



Community Involvement Committee



Community Involvement Committee

TO: Chair Deborah Kafoury and Board of County Commissioners 5 pages

FROM: Community Involvement Committee

DATE: June 18th 2020

SUBJECT: Housing & Houselessness Subcommittee Recommendations

BACKGROUND & PROCESS

The Community Involvement Committee (CIC) Housing and Houselessness Subcommittee began work in August of 2019 to better understand the County's work with transgender and gender non-conforming people who have experienced housing instability or houselessness. In our work together, we had 10 meetings and have met with:

- Marc Jolin, Director of the Joint Office of Homeless Services
- April Rohman, Program Specialist Senior in the Joint Office of Homeless Services
- Scotty Sherington, Senior Equity and Inclusion Specialist in the Office of Diversity & Equity
- Liam Frost, Policy Advisor in the Chair's Office

We use the term "houselessness" to honor the fact that many people who experience housing instability or who have been forced to sleep on the streets do not endorse "homelessness" as a good description of their experience. We honor that the struggles of the houseless includes those experiencing a multitude of unstable housing experiences--from couchsurfing to staying in a shelter to sleeping on the sidewalk.

We chose to focus on the trans community in large part due to hearing from both our community connections and the Joint Office of Homeless Services that houselessness in the trans community is widespread and the existing services are inadequate and inaccessible for many. In addition, the overrepresentation of trans people in surveys and studies like the

Community Involvement Committee

County's annual Point in Time Count, along with immense existing community advocacy around this issue, helped us narrow our focus on houselessness in the trans community.

In the 2019 Point in Time Count, 42 people identify themselves as transgender, though it's suggested that the data doesn't capture all who are transgender or gender non-conforming, as discrimination and social stigma likely prevents people from feeling safe to disclose their true gender. National data confirms that trans and gender non-conforming people, especially those who are also people of color, continue to be overrepresented in the houseless population.

It's been heard from many local community members that the services for houseless trans people are inadequate and there are many barriers to access existing services. All members of this subcommittee reviewed numerous articles and studies related to houselessness in trans communities. In addition, everyone reached out to their personal and professional connections (which included those with lived experience, service providers, individual activists and organizations) to further learn about the challenges trans people are facing in accessing local housing resources. We heard from many of our contacts that the existing shelter and services infrastructure was inadequate for this population, that trans people often experienced discrimination and outright violence in these spaces. They also indicated that many of the members of this community were exhausted from bringing these issues up and sharing their personal stories over and over again with no action or investment from government leaders to address these problems. They shared with us a sense of hopelessness for any real or meaningful change. Often, trans folks were navigating discrimination and harrassment both on the streets, as well as in shelters due to their gender identity.

We conducted research on the policies and practices of other jurisdictions who have done work to address houselessness within the trans community in their cities. Our subcommittee has had difficulties connecting with contacts in other jurisdictions, but Office of Community Involvement staff were able to have a conversation with staff in the City of San Francisco's Office of Transgender Initiatives. Last year, San Francisco began offering housing subsidies specifically prioritizing low and no income trans people. The information we received on their programs and the ways they are engaging in partnership with the trans community has helped inform our recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Approve Program Offer #10052J- Safety Off The Street- Trans Specific Services

Members: Richard Barker, Claire Carder, Desiree' DuBoise, Michelle Kosta, Rhiannon Martin, Sahar Yarjani Muranovic, Marvin Peña, Emily Purry, Juanita Santana, Mike Savara, Amanda Squiemphen-Yazzie & Sachini Weerawardena

Staff: Olivia Kilgore & Dani Bernstein

Community Involvement Committee

The CIC Housing and Homelessness Subcommittee wholeheartedly supports the Program Offer #10052J - Safety Off The Street- Trans Specific Services. We believe that this program offer is an excellent addition to the services and supports that trans houseless individuals have available to them. We implore the Board of County Commissioners to approve this Program Offer. We also want to emphasize the importance of including people with lived experience in the planning, implementation and monitoring process for a culturally specific service such as this one. The Subcommittee believes that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it's important to begin to offer new ways of providing non-congregate shelter for people experiencing homelessness. This Program Offer has the capability of supporting trans individuals with needed support to allow for increased protection from the extremely high rates of violence that they face at the hands of community members.¹ Trans women of color are shown to be acutely at risk of violence across the Country, according to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey.² Additionally, we believe that our below recommendations will augment and enhance this intervention by allowing for better collaboration, increased voice and input from people with lived experience and more focused work to better connect the County with this vulnerable population in the future.

