

**BUILDING A SYSTEM FOR HOMELESS FAMILIES AND  
AT RISK FAMILIES TO ATTAIN EMPLOYMENT AND  
EDUCATION SUCCESS**

**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM  
THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES STEERING COMMITTEE  
TO SKILLUP WASHINGTON**

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***The Economic Opportunities Steering Committee wants to express our gratitude to the thirty-three Homeless Families, thirty-two Providers, Peer Learning Group and Economic Opportunities Steering Committee Advisors who shared their time, experiences and insights to help us develop this report.***

# **Economic Opportunities Steering Committee Participant List**

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## I. Introduction

Two significant initiatives to impact poverty are underway in our community.

One initiative, **SkillUp Washington** is engaged in an effort to ensure that low-income residents have the skills to be competitive for family wage jobs. Concerned those 75,000 King County residents are living below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level and lack a postsecondary credential or degree, and that less than 5% of these individuals earn a post-secondary credential each year, SkillUp is implementing strategies to address this problem.

The other initiative, a new pilot program of the **Washington Families Fund**, is involved in a three county strategy to reduce family homelessness by 50% over 10 years. The initiative will include piloting and tailoring new strategies to meet the unique needs of families in their communities, including an emphasis on developing economic opportunities leading to self-sufficiency.

The people engaged in these initiatives are acutely aware that many vulnerable groups in our community are not able to earn wages to support their families: the most vulnerable of whom include homeless families. Conservative estimates are that 7,300 persons in families, including about 5,000 children, experience homelessness in King County each year.

Stakeholders involved in these initiatives are also aware that the lines between people earning low incomes and those experiencing homelessness often blur. Many people in our community are at risk of becoming homeless because they cannot afford housing. 20,000 households in Seattle alone, or 22% of all renter households, pay 50% of household income for rent.<sup>1</sup>

To ensure that homeless families and those who are at risk of homelessness have access to career and college opportunities, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation awarded funding to SkillUp Washington to enhance its planning efforts and to coordinate with King County's Washington Families Fund planning process. This work is led by King County Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) and supported by Building Changes.

<sup>1</sup> (<http://www.seattle.gov/council/housing> levy attachments/11c.pdf)

The Washington Families Fund Economic Opportunities Steering Committee was formed in early 2009 and chaired by George Dignan of King County. This Committee has focused on research activities and development of strategies to ensure that homeless families and those who are at risk of homelessness are integrated into the SkillUp Washington initiatives, including the vision for identifying on-ramps and bridge programs leading to post-secondary attainment through the newly formed College for Working Adults (CWA).

The Steering Committee's goals are to:

- Describe the strategies needed to effectively support homeless and at risk families to participate and succeed in employment and post secondary education, drawing upon the expertise of providers, colleges, research; and homeless families themselves;
- Assess the strengths and gaps of the local service system in place to support the education and career goals of homeless families;
- Recommend system building strategies that are most needed to build on local system strengths, address gaps and successfully connect homeless/at risk of homelessness families with training, college, work and educational opportunities available through the community and technical colleges. The Economic Opportunities Steering Committee coordinated their work over a four month period with a research firm, Business Government Community Connections, to develop and administer interview tools to homeless families and local employment providers who serve homeless persons and to consider the implications of the data collected via these efforts.

The information in this report draws upon the following sources:

- Interviews with heads of households from 33 homeless families, each of whom had at least one child less than 18 years of age.
- Interviews with 32 providers including staff from DSHS, FSET, WorkSource, WIA, homeless employment agencies, K-12, multi service centers, colleges, libraries, housing authorities and nonprofit agencies, and other community and faith based providers. Key respondents were chosen because they had expertise serving low income and homeless families, and were knowledgeable about the supports that families want, need and use to become self-sufficient. Stakeholders were also chosen for their expertise regarding the strengths and challenges of the service systems to which families turn.

- Surveys of employment and education providers regarding their experiences serving homeless and low income persons.
- Interviews with persons from other locales who were operating different types of homeless employment or college focused programs. These interviews provided documentation of successful services provided, lessons learned, and recommendations for improvements.
- Coordination with and review of King County's planning of the Washington Families Fund pilot, including the July draft of the *Landscape Assessment: Family Homelessness in King County*.

## II. Family Interviews

Why is it necessary to build a system for homeless and at risk families to attain employment and education success? According to the *Landscape Assessment: Family Homelessness in King County* the majority (95%) of these households earns under 30% Average Median Income (AMI) (source: 2008 One Night Count Shelter Survey). This report goes on to explain that 24% of all renters in King County earn under 30% of the area median income and only 1% of the units are affordable to this group. This report notes that the data is even more disturbing as many homeless families have a negative rental history, poor credit or criminal histories. Against this backdrop it is clear that community and education pipelines for homeless families play an essential role in promoting the housing and employment stability of families.

