

Everett Gospel Mission Open Forum

26 September 2014

The following is a transcript of an open forum hosted by the Everett Gospel Mission and attended by approximately 40 homeless individuals residing both at the Mission and on the streets of Everett. The transcript begins with the first comments by an attendee.

James: "I have had a lot of experience w (inaudible) homelessness and first coming from King County Washington has an idea of what you call a "10 year plan" to end homelessness. Now the 10 year plan to end homelessness is done pass the 10yr plan, way pass. It's about 5 yrs. past. (Inaudible for the rest of his speaking time.)

"I helped create a lot of that atmosphere."

"One of my most meaningful projects for the last 20yrs, to help with homelessness is a (inaudible) called Peace on the Streets and Kids on the Streets. The Fundraiser Executive Elaine Simmons is one of those people who stood up where homeless kids would run away. They were given so many hours to report back in the home. If you came from an abusive home, guess what, you're gonna go back to that abusive home. You were abused as a kid and never heard a kind word."

(Inaudible for several seconds.) There's a lot to be said at all these meeting right here in Everett. Believe me, I am no stranger to the 10 year plan to end homelessness. You can see me here at this table all day long with (inaudible) Wilson and call for an investigation (inaudible). "Yes, I am no stranger". Thank you."

What is the greatest danger between peer to peer pressures on the streets?

Answer: Drugs and police.

Mike: "As far as peer pressure, I mean, obviously you can make a choice if you want to do it or not. Hang out with people and to run with them and have friends, and actually I'm not staying here (Men's Mission), but I have literally been out on the streets for the last few months and to get into that group of people, to have people around is for safety reasons. For instance, women are being murdered. Um, right now, it's a very big concern. Two nights ago, being up on Broadway, women are actually not outside or when they are, they're running. "

"I'm not a girl or anything but I take it upon myself, to stay outside, hanging out with them, because it's scary. "

"Back to the subject, the peer pressure, ya know, of sitting around smoking a joint or whatever and be a part of...ya know, be a part of...the community." (inaudible).

"The drugs in this town are just crazy. They're everywhere."

Do you think there are more drugs on the street now than 5 years ago?

Mike: Yeah and in the 80's. If you were here in the 80's, than you know what I'm talking about. That's all I have to say."

Who wants to talk about the police as a danger on the streets?

Steve:" I don't want to talk about the police, because I'm still on probation."

How many of you think the police are more harassing on the street?

12 people.

How many people think the police have been helpful to you on the streets?

3 people.

How have they, the police, been helpful on the streets?

Unknown: "One thing I want to say is that Everett is a clean town and I think the Mission has a lot of things to do with that to do with that."

"I think that Everett PD has a strong presence, which is a good thing. I mean, it's good wherever you are." I have lived in other cities, the Northeast, Auburn, and Tacoma. Everett is a good working town, so I don't have anything bad to say here. They, EPD, have a strong presence. I feel there could be harassment issues, but I'm not going to go into that. Overall I just wanna say, "Everett is a clean little city."

What is one stereo-type that you want the City of Everett to know that doesn't represent you?

Unknown: "When one goes without it becomes everyone's problem. This idea is extremely useful towards the goal that functions. We want to function in society. People need their needs met. Imagine yourself not having. No matter how much you fear it, because most of you fear it and judge it. Just put yourself in that situation. Some people do that. People come down off their throne, Buddha, and walk among the men at ground level. Also, we need to take away the red-tape. Everyone here wants to work. Everyone here wants to make money. I don't see demon possessed here, good men here. They are not perfect. They probably have records. Thankfully, I have no felonies. That's not everyone's story. The red-tape and square peg is getting more and more difficult. Men have a lot more to compete with these days, without a whole lot of help. "Thank you."

I think a lot of us here have a strong desire to make a contribution. I am so incredibly grateful to the Gospel Mission here. To reach out to those in need. To give us a helping hand, when we really need it. To share the message of God, with those, who really need it, including me. I am thankful for the Mission and in the interest of bettering the situation in Snohomish County.

