Creating Homes Through Housing First

Celebrating the opening of a new building is one of our favorite things to do here at DESC! When new homes become available, it means that we can end homelessness for dozens of people who are currently sleeping outside or in emergency shelters.

New tenants at DESC haven’t lived in a place of their own for some time, and re-learning to live alone is a time of change and adjustment. None of our new tenants arrive with boxes of all the things they need to live independently.

Enter our amazing volunteers and donors. On a recent Saturday, 250 volunteers descended on The Estelle, our newest building located at 3501 Rainier Avenue South, to outfit 91 apartments with supplies that new tenants will need to thrive.

Now, each of the 91 units has a fully made bed with linens, a bedspread, a pillow and pillowcase. New residents arriving from shelters may have only had access to plastic mattresses.
Creating Homes ...

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and wool blankets. For those who have been sleeping outside, it’s been a long time since they had a clean, quiet place to sleep.

Each apartment now has a kitchen stocked with pots and pans, a dish drainer, utensils, and two place settings of dishes. After not having access to a kitchen for so long, being able to make their own meals is a dream come true for many residents.

Finally, each unit has a bathroom with hygiene supplies and a shower curtain. Having a shower in the privacy of their own space may have been a special luxury for most tenants, but is now readily available.

Each of the donated items by themselves seems simple – a frying pan, a shower curtain, a mop. But as a whole, these items make a new apartment a home, and can make a new resident feel welcomed.

These new tenants can look forward to a safe and secure home in this new building, as well as the on-site support that is so critical to managing many of the daily challenges that still lie ahead. Staff will be here around the clock as a supportive presence, and tenants will have access to healthcare services provided by Harborview practitioners in the building, as well as social support and behavioral healthcare support from DESC staff.

Harborview and DESC have worked together for many years, but this will be the first time we’re able to build healthcare directly into the building. Besides having healthcare available to all tenants of the Estelle, 15 of the building’s units are allocated for people exiting the hospital with healthcare needs that can’t be served in conventional residential care systems. With contributions from volunteers and donors, partnerships with community organizations, and talented staff, we anticipate the Estelle becoming a new model of the amazing things Housing First can achieve.
As the number of unsheltered people rises year over year in our booming city, there’s no doubt that homelessness is a hot issue in Seattle. Everyone I meet has questions, concerns, and their own opinion about what it will take to become a city where everyone has access to safe and affordable housing.

Mayor Durkan and our city Councilmembers know that this is a pressing issue, and are hearing more than ever from constituents seeking solutions. Are new business taxes the answer, or part of it? Can re-bidding provider contracts wring more positive outcomes out of a system that’s already stretched thin? Is paying for more housing case managers the solution when there’s a lack of affordable units? Already this year, two new committees have been formed to address these issues community-wide, and the conversation has never been more energetic.

With the taskforces and community conversations coalescing around this issue, it’s easy to forget one key fact: we already know how to end homelessness, and we’re doing it every day. At DESC, we move people off the streets and out of shelters and welcome them to their new homes almost 500 times each year. With 25 years of practice at developing Housing First, we’ve learned what works and what does not.

We’ve learned that unrealistic approaches that insist on “fixing” people before providing housing don’t work. We’ve learned that there’s no such thing as “rock bottom,” that you can’t punish people into better health, but that people will use services they find to be useful. Services that people don’t use are, by default, services that don’t work.

So what does work? Accepting people as they are, meeting them where they are, and offering housing and healthcare that meets their needs. Prioritizing housing solutions is not only the compassionate option, but also the smart option for our community and all of its members. The alternative is to accept a society in which extreme destitution is on display amidst tremendous affluence, and people needlessly suffer and consume expensive public crisis services rather than have meaningful opportunities to participate in the life of the community.

I’m inspired by so many people coming together with such great passion and energy to solve this problem. But as we continue the conversation, we can’t lose track of the path that DESC has blazed for more than twenty years with groundbreaking success. Housing First and wraparound care end homelessness for the community’s most vulnerable people. We know what to do and how to do it. Let’s continue!
Meet Our New Board Members!