The Steering Committee wanted to hear firsthand the kinds of challenges that low income people are facing, and what they would like to see in a community pipeline to jobs and college.

A total of thirty three homeless families were interviewed. The interview pool included thirteen families who were currently participating in the Homeless Intervention Programs (HIP: homeless programs operated by Fare Start, CPC, YWCA, and Seattle Conservation Corps) and five homeless families who had recently exited these programs.

*The interviews with families underscored the need to develop a workforce pipeline which successfully accommodates the different education and employment backgrounds, circumstances and experiences faced by homeless families, and integrates child care, housing, relocation support and family advocacy.*

Fifteen families were interviewed at other locations, including transitional housing sites; faith based organizations, a homeless school, a family support program, a community college, libraries and food banks. Interviews were conducted with families served by Goodwill, South King County Multi Service Center, the YWCA, Seattle Public Schools, Solid Ground, Family Connections and Refugee Women's Alliance. The family experiences described in this report are not unique; rather they reflect the types of circumstances and challenges faced by families who the community pipeline is striving to serve.

***The needs of families who wanted to go to college were complex***

Seven of the thirty-three families who were interviewed were interested in the idea of going to college. Their comments and situations shed light on the complexity of engaging homeless families in college. This group included three persons who had enrolled in college for brief periods, one who had finished a GED in a HIP program and six who had high school degrees. At least three of these individuals thought that they would need to take some developmental education classes *before* they could go to college because they had "tested low" on CASAS tests and needed to build their basic skills. Three of the seven could only take one class at a time because they were engaged in court ordered efforts to repay fines, or had mandated treatment or parenting obligations that would make it impossible to take more courses. All seven said they would need tutoring, childcare and transportation assistance to succeed in college.

The benefit status of these seven families is also a program design and cost consideration. Assuming they were going to college in the next two years, four would lose their current child care benefits during this time, and at least four would need to work while going to school given the large amount of past bills and fines the families owed, which ranged from \$610 to \$5,000. In addition, six would need to move and find new housing, based on the terms of their current housing, which could also require the building of new support networks. Two families were in their first six months of recovery, and two were regaining custody of children – challenges that could require additional support. One of the families who needed to work had a felony in his record, and was having trouble getting a job. None had a car, only one had a bank account, and one did not think he was eligible for college financial assistance because he had not paid back a loan from a proprietary organization. Only one family had no special circumstances (recovery, child custody, moving, etc.) that would make college participation more difficult to negotiate.

The interviews revealed that many families can and want to work, though the path they will need to take will differ. Pseudonyms are used. Excerpts from some of the interviews follow.

***When the right supports are there families can make an amazing amount of progress***

**Family Health and Circumstances**

- 26% had a mental health diagnosis
- 33% alcohol abuse, including 16% who were also engaged in drug abuse
- 33% experienced domestic violence
- 13% were involved in CPS and child custody issues
- 13% had special needs children
- 16% had a spouse or partner in jail
- Family Health concerns – included breast cancer (1); diabetes(5); morbid obesity (8); asthma (4); 1 back injury from workplace

The interviews shed light on the huge potential of families – showing that with the right supports some families make significant progress.

One woman who was served in a Homeless Intervention Project illustrated this point. A self described heroin and drug addict who “been voted out of” Tent City, Amy Sampson’s experiences defy the traditional predictions for getting her life back on track. When she entered the HIP program she had recently exited a treatment program, and was working with child welfare to get her children returned. Her highest grade of education was 9<sup>th</sup> grade “and back then I was D-U-M” she said, adding “that is how I would have spelled it”. Three months later, she has only missed one day of work, had one of her two children returned to her care, passed her GED, and was working hard to get her older son returned. Living in a residential treatment program, eight year old Matthew will face a long road ahead to address serious behavioral problems- but “I will be by his side”. Amy now wants to go to college and is being urged by her child welfare worker, Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor, and therapist to do so. She said she was able to make this progress because the HIP program allowed her to take up to two hours per day time off work, if needed, to go to important meetings, GED was offered on site and “I studied my ass off at home”. Her case managers from the HIP program and DSHS were very supportive, and she was earning money every day on a work crew. Although the work was not in an area she wanted to pursue in the future “the stars were aligned to let me work, study, get my child back and stay sober”.

***Some families are in trauma and need time to slowly reenter the workforce.***

**Family Debt/Subsidy Status**

- 14 families owe money for driver's license tickets
- 2 families owe back child support average \$2,085.00, ranging from \$340 - \$3,830.00
- 1 family is in default on a college loan from a proprietary organization: he was a refugee and thought he was getting a grant that did not need to be paid back
- 8 families owed court fines, average \$845.00, ranging from \$235.00 - \$4,100.00.