Jerry: Some of my worst fears are: There are a lot of homeless people being woke up in the middle of the night. "Can't be here guy, gotta go." "Sorry for disturbing your peace". "You're not supposed to be

here, if you can find some place more worth- while, we won't bother you." That's a big issue. Try and find a place where the police aren't finding you and disturbing your peace and quiet-time. That's the most important thing, your sleep. Try and find a spot in this town where you don't get busted. We'd have a peaceful night.

Steven: "I just want to address the stereo-type issue. Not all homeless people are drug addicts or alcoholics, and that's a stereo-type. Most people don't do it, I mean things happen. People lose their jobs. I heard that the average person is a paycheck away from being homeless."

"My problem is with the stereo-type that all homeless people are drug addicts or alcoholics."

Mike: "Some people think that this homelessness is a party and a joke and stuff like that but this is serious shit."

"When I'm out there, people are all, "Where you stayin' tonight?" I don't tell people where I'm staying because, for one, winter is coming and you don't want the cops to know. You don't want people to know, because a lot of people will come to your campsite and they bring drugs or whatever and party. This stuff is a reality. I know for me, its life or death. I've lost 30 lbs in the last 9 months. Summers over, its winter time. I got hyperthermia twice last winter. If it wasn't for the Mission and the hospital, I'd be in a different place right now. I was in the hospital 6-8 times since January, for being suicidal, homeless, my mental state and to just get out of the weather."

Unknown: "This is all new to me, but I'm thankful for coming here. I'm here on a charge that I got from 2yrs ago, that caught up with me, and now its taken me away from my family. I'm trying to make a move, to get back there, to be with my family, and my sisters."

"The program I'm in, so far, has helped me. It's great here and I'm thankful for it."

A lot of the guys, that maybe in the same situation, that have families and are trying to get back here, or they have records that's holding them back from getting a job. I pray every day and stay focused. I pushed myself until I finally got a full-time job with the felony that I have. I told the truth, told them what happened and they understood. I didn't give up."

"The one thing we can't do is give up. Got to keep pushing ourselves, and pushing, until we make it. That's where I'm at now. Pushing and pushing myself. Eventually I will be back at home with my family.

As for stereo typing towards us, the cops do a good job, but I think they target it this place (Mission) because of who we are. I have noticed this and it's not a good thing."

James: (Inaudible)...have to find other ways, diversions, then having someone's vehicle towed. I'm not so certain about Everett. I have seen the 3 day stickers. We can't have the same mistakes that the City of Seattle has already. Ticketing and towing everywhere you go. You (police) can't follow us every place.

You can't have a vehicle park w/out tags. They put a boot on your vehicle (City of Seattle). Like I said we can't be a carbon copy of Seattle. We've got to find other ways, diversions, other than having someone's

vehicle sitting at the tow yard, w/out anyone being able to use. They own it themselves and have to pay double or triple the price just to get their belongings out of the vehicle. It's criminal. It's criminal to see someone lose their vehicle. All their belongings are now owned by the towing company. There's no accountability at tow yards. Most of the contents in that said so-called, described vehicle has been had by the drivers. I'd really like to say to the people of the establishment here, I'd really like to see a diversion plan.

How many people have had their vehicle towed and lost it?

6 people

If you could have a home tonight, a roof over your head, that's yours, how many of you would take it?

Almost everyone raised their hands.

Not take it? Zero

What are the barriers to getting housing? Why is housing so hard to get?

Unknown: "Lack of transportation."

Unknown: "There are a lot of restrictions. I can't get housing because I'm not in program. It's very hard."

Unknown: "I have no rental history. If you haven't rented before forget it."

How do you get rental history if nobody will rent to you?

Unknown: "I have no clue." I receive \$1200 a month from Uncle Sam for being a disabled vet, but I can't rent my own place. With 1,200 bucks a month I should be able to rent in a jiffy, but I have no rental history. Every time I have lived in Everett I have lived with somebody else, and I helped them pay the rent."

How many people in here have an income from some source? Is it enough to pay rent?

6 people

No.

Do you see anyway that you'll ever be able to get a place on the income you have.

No.

Is there anyone that does?

2 people

Unknown: “To enable people who have aspirations to work and to move out, to enable those people better, and to make that transition would be beneficial.

