



“What we have here is a
revolution of the heart”

MEG MARTIN, CPC, MSW, DIRECTOR OF HOMELESS SERVICES, INTERFAITH WORKS, OLYMPIA, WA



A little bit about where we come from.

Thurston County

Rural county of 250,000 and quickly growing, surrounded by more rural counties. (overall) doesn't think houselessness is really a thing countywide... more of a city problem.

City of Olympia

Urban center of Thurston and surrounding rural counties. Rapidly growing and skyrocketing rents. Feels super overwhelmed by houselessness just starting to increase political will to implement solutions.

Interfaith Works

42 year history in social justice and peace efforts including 25 year, volunteer run rotating faith based shelter.

The People's House

Street outreach activist effort to respond to criminalization of homelessness in our city. Fought for legitimacy to open a low-barrier shelter. Came under the wing of IW in 2013.

A little bit about the work we do.

Interfaith Works Emergency Shelter

Highly controversial, 42 bed, vulnerability based low-barrier shelter opened Nov. 1, 2014 in the basement of First Christian Church (only place in town who'd take us in). 100% occupancy every night on average. Moved over 100 very high needs people to perm housing with little to no case management resources or housing.

Vulnerability Index Team

Multidisciplinary, cross systems weekly case conferencing and networking meeting. Over two dozen service providers with weekly attendance. Game changer for our community.

Navigation Team

Piloted in 2015, Peer advocate, participatory, goal oriented "case management" services. First 6 months: 45% rate of moves to perm housing since enrollment, 40% connecting to substance use treatment, 85% connection to mental health services.



A little bit more about the work we do.

Community Care Center

Day room, Urban rest stop, licensed mental health clinic. Created in partnership with Providence Health Services opened Sept. 13, 2017. Serves 200+ people per day. 16 partner agencies providing support services on site.

Interfaith Works Homeless Services Program

Nightly shelter, Navigation Team, Community Care Center.

What does “Housing First” mean to you?

Adina at her good friend Minnie's memorial last Saturday.



Here's what it means to me.

- ▶ Low barrier — Resourceful and strong DIY ethic
- ▶ Leading with "Yes" rather than "No"
- ▶ Active involvement in political actions to bring visibility to the issue
 - ▶ Willing to take a stand even when it has potential consequences (ex. YWCA Letter)
- ▶ Always innovating, changing and willing to flex based on need
- ▶ Consistently meeting people with unconditional respect

Here's a bit more about what it means to me.

- ▶ Balances how to meet basic emergent needs and plan for long term solutions. One cannot happen without the other
- ▶ Willingness to work really really hard
- ▶ Willingness to have good boundaries and prioritize self reflection/preservation
- ▶ Willingness to be politically unpopular and push limits
- ▶ Dedication to intersectional understanding and advocacy – housing justice is racial justice is gender justice is LGBTQQIATS justice is economic justice, is disability justice, etc.

Shout out!!

Stout Street clinic and housing in Denver through the **CO Coalition of the Homeless** provides a solid example of intersectionality posted throughout their building



What does “Housing First” mean to your org/agency?

Doug laying his wife of 26 years to rest. They stayed with us together in our couples dorm for two years until she died on March 29, 2018.



Here's what it means to us.

▶ **Low barrier**

- ▶ Couples stay together regardless of sexuality, gendered dorms are inclusive, pets allowed, sobriety not requirement, required Narcan administration, goal of minimal barring, no length of stay requirements, commitment to cultural humility and understanding, sharps containers throughout, welcoming drug user language on guest agreements.

▶ **Regular self reflection to keep power imbalance in check**

- ▶ We decide if they sleep inside or out. We get to go home after we get off work. With great power comes great responsibility.

▶ **Active involvement in social inclusion and political actions to bring visibility to the issue**

- ▶ Host memorials, block parties, arts walk participation, open to the community meetings about relevant issues, multi media story telling and meeting the community "where they're at" to educate and advocate, inclusive fundraising

▶ **Always innovating, changing, and willing to change rules to flex based on need**

- ▶ Previous Guest Agreement/Good Neighbor Policy
- ▶ Updated Space use Agreement – WORK IN PROGRESS/Extensive process

▶ **Balances how to meet basic emergent needs and plan for long term solutions**

- ▶ Running a shelter and day center but very involved in HOME fund passing, setting the framework for permanent housing, working with existing providers

Here's a little bit more about what it means to us.

- ▶ **Willingness to work really, really (really, really, really, really) hard**
 - ▶ High expectations for level of care and commitment from our staff and management team. Unconditional respect policy. Going above and beyond is the norm.
- ▶ **Willingness to have good boundaries and prioritize self reflection/preservation**
 - ▶ Regular monthly staff meeting schedule, one on one/peer supervision, caucuses, outings/gatherings, self evals, debriefing trainings, front line staff paid a living wage
- ▶ **Willingness to be politically unpopular and push limits**
 - ▶ All while maintaining a harm reduction perspective of incremental change, any positive change, and being flexible to meet the community at large where they are and be persistent
- ▶ **Dedication to celebrating the small victories**
 - ▶ Sharing funny quotes in the nightly log, taking photos of fun times and hanging them around, karaoke, letter writing, shout out wall, etc.
- ▶ **Dedication to intersectional understanding and advocacy**
 - ▶ Housing justice is racial justice is gender justice is LGBTQQIATS justice is economic justice, is disability justice, etc.

Do the written policies at your org reflect the values of “Housing First” as discussed today?



**Charles and Dave
w/volunteer Mimi.**

Couple of 30 years
staying together in our
men's dorm.

Do our policies???

- ▶ Yes and no... We certainly don't have it all figured out! ALWAYS QUESTION/REVISIT POLICY
 - ▶ Who is this policy for? Us, or our guests/clients/tenants?
 - ▶ Are we requiring a standard for our guests to follow that we as staff don't? (i.e. late policy/staff late to meetings)
- ▶ Political limitations
 - ▶ Narcan policy, welcoming environment to drug users, etc.... Yet, due to political barriers, no syringe exchange access on site, still supposed to bar for egregious drug use on site due to permit restrictions
- ▶ Resource limitations
 - ▶ We're a shelter! And we're not even 24/7! We make people leave at 7am and they can't come back until 5pm regardless of circumstance because that's the only way we could get a permit to operate from the city.
 - ▶ No dedicated case management team or wrap around services on site. It's all partnerships with outside agencies and volunteers, ad hoc by front line staff, and me as the only MHP.
- ▶ Staff Team/Participant Fatigue
 - ▶ Rigidity increases as staff come on, stay a long time, begin to lose hope, and narrow their perspective

Questions? Discuss...



EYE-2-EYE

Policy can (and should) change.

- ▶ What is one policy that you will commit to change/work to change to be more in line with Housing First Practices?
 - ▶ **1. Within yourself**
 - ▶ **2. At your organization**

Get in touch! Thank you!

- ▶ Meg Martin
 - ▶ <http://www.iwshelter.org/>
 - ▶ meg@iwshelter.org



Bonnie, Mike with Taz, Zombie, and Peanut in our couples dorm