**Family Assets**

- Own working car (13%)
- Have car insurance (6%)
- Have working computer (13%)
- Have bank account (13%)
- Have savings account (3%)

Anita Estados, a Latina woman, had faced 15 years of abuse prior to leaving her husband. "In my family you don't leave", she said, "But one day I decided no more". Thirty-three years old with a 10<sup>th</sup> grade education, and only church volunteer experience Anita found it hard to think of herself as "someone who had a job". Her DSHS case worker and housing manager took a real interest in her, she said, "and I started to volunteer in a local food bank, then in my child's school, and now I am going to get a GED. " Anita wears the physical signs of abuse – has lost her sight in one eye, and is missing a front tooth. Her 14 year old son's behavior often results in her receiving several calls a week from the school, and his younger brother is "starting to rebel". But some things are improving.

Anita is starting to study for her GED. "Once we studied together recently – he said it is funny to see me have to do that". Anita is worried about what will happen when her TANF ends, and says "I don't know for sure what I want". She thinks the child care training that the College for Working Adults is offering would be interesting, adding or "maybe I want to be a nurse". As she put it, "the clock is ticking and I am getting stronger. I feel I am getting ready though I know it will always be hard to put food on the table". A resident in transitional housing, Anita has no relatives to turn to and "in fact I need to stay away from them because they want me to return to my husband and say they will kidnap me". When the interview was ending she said, "I know every second counts and I should be studying for my GED, but sometimes I need every second just to recover". She credits her progress to her domestic violence support group, TANF caseworker and to her church. Her advice to the Steering Committee, "People like me need help with our children – if I had a job now I would be in trouble for dealing with my son's school so many times".

**Many families have bad memories of school, and do not think an education will make a difference**

**Family Characteristics**

- 78% of families were headed by a single parent
- 42% of children in families were under age 4
- 58% of children in families were 5-18 years of age
- 24% of families were Caucasian and 76% persons of color
- 31% had no high school diploma or GED
- 69% were homeless for the first time
- 22% were homeless for the second time
- 8% were homeless for the third time
- 1% were homeless for the fourth time

Sasha was thirty minutes late to her interview, noting that right before she had met with a pro bono lawyer about some fines she had to pay and then had to go to a state ordered counseling appointment –“I was on three buses”, she noted, “ cause they took my license away after my second DWI”. After resting a moment she said, “I hope I can help you- though I am a poster child for what not to do in life. Drugs. Have babies when you are young. Drop out of school.” Sasha, a 25 year old African American woman, had lived in Seattle all her life, “released two children for adoption which she said, “was hard, but right”, and was recently reunited and living with her seven year old, who had been raised by her ailing grandmother who could no longer provide this care.

Like many other families who were interviewed, Sasha confessed she “hated school” and did not see that it really helped people. “But I am willing to be convinced otherwise”. A recent entrant to TANF, Sasha was “ready to make a change – because I am taking care of my daughter right now”. Her advice to the Steering Committee was: “Remember how some people like me are scared of school, don’t think it pays off, and think they will fail. You gotta expect that, you know”.

The day before the interview Sasha got a part time job at a Minimart. She was worried about running the cash register, and in her typical self-deprecating way, said, “That machine better be smarter than me”. Asked why she thinks she got the job she said, “Cause I was truthful and they know I can deal with punks who come to that store – have used a cash register in my job at Target- and because I said I was trying hard to get my life together”.

***Some families don't know how to survive – and do not know how or where to ask for help***

**Family Involvement  
with Provider Systems**

- On average families had over three case managers, ranging from 2 to 8
- One family was not eligible to return to Section 8
- One family was having trouble accessing veterans benefits due to their discharge status
- Thirteen families with young children had required substance abuse and/or parenting classes at least 3 nights a week
- One family had been told they would be responsible now for paying for required parenting classes due to state budget cuts, and was having trouble locating a sliding fee scale therapist.
- One immigrant family was not eligible for FSET, due to residency requirements

Peter Arbor and his wife had done “all the right things – worked hard, and saved a little, bought a house” when everything fell apart. When Peter’s management warehouse job ended the same month his wife’s retail job did, the life of the family went into a tail spin. “And things got unbelievable when my wife had to get her gall bladder out two weeks after we dropped our insurance”. When they were interviewed, during their “second ever” visit to a food bank, Peter said, “I have taken a few college classes but don’t have a degree. I have not really kept up with that computer stuff the way I should have. My company had one program and I used it over and over.”