2. A trans community advisory board

Our second recommendation is for the establishment of a trans community advisory board to advise the County on their joint effort with the City of Portland to better serve those experiencing homelessness in our communities. Both Los Angeles and the City of San Francisco have created transgender advisory councils, that have been crucial to establishing programs and services for this community, especially around housing. This would give the trans community a platform to have a voice and give them political power within the local government structure. The trans community advisory board could provide leadership and expertise around a variety of issues, ranging from healthcare disparities, housing and homelessness to broader issues like transphobia and discrimination. We recommend that, similar to San Francisco's advisory council, this advisory board not be subject to public meeting laws to better build trust and safety for the community.

If the City and County move forward with Program Offer #10052J- Safety Off The Street- Trans Specific Services, a trans community advisory board could function similar to the board of the Diane Wade House. Decision makers and leaders desperately need the wisdom and

¹ [Reforming Police & Ending Anti-Transgender Violence](#)

² [Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey](#)

Members: Richard Barker, Claire Carder, Desiree' DuBoise, Michelle Kosta, Rhiannon Martin, Sahar Yarjani Muranovic, Marvin Peña, Emily Purry, Juanita Santana, Mike Savara, Amanda Squiemphen-Yazzie & Sachini Weerawardena

Staff: Olivia Kilgore & Dani Bernstein

Community Involvement Committee

expertise of trans people with lived experience to inform their work and guide our funding allocations. We know that funding a project of this magnitude will require continual community guidance and accountability.

3. One dedicated full time staff for the Multnomah County/City of Portland

In San Francisco, the Director for the Office of Transgender Initiatives is also a Senior Policy Advisor to the Mayor, and we recommend that wherever a position is housed with Multnomah County or the City of Portland, it is structured so the staff has direct access to key decision-makers and can build trust with the community.

4. Increased collaboration with other jurisdictions on the West Coast

We recommend increased and consistent communication with other cities on the West Coast who are working to address trans houselessness. This could increase the likelihood of collaborations across jurisdictions to help address this issue as a region. The trans population is a small percentage of the entire population, but overrepresented in people experiencing houselessness, especially in the West. We feel it's important that JOHS works to establish and maintain communication with other jurisdictions working on this issue in order to develop services and programs that effectively serve trans people experiencing houselessness in Multnomah County.

Local government staff have reported encountering barriers when trying to engage with this community, due in part to mistrust in government systems that stems from a substantiated history of a lack of follow through when it comes to this population. Implementing these recommendations would be a concrete demonstration from the County on the commitment to serve this community.

A NOTE ON THE BACKGROUND AND LIFE EXPERIENCES OF SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Desiree' DuBoise (she/they) is a Research Assistant working on various projects in the area of Psychology. Desiree' identifies as Black and non-binary, and is concerned with issues of houselessness, police brutality, and the LGBTQ+ community.

Emily Purry (she/her) is the Director of Independence at INCIGHT, the Founder of RAPID and the Owner of Purry Consultants. Emily was previously employed by Multnomah County, where she served as IDEA (Including Disability in Equity and Access) Co-Chair, and as a member of the Safety, Trust and Belonging Advisory Committee, the DCHS Diversity, Equity and Social Justice

Members: Richard Barker, Claire Carder, Desiree' DuBoise, Michelle Kosta, Rhiannon Martin, Sahar Yarjani Muranovic, Marvin Peña, Emily Purry, Juanita Santana, Mike Savara, Amanda Squiemphen-Yazzie & Sachini Weerawardena

Staff: Olivia Kilgore & Dani Bernstein

Community Involvement Committee

Committee, and the Access U IT committee. She is passionate about advocating for Social Justice and educating people from her lived experience as a person with a disability.

Mike Savara (he/him) is the Assistant Director of Homeless Services at Oregon Housing and Community Services. Previously, he spent 6 years at Central City Concern providing housing support services and behavioral healthcare. He served as Chair for the Homeless Alcohol and Drug Intervention Network and has been a member of the A Home for Everyone Health & Housing workgroup, the Oregon Housing Alliance Homelessness workgroup, and the National Healthcare for the Homeless Council Policy Committee. Mike is passionate about making sure that equity and racial justice is at the heart of all of our services and supports for vulnerable people.

Sahar Yarjani Muranovic (she/they) is the Executive Director of the Oregon chapter of National Organization for Women (NOW). She previously worked for the Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), sits on the David Douglas School Board, and is also on the Portland DSA Steering Committee.

This recommendation from the Housing & Houselessness Subcommittee has been approved by the Community Involvement Committee on June 18, 2020.

Members: Richard Barker, Claire Carder, Desiree' DuBoise, Michelle Kosta, Rhiannon Martin, Sahar Yarjani Muranovic, Marvin Peña, Emily Purry, Juanita Santana, Mike Savara, Amanda Squiemphen-Yazzie & Sachini Weerawardena
Staff: Olivia Kilgore & Dani Bernstein