“We are all unique with diversity. We all have different reasons why we’re here. So simple, one step solutions aren’t going to address anything.”

Resources, are they easy to find? Is it easy to know what is available?

We can probably learn a lot from Whatcom Co. They have very good transportation systems, very cheap. For \$15 you get a bus pass to get you to where you need to go. There’s also an idea of having housing available, to get people to work when they need to be at work. Transportation and sleep, without these two things you can’t expect people, children and young men traveling from other places (there’s a lot of them) who obviously want a place in the community. Keep them from judgment (inaudible). Have on-site programs within walking distance and they are all working tightly together. We all know it creates a seed of motivation, morale and attitude.

Unknown: “I think there are all kinds of resources in Everett. I think there are plenty in this building .You need to be proactive. 6 blocks away you have Work Source. They have resume classes. You can print things for free. DSHS is 4 miles away, there are transportation vouchers. I think there is a lot there, you just have to know what you are doing.”

Unknown: Large directory of updated resources if it was available to us.

Dave: “I’m an advocate for the homeless. I’ve seen a lot of abandoned buildings that could be opened up and make it some place, like housing (inaudible). I do believe it’s a good idea. Open up housing for low-income people and who are having problems with income. I think it should work out here in Everett.”

How many of you have signed up for the Affordable Care Act?

3 people

How many of you don’t have medical?

5 people

Allan: “For the last 10 yrs., I’ve had Medicare. Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, Medicare has pretty much disappeared from all hospitals and (inaudible) plans. You need Medicare Plus or Medicaid to get access to services. When I tried to find services, I was given a number of list or doctors and providers that meet my needs, all of whom use to take Medicare. Out of 30 something providers not a single one took Medicare anymore. They all take Medicaid. DSHS told me to talk to the After Care people. When I talked to the After Care people they told me to talk to DSHS. I had a spin down of \$1600 (inaudible). None of my needs were being met. I was not receiving medication. I was not receiving counseling. Just about 2 days ago I finally my (inaudible), after spending 6 months of going to doctors, almost 3 times a week and many ER visits. I finally met my (inaudible), I receives a letter from DSH , stating that my spin

down ended on the 30th. This means, I received care for, exactly, 10 days. After spending 6 months (inaudible), so basically, I did all this for nothing. All that the Network says is that recipients of Medicare no longer exist, but the providers, like Volunteers of America who have the information, do not know this. So they are giving out bad information and are giving the names of people who no longer take Medicare.”

Jeremy: “I think the big problem here, is drugs and alcohol abuse and I think there (inaudible) to get people into inpatient faster, quicker. That people would have more of a stronger focused head and healthy body so they can go out and get the medical and benefits that they need. I think there are a lot of people out there using and drinking and can’t get the help they actually need because it’s such a big process and timeline for it. They don’t want to go. They don’t want to take the time to do it. If, DSHS or Work Source, if they had a Board or something like that, that focuses on inpatient and outpatient for people, maybe they can actually help them go get their medical other than the process of going there. So when you leave treatment you’ll have medical, food and all this stuff.”

Mike: “I applied for SSI. One of the deals was I had to get medical. I tell you what you guys need to sign up for it. I’ve been to the doctors, hospitals, my prescriptions, everything has been paid for. I am very fortunate for that. Before I got insurance, just to see a family doctor, it was \$150 cash. Not working, I couldn’t afford it.” You have the opportunity guys, they come here (Mission), once a month to do medical.” The Mission kicks ass. It’s a good place.”

Tell me where the most common place you have slept in your car?

5 people

Tents?

3 people

Under the bridge?

1 person

What causes you to come inside from these places?

Temperature, weather, food (#1 reason) and showers.

When you’re on the streets where do you go for showers other than the Mission?

The river.

A mobile shower unit on Wednesdays.

Where do you go the bathroom when you’re on the Streets?

It’s pretty easy for a man.

This is a serious problem. If the City of Everett can build a facility, that would help.

Where would be a good place for the City of Everett to build a facility?

An abandon building.

Unknown: “You’d have every drug addict in Everett using in it, firing up. They’re going to tear the thing a part. People don’t respect (inaudible) stuff like that, that other people would actually use.”