Thinking over the past eight months Peter said he was “despondent. I can’t believe this has happened – and I – I can’t describe it. I owe my folks money, and most of my friends too. I need to get started on something now. I have submitted a load of applications”. When asked if he had gone to WorkSource yet, he said, “No, but I will – the food bank mentioned that to me too”. Living here and there in his car and local motels, while his two young children stayed with his brother, left Peter feeling disoriented, though a recent temporary job “at a small company” helped me get me back into a routine”.

His wife, Theresa, was also job seeking, but neither were utilizing outside help. Why? They had no idea of the service system, and a huge level of embarrassment about needing it.

***Some families may need preparatory classes but are ready to enter college now.***

“Life just throws you some surprises”. Katya, a 29 year old Russian woman, who has been a United States citizen for almost ten years said, “I moved from Eastern Washington to take my child for cancer treatment in Seattle. He is in remission now but so is my life. My husband could not take the pressure so left to go home. I got used to nothing but being a caregiver. I have some skills in accounting – nothing formal, but I have kind of a good head for math and helped my church get their records organized”.

The mother of a seven year old boy and three year old daughter, Katya said, “I don’t know how to organize child care to go to school – but this is something I want. I like business. I know excel and word. I am not so good at writing. I need more classes before I can start college. I took test years ago and heard that”. Katya was interviewed in the library, when she was checking out jobs and college scholarships. She was “lugging her life”, as she put it, carrying two backpacks, while her children were playing nearby. Her family was on the way to live with a woman she “barely knew that I met at church”.

***Some families want to work and will need to receive job coaching and special job placement assistance.***

Paige Wilson has had in her own words, a “tough life”. Single parent. Rough time in school. Paige was in special education on and off “until they decided I was not stupid, just that I did not pay attention”. She liked to work, “but it can’t be nothing too complicated”, and for years has had a small apartment and raised her daughter”, who is “9 going on 30”. But then, as Paige put it, “the devil got his dander up and I lost my job in the kitchen at a local charity. So I guess”, she joked, “charity starts at home and stops at the office. The problem is I don’t got neither anymore”.

As she put it, “one thing led to another and here we were living in a shelter, at my sister’s in two rooms, with her five kids, and now in this place (transitional housing)”. Paige says she has some “brain issues” that make me need to work “in a job that repeats” but that “she is never late, and always does her work”. She is not receiving SSI, though has applied, with the help of a fellow churchgoer, and is waiting to hear if she is accepted. “But no matter what”, she pointed out, “I am meant to work. I want to be with people”. Paige was interviewed at a local church. The pastoral care worker said, “I don’t know much about benefits. Will Paige lose her benefits if she gets a job?”

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Our interviews revealed that the families in HIP programs received more supports than the families not connected to these resources, and were more likely to be working. Families interviewed in the library and food bank were the most vulnerable, and tended to be loosely connected to outside provider systems. Almost all families faced long term problems that would require long term solutions and supports. The family situations underscored the need for whole family assistance, integrated cross system services and support necessary to navigate the service system. The family interviews also underscored the need for a media campaign touting the benefits and paths to education and college, as many families are distrusting of education.

The interviews revealed the complexity of the current system for homeless families, which includes a range of prevention, emergency shelter (90 days), transitional housing (up to two years) and affordable permanent housing (where rents or mortgage payments cost no more than 30 percent of a household's monthly income). By building a system to connect homeless families residing in each of these venues with jobs, education and training, many more families will attain employment and education success.

### **Results from the *Landscape Assessment: Family Homelessness in King County***

The demographics of the families show that the 33 homeless families resembled those of many other local homeless families. The results of the 2009 King County One Night Shelter Survey revealed that:

- 82% of the homeless families in King County are headed by a single parent and 79% by a single female.
- 40% of homeless children in King County are under age 4, and 57% are school aged.
- 80% of homeless families are persons of color, as compared to 31% of King County residents.
- 33% have no high school diploma or GED.
- Most are not long term homeless; 72% were homeless for their first time in the past three years; 20% for their second time; 8% for their third time, and 1% for their 4<sup>th</sup> time.

**Family  
Demographic and  
Circumstances**

- 67 children birth to 18
- 5 children in grades K-6 were identified as lagging academically
- 2 high school aged children have left the home due to family homelessness and dropped out of school
- 9 children had emotional and behavioral issues that families attributed to homelessness and experiencing domestic violence
- 17 K-12 children had missed significant (20 days or more of school) in the last year
- 6 families had middle school and high school aged children who had received suspensions

The needs of the 33 families we interviewed were also similar to the needs of the local families described in the family snapshot portion of the *Landscape Assessment: Family Homelessness in King County*. One of the research strategies employed by the county resulted in a group of providers preparing snapshot descriptions of families who were recently engaged in their services and assess their needs on seven measures: employment stability, education, career resiliency and training, legal, childcare, health and access to services. Housing staff who completed 172 family snapshots reported that employment stability was the lowest ranked among all 7 self-sufficiency measures; 76% of all families were in crisis or vulnerable; and 116 of 172 were unemployed. The families we interviewed also identified employment stability as the area in which they were most vulnerable.

