



City of Ferndale

POVERTY TASK FORCE REPORT

MEETING DATE: Oct. 2nd, 2019

SUBJECT: Youth in Crisis

DATE: 9/27/19

FROM: Riley Sweeney, Communications Officer

PRESENTATION BY: Riley Sweeney

SYNOPSIS: Here is an overview of the issues and resources relating to Youth in Crisis and how that interplays with vulnerable populations in north Whatcom County.

STAFF NOTES: “Youth in Crisis” is by necessity a broad topic. Originally, I had intended to focus this discussion specifically on homeless youth but the discussions over the last year have articulated the broad spectrum of challenges facing our vulnerable populations. A young person in trouble may be homeless, or their home life may be chaotic, impacted by domestic violence, drugs or mental illness. They may be facing intense pressure from their family over their sexual orientation or gender identity or struggling with the impacts of generational poverty. They may be temporarily without a home or simply without a safe place to be during a few hours each day.

One thing that makes this such a compelling issue is that making a change at this point in their lives prevents them from becoming chronic homeless – reducing the impact to social services for a generation. Several members of our community, including some serving on this board, faced homelessness in their youth and since have built a strong life for themselves. We want to make sure that opportunity to rebound is available for everyone in our community.

BACKGROUND:

Statistics and Research



In 2018, the Whatcom County Health Department, the Opportunity Council and the City of Bellingham teamed up to study homelessness with a focus on youth. You can find the entire report here: https://www.opcco.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/FINAL-Whatcom-2018-homeless-count-report_06292018.pdf

Here's some salient points from that report:

- In 2018 the Point-in-time count identified **150 youths counted as being literally homeless**. This accounted for 18% of the total homeless population.
- Beyond that, **they counted an additional 46 youth households** that were unstably housed (couch surfing with friends or relatives on an interim basis to avoid becoming homeless).
- **35% of those homeless youth identify as LGBTQ**. Nationally, 20-40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ.
- Approximately 3.5% of students enrolled in the Ferndale School District experience a housing crisis during the school year. **This is approximately 120 students.**

Building Changes, a non-profit that studies homeless students in Washington State, did a deep dive into the causes of homelessness and released a report here: <https://schoolhousewa.org/data/analysis/academic-outcomes-for-students-experiencing-homelessness-are-far-worse-than-those-for-housed-students/>

Some details from that report:

- The prevalence of student homelessness **is growing faster in Washington** than the national average.
- **Washington had the sixth highest number and eighth highest rate** of students experiencing homelessness in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.
- Students experiencing homelessness are in every grade level. Grade 12 has the largest number of any grade, and about half are in kindergarten through Grade 5.

- Statewide, **six out of 10 students experiencing homelessness are students of color.**
- The student homelessness rate is higher or substantially higher among students who are Black/African American, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, Hispanic/Latino, or two or more races when compared to White students.

Resources for Youth in Crisis



Ferndale School District

The first line of defense against homeless youth is the Ferndale School District. They have a designated Homeless Liaison, Kim Bunch (<https://www.ferndalesd.org/student-services/homeless-support>) and family community coordinators assigned to each elementary school (<https://www.ferndalesd.org/student-services/family-community-coordinators>). They work on a case-by-case basis to keep kids stable throughout their academic career, including providing transportation, food and additional support.



Northwest Youth Services

Northwest Youth Services is a non-profit organization serving young people ages 13-24 experiencing homelessness in Whatcom and Skagit Counties.

We support youth in identifying goals and building the skills necessary to reach their own sense of stability.

Northwest Youth Services offers housing, street outreach, help finding a job or enrolling in school, connection to mental health services, support for LGBTQ youth, restorative justice for juvenile offenders, and referrals to other services in the community.

The City of Ferndale contributes \$4,000 a year to the Northwest Youth Services Teen Court as part of our organizational grant program.