

Focus Group #2

Date: 02/05/08

Flynn Home

1. How do you define homelessness?

P5: Sleeping under a bridge, nowhere to lay your head. I've slept in the woods.

P2: Yeah, nowhere to lay your heard.

P7: Not having a home, walking the streets.

P3: Wonder where next meal is gonna be, no job, no direction.

P1: Having nothing, no hope, nothing to call your own, no control, at mercy of circumstances.

P6: Feeling of incompetence, loneliness, weariness, "very long, long walk", homeless feeling.

P5: Ashamed of looks you get from dirty clothes.

P1: Loneliness, you against the world, helplessness you feel, wanting so badly for things to be different.

P2: Makes you want to give up-world coming to an end. Don't care about anything.

P5: Society treats you like an outcast, like you have a disease, nowhere to turn.

P6: When I was homeless I had to ask for something to eat. People give you money for food but nothing like a home cooked meal. Used restaurants to clean up, sneak in to take a bath. You can't ever stop, it's a cold feeling.

2. How did you become homeless?

P2: Drug abuse, people gave up on me, got tired of me. No friends.

P1: Suffer from depression, self medicated with drugs. In whirlpool, stigma from mental illness. Brought up to believe mental illness as crazy. Attached medications as equaling crazy. Self medicate instead of taking prescriptions. Homelessness was like house of cards, depression at the root. Me against the world. Issues from early on-abandonment. Even now it's hard to let people get close to me. When you leave it doesn't matter. Lost my best friend, sister, and mother died very close to each other.

P5: Alcoholic father, abused my mom, mom cried to me not to be like my dad. When they separated I went with dad to bars. At 15 I quit school and went to work with Dad and he fired me. Dad wouldn't let me go to a doctor. I had no education and self medicated. Dad

didn't believe in mental illness. I only knew how to do construction. Same crowd, drinkers, no education to get out.

P3: Grew up without parents. Older grandma raised me. At 15 she couldn't keep up with me. Drinking, smoking weed and over the years started selling reefer, went to jail, got out, did it again, stayed in same circle.

P7: Drugs until I lost everything.

P6: Own egotistical thoughts. Father died when I was young. Been married, good job/state job. Bad choices on my part, never satisfied, never enough, hard to explain. Alcohol and drugs.

P5: Felt unworthy, didn't do things other people were accomplishing. Once out hard to get back into school.

P6: Do it ourselves. Stepping out of boundaries of the law once you get in trouble it follows you. Jobs big things held against you. No cure for criminal record. Past does not go away.

P1: Homeless situation is exacerbated by people's perception that homeless people aren't intelligent but when you're homeless you have to have your wits about you. November, December people are very giving – March not so much. If you're homeless you're somehow less than. Everyone is one or 2 paychecks away from street. Last felony was 25 years ago but I was denied a job this week because of it. Took test at ASMO, scored highest in my group, went through 2 interviews, went through the STRIVE program, they looked at my history and I didn't get the job. Hard to keep a job with nowhere to live. Shelter hours didn't coincide with work hours. People don't understand what you're up against. No job market for 50 year old felon.

3. How long have you been homeless or were you homeless?

P1: 1 year.

P2: Couple of months state to state hitching, get locked up off and on so I could sleep.

P3: Off and on for 2 days or a week at a time.

P1: Off and on over 10 years.

P5: Off and on over 5 years.

P6: Off and on over 6 months.

4. How has homelessness affected the way you think about yourself?

A lot of conversation during this group. Answer mixed in with others.

5. Thinking back to when you first became homeless, what would it have taken to prevent it?

P6: Making good choices, not blaming others, not getting led astray. Guarding heart and feelings. #1 is self-preservation.

P4: I was homeless for one year and had no knowledge of resources that were out there to help me. I didn't take a bath for the first 6 months, had no idea that kind of resource was there for homeless people.

P1: "Not knowing about services when you got them. Everyone not the same, homeless, yes but needs are different". Funds and resources are limited. "You get lost in the herd".

P4: "I wasn't aware of services that could prevent homelessness".

P5: "Education would help – even McDonald's you have to have experience. They don't want construction workers serving food".

P6: Always wanted to bear my own burden. I didn't want to ask for help. Choose between a job & working a getting help. Doctor's appointment or a job for the day. Service appointments conflict with work schedule.

P1: In jail for the last year for child support. Court, probation fees, child support, Flynn Home fees. I can't afford to turn down any work to get help.

6. What do you need to maintain a home/housing?

P5: Job, money to pay bills, education.

P2: Leave drugs and alcohol alone. I can get a good job. I have a good job.

P3: Help finding a job. "If I tell the truth on applications or lie I can't get the job".

P7: "Stay prayed up, clean and sober."

P1: Affordable housing in good clean neighborhoods but I can't afford it.

P4: Education. Need to understand responsibilities of paying bills, it's not all about me and my wants.

P5: Money to get in place, help finding a job. Maybe company could help people. Class would help teach us financial responsibilities.

P2: Education and money management.

P5: "Want steak but need to eat hamburger".

P1: I never paid my bills.

7. What would you do if you had unlimited resources and could end homelessness?

P5: Praise God and help others.

P4: Vocational Rehabilitation had a good job program on 2000. Good model, good discharge planning, assigned counselor, went to client, now client goes to them. East Carolina Vocational Center trains for jobs, helps find jobs. Lot of cuts.

P6: Need to be followed and observed closely.

P2: Live better, no stress. No depression.

8. What effect has homelessness had on your children?

P2: Haven't seen in 4 years. I'm an unfit father.

P1: Adult and small children-nowhere for them to come visit me or spend time with me. Talking on phone is not the same. Missed 3 year olds first steps.

P2: Nowhere to take them. Don't want to meet them in an alley.

9. Many experts think estimates of the numbers who are homeless are not accurate because they do not include people who are doubling up with relatives or friends. Did you ever double up? Do you know others who have?

P1: Seen doubled, tripled, quadrupled! A lot of people do it.

P6: Yes, I've doubled up.

Everyone in the group had or knew people that had doubled up.

10. What three things should Pitt County do to end homelessness?

P1: Educate, public more aware of problem, stop by soup kitchens.

P2: Give people jobs, offer people with no education a job or education.

P6: Equal opportunity for non violent criminals, monitor more, more outreach.

P2: Wrong people are getting help.

P1: Prioritize our resources. Pitt County has a lot of resources, we just need to prioritize them. Educate service providers about what it's like to be homeless.

P2: People get help and don't want to work.

P5: Counseling to help stay where we are. Learn not to lose housing.

P1: Educate about services.

P5: Show us what we need to do and we'll do it.

P7: Educate, give people with felonies a chance.

P3: Transportation, jobs.

P6: Jobs, education, job training.

P1: More job training.

P4: Businesses need to know about tax credits for hiring felons.