Both our interviews and the snapshot review of the county identified a similar set of services that were hard to access, though the ranking differed. The snapshot reviews identified in order of frequency; rental assistance, legal assistance, mental health, employment prep, job search, childcare, transportation and credit repair. The interviews with the 33 families identified in order of frequency, job search, mental health, employment prep, legal assistance, family support (for child behavior and school problems), credit repair, rental assistance, transportation and childcare.

During the family interviews we also encountered many circumstances in which families were concerned about their children. Some of the issues they faced are typical of those many homeless families confront. The *Landscape Assessment Family Homelessness in King County* report noted that: children in homeless families were almost three times more likely than other children to suffer from emotional or behavioral problems that interfere with their learning: and that homelessness is associated with children at greater risk of severe health problems than low income children. Housing instability and homelessness were also identified as factors which lowered academic performance, and increased the chances of a child repeating a grade or of reducing high school completion rates. (Source: OSPI 2008 Better Homes Fund, Lubell, et al Downey).

### III. Provider Feedback

The Steering Committee members also wanted to hear from providers. They engaged in two different efforts to garner provider feedback.

#### **Steering Committee Survey Respondents**

CARES of Washington

Community Psychiatric  
Clinic

FareStart

King County Jobs  
Initiative

King County Work  
Training Program

Multi-Service Center

Port Jobs

Seattle Goodwill  
Industries

Seattle Jobs Initiative

YouthCare

YWCA (Homeless  
Intervention Project)

YWCA (Young Parent  
Program)

First, Building Changes administered a survey to twenty agencies which were identified as providing employment services to homeless or at risk families. Twelve agencies responded to the survey. The data revealed that:

- Nearly all providers responding to the survey received some level of job readiness, workplace expectations and life skills training and to a lesser degree job development and job retention services.
- Clients were most likely to be referred to outside agencies for apprenticeships, occupational skills training, education (secondary or post secondary), adult basic education, ESL, credit repair or asset building. Most of these referral strategies were not bound by a contract or MOU, though six agencies had MOUs with community colleges, and one had a contract with a community college to refer clients.
- Providers had the most difficulty securing the following employment services for their homeless/at risk families: post-secondary education, internship, job development, financial literacy, and asset building.
- Providers had the most difficulty accessing the following support services for their clients: housing assistance, childcare, transportation, health care, mental health and legal services.
- Providers are spending less per homeless client - \$1,470.00 annually as compared to \$3,339 per client per year for non-homeless clients.
- Job placement was \$10.87 for all clients as compared to \$9.81 per hour for homeless clients.

**Steering Committee  
Provider Interviews**

BuRSST for Prosperity  
Cares Washington  
Church Council  
City of Seattle Human  
Services Department  
Committee to End  
Homelessness  
Community Psychiatric  
Clinic  
Department of Social  
and Health Services  
Downtown Emergency  
Service Center  
Fare Start  
First Place  
Goodwill  
Highline Community  
College  
Hope Link  
King County Housing  
Authority  
King County Library  
King County Veterans  
South King County  
MultiService Center  
Neighborhood House  
Nonprofit Assistance  
Center  
Pacific Associates  
Port Jobs  
Pioneer Human Services  
Seattle Conservation  
Corps  
Seattle Jobs Initiative  
Seattle Housing  
Authority  
Seattle Public Schools  
South Seattle  
Community College  
White Center  
Community  
Development  
Association  
WorkSource Renton  
Work Source Operators  
Group  
Youth Care Orion  
YWCA

Second, the Steering Committee interviewed thirty two providers (employment, housing, college, K-12, library, multiservice center, DSHS, WorkSource and other providers) to gather information about effective practices and gaps in their strategies to provide or connect families with employment and education services. These interviews revealed that:

- there is no community pipeline in place to connect homeless families with workforce opportunities, and that some homeless families do not end up getting referred for needed services.
- providers were worried about the longer term employment prospects of homeless persons who exited employment programs because most were earning low wages at their one year post placement follow up;
- many providers thought that families needed longer term supports in order to be more stable and economically secure;
- some providers wanted to more strongly support “work and college ready families”, while others did not see college as a practical or desirable outcome. The reasons they cited varied, and included a fear that the family would get more in debt, or that the family would not be successful or be able to use the instruction to get a better job.
- many providers were engaging in one or more of the following successful strategies to promote the success of homeless families and identified the following strategies as crucial:

- o Giving families time off from work or school to attend important meetings (court, therapy, parenting classes)
- o Developing close partnerships with treatment, mental health and other provider systems utilized by homeless families.
- o Integrating asset building into family case management plans
- o Making core skill building services accessible to families, by offering on site GED, ESL, computer training
- o Helping families negotiate complicated bureaucracies and plan for near term benefit changes
- o Working with families to develop and make progress towards achieving career and education goals
- o Recognizing family successes through the use of incentives and celebrations
- o Developing strategies which ensure families have stable housing and can focus on other goals

Most providers acknowledged that these types of strategies need to be implemented until a family has achieved housing, income stability and/or family wage. They emphasized too that the role of work and college in this effort will vary according to the family's circumstances and preferences but should not be limited because a system is not in place.

