison Project to search for an affordable apartment. CG temporarily moved back in with her family, where she could search for housing and work a job HIP helped her to obtain. Over the holiday period, the YWCA helped her and her son with the Adopt-A-Family program. Most importantly, with help from the YWCA, C.G. was able to obtain permanent housing by renting an apartment.

COMMUNITY CONTACT

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