Unknown: “Have more day centers up and running. (Inaudible), have more positive character traits in various ways would be beneficial and different types of programs that the clients to help them with working attributes. I know we all have areas to grow, regardless of who we are and the programs that can help us develop our character.”

Unknown: “This goes back to Stereotypes. I was just up at the 76 gas station on Saturday, because here, (Mission) was closed until 3 o’clock. I went up there ‘cause we have to be out of here early Saturday mornings by 9 o’clock and I was stopped. This is a gas station where they have a bathroom I can use. The guy asked me if I was transient. Gas Attendant says” I feel sorry for you, was it drugs?” I don’t him I don’t do drugs. I don’t drink. I don’t understand what that has to do with me using the bathroom. He asked me if I was a transient and I got offended. I was also hurt by this.”

Unknown: “I want to address the issue about bathrooms. A lot of times (inaudible), treat you like transients because transient people do bad things. I don’t have anything against it, but they don’t know that. They think it’s the stereotype thing, “You’re a transient, so you’ll do the same thing as everyone else.”

A couple of weeks ago I got stopped, because I was smoking a cigarette in front of Work Source , when I got asked,” If I knew that it was against the law(smoking).” “Yeah, but there are several other people out here that you just passed by, doing the same thing. I asked “why was he coming to me?” He didn’t have an answer of that.

There are a lot of people that don’t come in here (Mission) because they don’t want to.

Unknown yells out; “They don’t think they’ll be heard”

Back to person at mic: “It’s not that they think they won’t be heard, they don’t care if they’re heard or not. They are about getting high or whatever they think they can do, but for those of us who care about this, I would love (inaudible), but it’s hard because we’re so generalized.

Unknown: “Right across the street from here, there’s a sign that says” No Standing No Stopping. ”It’s against the law to stop on the sidewalk?” This is criminal harassment. Homelessness isn’t about a problem in society; it’s about people, individuals. It’s about their needs and I think we need to make our voices a little bit louder. “People need to understand we are human beings”

Unknown: “I just checked into the Mission. I’m tired of being homeless.

Unknown: “I want to touch base on criminal charges on No Trespassing. I think the police in their investigation; the fact that they might not know there is an exclusion period here. 90 days in, 90 days out. If you’re on your 90 days out, you still rely on this place for lunch, dinner, and showers. People tend to stay close, while under investigation. So, if they’re going to try and decide to charge you criminally for trespassing, I understand if they (men) have been banned or has a strong presence, there should be a clause front that for that exclusion period and maybe they, EVP, should take that in to consideration.”

Mike: “I’m not married; a lot of us aren’t married. Everett doesn’t have much very much to do, except drink and drugs. I mean you can find things to do, it just means like there isn’t much to do.”

Unknown: “This is the last stop for this whole entire village.”

Rick: “I have a question for the Committee as well as for John (Hull)? (Inaudible for several seconds) Also on the sign back there (pointing to back of room), It says” West of the river could result in loss of services.” Does that mean I’m not allowed there and visit if I want to? Talk to my mom about my problems w/out getting kicked out of here? My brother Bob down the road can go over there and fish or whatever else he wants to do. I’m sorry if I’m misunderstanding, and if I am correct me, but that’s just the way I’m seeing it. It’s kind of singling out homeless people.

Unknown: “I think entry level jobs that would be available to follow people directly from the Mission, from programs and services. You guys, (Mission), might have...to work, from work, would be beneficial to individuals. Like maybe a grill over at the Transit Station that employs exclusively people from the Mission. This would enable a lot of people. Motivate people to get a job, that otherwise wouldn’t, get a job, exclusively with the Mission. Also I want to encourage more in your face evangelism from the Christian community in Snohomish County. They really should be out here and Jesus Christ is the only way that we can get back on track.

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Post meeting suggestions communicated to Sylvia Anderson by those who did not get a chance to speak:

- 1) 24 hour facility with services attached
- 2) Bus Fare to go to job interviews
- 3) Support for job hunt process—like storage of items while job hunting
- 4) More opportunities for day labor