Examples of the most frequently mentioned provider recommendations for building such a system are presented below.

- Increase the presence of employment, library and college providers at housing sites;
- Develop strategies which integrate and streamline across service systems the goals that homeless families have to achieve;
- Promote self-sufficiency pipelines that free up subsidized housing for new families as current families move out into the private market;
- Implement instructional strategies which make it possible for English language learners and persons with lower basic skills opportunities to become rapidly engaged in college level courses by teaching these skills in concert with math and language acquisition.
- Use specialized staff at WorkSource sites to facilitate the involvement of homeless families, arranging appointments in advance to ensure that homeless persons get the help they need; and
- Look at and support the employment needs of all potential wage earning family members in tandem
- The above research efforts, coupled with the family interviews and suggestions from the Steering Committee advisors, informed the key assumptions and recommendations presented in the balance of this report.

#### **IV. Key Assumptions**

Key assumptions driving the Economic Opportunities Steering Committee recommendations in Section V are presented below. We believe that the pipeline should:

- Include carefully designed and deliberately connected entry points, on ramps and bridges.
- Include a long term commitment.
- Be driven by the aspirations of homeless families and result in integrated housing, employment and child welfare system plans that incorporate asset building strategies to negotiate benefit cliffs changes over time.

- Create a supportive environment to help families whose lives are often chaotic and in crisis.
- Include a continuum of employment and education activities; beginning with “stepping stones” to employment engagement, such as volunteer work, paid and unpaid internships, part and full time jobs; and including, as appropriate, standalone or in tandem education activities that may include ABE/GED/ESL, business start up training, integrated developmental education college courses, certificates and degrees.
- Support homeless and at risk of homelessness families until they are assessed to have income, housing and employment stability.
- Be designed to address the cultural and linguistic diversity and workforce needs of homeless families, recognizing that some will need extensive multiyear support.
- Engage in efforts to streamline services, as many families are engaged in multiple service systems and have multiple case managers and case plans.
- Include strategies that offer a continuum of higher paying employment that is aligned with the career and/or educational goals of the job seeker, and high growth jobs that pay family wages.
- Include linkages with DVR, DDD, WIA, McKinney and other funding streams.
- Include strategies to help families navigate complex systems and benefit cliffs.
- Include integrated service packages that clearly link families with housing, employment, and child welfare case management systems, with other needed family supports.
- Promote the skills and wage earning capacity of the whole family.
- Include substantial support for childcare and housing.
- Define a clear set of momentum points for providers and customers linked to incentives to reward persistence.
- Include partners who have close ties to refugee, immigrant and low income persons, and have the partnerships in place to address the treatment, mental health, domestic violence, legal and other circumstances faced by many homeless families.

## **V. Economic Opportunities Steering Committee Recommendations**

The homeless family, client and key informant interviews informed the recommendations presented below. The Economic Opportunities Steering Committee is committed to designing a high performing community employment and education system for homeless families. We recommend that strategies focus on system building, Entry Points, On Ramps and Bridges. These terms are described in Attachment A.

### **System Building Strategies**

We recommend the following system building strategies:

1. Designate one or more entities to facilitate the development of the community pipeline to Workforce Entry Points, On Ramps and Bridges. These entities would be responsible for working for and with pipeline partners to:
  - Prepare clear materials describing and marketing the education and employment system.
  - Coordinate case management services to assure efficient use of client time.
  - Promote knowledgeable navigation of college and other supports among case managers, clients and students.
  - Establish a homeless family customer feedback structure to inform the work of the education and employment system.
  - Develop a core set of case management standards and methods for engaging homeless families in pipeline activities and for supporting their success in these arenas.
  - Develop evaluation metrics for the system.
  - Identify opportunities for aligning, enhancing, and increasing resources for employment and education for homeless families.
  - Promote employer involvement as partners in training and college strategies, ensuring that homeless families have multiple opportunities to connect to employers and wage progression opportunities in high growth occupations.

