

Blue Ribbon Task Force

Focus Groups

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Focus Group #2: Flynn Home

Question 1: How do you define homelessness?

- #5 Sleep under bridge; nowhere to lay head; find a dry warm place to lay
- #2 No home; nowhere to go or call home or lay head
- #7 No home to go to; no ride; walk the streets; no job
- #3 Wonder where will get next meal or where you will stay; worry; have no job; no direction to go
- #1 Nothing – no future or hope – nothing to call your own; at the mercy of circumstances; no control/say; helpless
- #6 Lack shelter; incompetence; loneliness; discontentment; without rest; long, long walk; hopeless feeling
- #5 Shame; get looks; clothes dirty; bothers you – looks
- #1 Feel worthless, helpless, loneliness; you against the world – hopeless; want so badly for things to be different; hard to stay focused on overcoming the situation; playing vs. a stacked deck
- #2 Give up; don't care
- #5 Outcast by society; scared to get around you; people don't want to help you; would run as quickly as gave change
- #6 Ask for someone to feed me – nothing like a home cooked meal; no place to wash self; worthless feeling; spirit led me to shelter – hopeless; cold feeling

Question 2: How did you become homeless?

- #2 Drug abuse – people gave up on me – tired up putting up with me – went on street – no more friends
- #1 Started with mental health issues – depression – self medicated to feel better – got worse like caught up in a whirlpool
There is a stigma about mental illness
Cost him marriage; kids; didn't seek help

Abandonment issues – careful not to let people get too close – kept distance b/c then people couldn't hurt him

- #5 Alcoholic father was abusive to mom. Lived with dad after separation – exposure to alcohol as a child. Dropped out of school to work to help pay rent (15 yo). Got DUI – lost license – no hope – depressed – dad not supportive re: depression; No education; self medicated; no one would give him a chance – scared to ask b/c of rejection; hard to get job – if in construction = SA. Discouraged – no one wants to trust you
- #3 Grew up without parents – lived with grandmother. Alcohol and marijuana when 15 yo. Charged for selling marijuana at 19yo. After jail – got back in same circle and never got out.
- #7 Drug abuse – messed up over and over – lost everything
- #6 Father died when young – had a good past (marriage, job) – made bad choices – alcohol and drugs; false sense of self
- #5 People in negative circle; no education; felt unworthy (not doing what others were doing); hard to get into school b/c of money – can't get money with no education – hurts a lot
- #6 All our fault – do it to ourselves; step out of boundaries with the law and grace of God; self destruction – sick in eyes of law – not violent crimes but past doesn't go away – considered a broken person
- #1 Perception of homeless people is that they are not intelligent/educated – it's rough out there and you have to have your wits about you. People are very giving Nov/Dec. It's made worse by the way people perceive you. Most people are 1-2 paychecks away from being homeless. Once in the system are playing against a stacked deck. One mistake – will pay forever – he was facing problems due to a felony 25 years ago – was denied a job b/c of it last week. Job market poor for a 50yo. Hard to maintain a job with nowhere to live.

Question 3: How long have you been homeless?

- #7 1 year
- #2 couple of months – different periods of time – hitch hiked from state to state; would knock out store windows so could get in jail to have a place to stay and eat
- #3 couple of days/weeks at different times
- #1 off and on for over 10 years
- # off and on 6 months

Question 5: How has homelessness affected the way you think about yourself?

For some reason, I have no notes on this question – I think b/c they had answered during other questions.

Question 6: Thinking back to when you first became homeless, what would it have taken to prevent it?

- #6 Making good choices – stay with what I know is right. Have faith – guard heart – pray – self preservation.
- #4 Didn't know information about resources (most of the group agreed with this statement). Was stuck in an area with drugs.
- #1 Before was homeless, was not aware of the services. Services are “trying to feed everyone out of the same spoon” (not geared toward individual needs – all homeless people have different needs). Was lost in the herd.
- #5 Construction work was up and down – not steady. Needed education and knowledge. Didn't qualify for the services b/c was working.
- #6 Need to know resources. Would hustle a job to get money rather than getting help. Didn't want to ask for help – wanted to do on own. Chose short jobs over making appointments for services.
- #1 Difficulty of maintaining – can't afford to turn down anything.

Question 7: What do you need to maintain a home/housing?

- #5 Good/steady job – enough income to pay bills
More education
- #2 Willpower to leave drugs and alcohol alone
- #3 Help finding a job when you have criminal background
- #7 Be clean and sober
Work hard every day
- #1 Affordable housing – often affordable housing is in a neighborhood that is not good for people with SA problems. Economically forced to stay in the “hood.”
- #4 Education
Didn't understand the responsibility of paying bills

#5 Someone to work with us – help stay in a home, find job (esp. for people with criminal records)
Classes to learn about financial responsibility

#2 Education – money management

#3 Education – money management

Question 8: What would you do if you had unlimited resources and could end homelessness?

#5 Help others – Education!

#4 Help with transition – help find a job and monitor them

#6 Evaluation at job until you know how to manage yourself

#2 If had all services would deal with depression

Question 9: What effect has homelessness had on your children?

#2 Haven't seen kids in 4 year – terrible – unfit father – when homeless have no where to meet/take children

#1 Not able to spend quality time to bring them where he is – depression - misses little girl – hasn't seen her in 2 years – missed 3yo first steps – has no where to take them

Question 10: Did you ever double up? Do you know others who have?

#1 Yes

#6 Jail for 4 months – stayed with a guy after got out of jail – was alcohol in that house – doubling up helps but the “blind can't lead the blind”

Question 11: What three things should Pitt County do to end homelessness?

#1 Educate
Public awareness of seriousness of homelessness (accurate numbers)

#2 Jobs with little experience needed
Education to get a job

#6 Equal opportunity (for non-violent criminal records)
Monitor people in jobs
More outreach to the homeless
People often get help and don't need it; those who need it can't get it

- #1 Prioritize the resources that we do have
Educate those who administer services – need better insight into problems of homeless
- #5 Help with housing
Counseling to help people stay where they get – show them resources
- #1 Don't know what to ask for
- #7 Education
Give people a chance, even if they have a felony on their record – don't hold it against them forever
- #3 Help getting a job
Transportation
Education
- #2 Transportation
- #6 Access to jobs for underprivileged
Education
Job training
- #1 Job training – temp agencies won't accept people with any criminal history
- #4 Job link
More support and knowledge for businesses about tax credits for employing those with criminal records

Question 12: Anything else you'd like to share?

- #5 This process gives me hope that something will happen