



Date: April 8, 2009

To: Mayor's Executive Team

From: MYC Youth Homelessness Group

Subject: Roving Mental Health Specialist

Briefing Objective: Provide information on needed drop-in mental health counselor for Seattle's homeless youth population

Issue Statement: Homelessness is a grim reality facing thousands of Seattle youth today. Mental health issues are a huge factor in creating and exacerbating the issue of youth homelessness. Many homeless youth have severe mental health problems that remain unaddressed due to a lack of easily accessible mental health services. Youth with these mental health issues are much less likely to seek help or be able to take care of themselves and find housing.

Background: Our proposal to implement a drop-in mental health counselor for Seattle's homeless youth population is intended to provide some necessary mental health services to at-risk youth. A large percentage (20-50%) of homeless youth face serious mental health problems including personality disorders, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among others. Many homeless youth have PTSD from a history of abuse and if they do not already have it, the trauma of living on the street can cause it. It is necessary to treat these disorders quickly because once a mental health problem manifests many youth spiral downward until it is almost impossible to rehabilitate them. A children's health fund survey found that of youth with mental health disorders more than 53% had attempted suicide at least once. We propose to provide a low-barrier mental health counselor to provide services to the 1000-2000 homeless youth of Seattle who can get it nowhere else and, if left without services, become a serious risk to their own safety.

Outreach: The issue of youth homelessness came up frequently in the five youth community meetings held by the Mayor's Youth Council, causing us to form our youth homelessness group. After forming, we met with the employees of and toured the ROOTS homeless shelter in the university district, the 45th street clinic in Wallingford, the Orion Center in capitol hill/down town area and the University District Youth Center. We spoke with several different people at these locations who all seemed extremely enthusiastic (even "salivating" in the word of Ruth Blaw from YouthCare) about our proposal.

Proposal:

- *Goals:*
 - Provide drop-in mental health counselor at the following locations, which represent four different regions of Seattle. We chose to have a roving mental health counselor rather than a stationary one because they would be able to reach a greater and more diverse population. Of course having 4 counselors, one at each location, would be best however we must consider the current economic status of the city. We would like our proposal to act as a pilot program, demonstrating the need and hopefully leading to more counselors in the future.
 - YouthCare's Orion Center in downtown Seattle
 - Rising Out Of The Shadows (ROOTS Young Adult Shelter) in the University District
 - Peace for the Streets by Kids from the Streets (PSKS) in Capitol Hill
 - YMCA's Resource Center in South Seattle
 - This mental health counselor would provide short term crisis counseling and then, if needed, set the youth up with a longer term, more in depth counselor. This would allow the drop-in counselor to help as many youth as possible. The counselor would also help homeless youth set up with a case manager who can help the youth navigate the system and find housing.
- *Steps for implementation:*
 - Work with the four different service providers to coordinate timing and working locations.
 - Hire a low-barrier harm-reduction mental health counselor. This person must have experience working with homeless youth and be outgoing, likeable, dedicated and must work flexible hours and conduct community outreach.
- *Resources required:*
 - Approximately \$80,000 for a mental health counselor to provide regular low barrier mental health services at 4 citywide homeless youth/young adult agencies in North Seattle, Capitol Hill, Downtown, and South Seattle.
 - Mental health outpatient center to employ and provide supervision to this position
 - Location at service center for one-on-one confidential counseling
 - In these economic times, if this funding is not available we are asking for \$17,000 in supplemental funding to maintain the current counselor in North Seattle beginning in October 2009