- Identify policy and funding barriers and opportunities.
  - Coordinate cross system training, technical assistance and capacity building.
  - Convene housing, education, employment, legal and child welfare organizations, and design web based tools to share and showcase effective practices, including efforts to strategically align their work.
  - Disseminate promising practices and how these can be marketed or adopted on a larger scale.
2. Ensure that education and employment strategies are aligned with community strategies for increasing affordable housing stock and the other homeless family strategy “pillars”: homeless prevention, coordinated entry, rapid re-housing, and tailored services.
  3. Develop an easy to negotiate communication strategy and membership model that keeps families and providers engaged and informed about upcoming workforce pipeline activities, celebrations and events by web, and gives them access to reduced rate offerings of food or other goods. These events will include regularly scheduled college tours, college testing, announcements about new programs, and whole family services such as “helping your child be college ready”, or “how to support early childhood literacy”.
  4. Devise work and college ready family strategies to ensure that all family members are moving forward in support of each other and the adult worker or student: strategies may include coordinating with libraries and after school programs, for example for homework assistance or ESL, or with college staff to conduct parenting classes, or to administer child development assessments.

The Steering Committee also recommends the following system building strategies to better engage homeless families and those who are at risk of homelessness in **college** programs.

1. Establish “no wrong move” distance learning and core college classes at different locations across the county, sited at such places as housing authorities, libraries and schools where there are high concentrations of poverty. These classes could be a portal to continued engagement in college

and would provide students with opportunities for career advising and navigator support.

2. Look for natural college peer cohorts – such as Head Start parents, and K-5 parents and engage them in “no wrong move” college courses and career planning sited at their location.
3. Establish protocols for developing next step college and career plans with ESL and ABE students.
4. Engage all students in *on ramp* and *bridges* activities with membership into a model which provides them with continuous information about how to access college and career services, and gives them an opportunity to schedule by phone appointments for career planning, or to arrange for college tours or other college services.
5. Support creative strategies to earn college credit – by, for example, taking Education 100 as part of the college ready family strategy or by earning business credits by completing a course which shows that families know how to develop a work and education plan, that projects over time necessary adjustments to address benefit cliffs.

### **Entry Point Strategies**

We recommend the following education and success entry point strategies:

- An integrated Family Career Pathways/Housing Plan, with multiple steps along the way, leading to living wages.
- Promote a system wide understanding that all homeless families should have opportunities to learn about and participate in career pathways.
- Train and engage entry point partners into discussions about the system homeless families and at risk families to attain employment and education success using Access Points, On Ramps and Bridges.
- Provide up to date information about system opportunities and options.

### **On Ramp Strategies**

We recommend that on ramp strategies include:

- Building the capacity of WorkSource sites to better serve homeless families.

- Assisting families to access employment pipeline services such as job preparation, stepping stone to employment opportunities, paid/unpaid internships, supported employment for those who need intensive supports, transitional jobs and job placement; and/or educational pipeline services that include financial aid assistance, ABE, GED, ESL, referrals to testing, business start up training and other resources.
- Providing navigator career coaching strategies which include assistance to accommodate benefit cliffs; and other interventions such as tutoring, family or employer advocacy to support the job retention, advancement and educational success of the family.
- Increasing the availability of short term work opportunities for homeless women linked, if appropriate to next steps training or college tied to career pathway plans.
- Supporting the creation of housing and self-sufficiency pipelines that free up subsidized housing for new families as current families move out into private market housing. As part of this pipeline new families moving into the freed up housing would be required to work with a provider on a plan for employment and workforce training. Adequate staffing levels (estimated at 1.00 FTE navigator position for every 50 clients who would receive support at the community college level to reach the tipping point) would be needed to support this strategy.

### **Bridges Strategies**

We recommend that Bridge strategies include:

- Strengthening college preparatory, transferable skills building, and college credit bearing programs at time-limited housing and public housing sites linked to enrollment in WIA training funds, college preparatory programs, the College for Working Adults, one year certificate or two year degrees.
- Linking short term training of homeless and low income people to aligned WIA training programs, college certificate two year certificates or degrees.
- Developing and implementing Peer Navigator strategies using graduates who share the same language and culture to provide system navigation and success coaching for new students.

- Promoting the offering of college instructional strategies that could expedite and increase the successful engagement of homeless and low wage families. These include:
    - Integrating developmental education into credit bearing college courses, thus reducing the length of time families spend on college preparatory work.
    - Using fully funded IBEST (Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training) strategies for English Language Learner students to assist in transitioning them to college level work.
    - Developing learning communities that integrate developmental education into credit bearing college courses such as financial literacy that support the development of applicable and relevant skills.
    - Strategies which offer credit for prior learning.
    - Implementing applied learning instructional strategies, which are known to be successful approaches when working with students whose learning styles are best suited to this approach.
    - Offering modular courses, which include a series of short term certificates, a strategy which allows the student to immediately reap the rewards of, market and be recognized for short term academic achievement and skill gains.
    - Offering a mix of distance learning and classroom courses to increase the flexibility and level of participation, and adapt to the needs of people who work in jobs that fluctuate due to seasonal differences.
    - Offering educational technology to provide a more flexible delivery of instruction or learning support: on line courses, podcasting lectures, tutoring with multiple language options.
    - Providing funding and training for both on line and on campus student support services specifically for homeless families, focused on advising, counseling and on campus childcare.
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## **VI. Summary**

In summary, the Economic Opportunities Steering Committee report underscores the complexity and challenges of connecting homeless families to post secondary opportunities. Some families have had negative experiences with education and are reluctant to enter the post-secondary system. Others face barriers like low basic skills or limited technology skills, or issues such as mental illness or substance abuse. Yet others have family or financial circumstances which require that they work so they can only engage in college on a part-time basis.

Many families have multiple case managers and systems they need to navigate. The current system is not designed to accommodate the long range support and continuity that many homeless families need in order to pursue education and career opportunities.

The feedback from providers showed that many were worried about the longer term employment prospects of homeless persons. Local data showed that job placement was \$10.87 for all clients as compared to \$9.81 per hour for homeless clients. Provider recommendations included giving families time off work or training to attend important activities, such as court, treatment or parenting classes. They also recommended that families receive help to plan for benefit changes. In addition they recommended that the needs of all potential wage earners in families be supported in tandem. They recommended self sufficiency pipelines that free up subsidized housing for new families as current families move into the private market.

Drawing upon the recommendations of families and providers the Steering Committee recommended:

- A comprehensive array of system changes, case management and educational service changes;
- Developing an integrated housing/employment plan for self-sufficiency that facilitates streamlining and integrating case management across multiple systems;
- Conducting whole family assessments that include careful analysis and long term supports to negotiate benefit cliffs;
- Offering career and jobs coaching that includes the integration of asset building;

- Establishing “no wrong move” distance learning and core college classes at different locations, such as housing authorities, transitional housing, libraries and schools;
- Creating a system which has the capacity to provide navigation assistance and tailored services to homeless families and build customized on ramps and bridges that support the self-sufficiency goals of families; and
- Providing long term employment retention and wage progression support, including support services to assure momentum.

The Steering Committee are optimistic that the recommendations they are making will result in a coordinated strategy which will significantly increase homeless and at risk families access to stable housing, jobs, college and income stability. They anticipate that many of these recommendations will be implemented through SkillUp, the Washington Families Fund and the King County Veterans and Human Services Levy, a local effort to end homelessness through outreach, prevention, permanent supportive housing and employment.

## Attachment A

### King County Funders Collaborative

#### Proposed definitions developed through Peer Learning 4/03/09

Entry Points	On Ramps	Bridge Programs	Bridge Plus College
<p>Organizations that provide services to low income populations and want to connect their clients to jobs and training for better paying jobs.</p>	<p>Basic or entry level skills training that helps individuals obtain a job and/or enter community college training for better paying jobs.</p> <p><i>Features:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-- On Ramps provide basic skills training such as ABE, ESL, GED and computer skills.</li> <li>-- On Ramps provide entry level skills training for jobs in retail, culinary arts, warehouse, or other sectors.</li> <li>-- On Ramps assist individuals with labor market and industry sector information, career paths, goal setting, and in navigating training and education options.</li> <li>-- On Ramps need to offer personal support in the form of case management and support services</li> </ul>	<p>Pre-college reading, writing, math and computer skills building courses that prepares individuals for college level courses and the “college going” experience.</p> <p><i>Features:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-- Bridge programs provide reading, writing and math skills building that lead directly to college level courses.</li> <li>-- Bridge programs provide computer skills that enable individuals to navigate the college and complete assignments.</li> <li>-- Bridge programs prepare individuals for the “college environment” with information on tutoring, advising, time management, test taking, support services, etc.</li> <li>-- Bridge programs can be sector based; the remediation and preparation is focused on a specific industry sector</li> <li>-- Bridge programs need to offer personal support in the form of case management and support services</li> </ul>	<p>Pre-college reading, writing, math and computer skills enhancement, and college preparation combined with college credit courses.</p> <p><i>Features:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-- Bridge Plus College programs provide reading, writing and math enhancement that lead directly to college level courses.</li> <li>-- Bridge Plus College programs provide computer skills that enable individuals to navigate the college and complete assignments.</li> <li>-- Bridge Plus College programs prepare individuals for the “college environment” with information on tutoring, advising, time management, test taking, support services, etc.</li> <li>-- Bridge Plus College programs can be sector based; the remediation and preparation is focused on a specific industry sector</li> <li>-- Bridge Plus College programs need to offer personal support in the form of case management and support services</li> </ul>