**Derrick Belgarde**  
Deputy Director, Chief Seattle Club  
Derrick Belgarde is an enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians of Oregon, and also Chippewa-Cree from Rocky Boy Montana. Derrick is currently the Deputy Director for the Chief Seattle Club, and serves on the board of Capitol Hill Housing, Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness, and the Washington State Affordable Housing Advisory Board. He completed his undergraduate in Public Affairs Magna Cum Laude, and went on to complete his Master’s in Public Administration, both at Seattle University. He is a proud father of three and is married to the wonderful Lua Belgarde.

**Susan Byrnes**  
Director of External Communications, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation  
Susan Byrnes is the Director of External Communications at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Her team is responsible for global campaigns, creative content and media engagement to drive impact for the foundation’s priorities. Susan has spent her professional career in communications and journalism, with a focus on social impact. She joined the foundation in 2007 and spent seven years in a variety of communications leadership roles, including interim chief communications officer. In 2015, Susan joined foundation grantee Malaria No More as managing director, strategic communications. In that role, she supported key malaria partners, including the African Leaders Malaria Alliance, and drove global media coverage and conversation to help end malaria. Susan returned to the foundation in March 2017.

Susan’s early career was in journalism, working for The Seattle Times, The Los Angeles Times, and Italian national television (RAI-Uno). Prior to that, Susan spent a year in a village in the Casamance region of Senegal, where she worked with a local agricultural organization and participated in health and education projects. Susan earned a Bachelor’s Degree in History at Brown University and a Master’s Degree in Journalism at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism.

**Dr. Peter McGough, MD, FAAFP**  
Medical Director, UW Neighborhood Clinics  
Peter McGough, M.D. is the Medical Director of the UW Neighborhood Clinics (UWNC). He is responsible for overseeing clinical services provided within UWNC clinics (15) and urgent care sites (8), and for implementing quality improvement programs to assure that services remain current with the best available evidence. He has been a leader in developing new models of care that align with the goals of accountable care and the patient centered medical home. Most recently he co-chairs the UW Medicine Primary Care Innovation initiative.

Dr. McGough is a board-certified family physician in active practice in the Seattle area since 1982. He enjoys teaching medical students, residents, and graduate students in health care policy and administration, and is a Clinical Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the UW School of Medicine. Dr. McGough served as the President of the Washington State Medical Association in 1994-1995. Dr. McGough received his medical degree from the University of Southern California and completed a Family Medicine residency at the Providence Medical Center in Seattle. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Family Physicians. He lives in the Seattle area with his wife, Colleen, and family.

**Jon Scholes**  
President & CEO, Downtown Seattle Association  
In November 2014, Jon Scholes became President and CEO of DSA following six years as the organization’s Vice President of Advocacy and Economic Development. Jon’s passion for taking on big issues is reflected in his 15 years of work in nonprofit advocacy, local government, and senior positions on statewide political campaigns.

Jon is a member of the Visit Seattle Board of Directors and the Downtown Transportation Alliance and has served on a number of city and county task forces on transportation, homelessness and housing. He is a Puget Sound Business Journal 40 Under 40 award winner and a graduate of Leadership tomorrow. He attended the University of Texas in Austin before graduating from the University of Washington. Jon lives in downtown Seattle with his wife and seven-year-old twins, Parker and Avery. In his spare time Jon sails, skis and rides motorcycles. He loves how much mental focus and presence each activity requires.
We marked a successful fourth Housing First Partners Conference (HFPC) in Denver this April! Every two years, we gather together housing and homelessness service providers, funders, research and policy experts, medical and behavioral health practitioners and people with lived experience of homelessness from all over the country, as well as Canada, Europe, and beyond, to share knowledge and best practices. At its core, the HFPC represents the struggles and hopes of the people most impacted by Housing First – the hundreds of thousands who have already charted their own recovery from homelessness, mental illness, abuse or addiction, and an equally large number who may soon benefit from the stability, respect and hope that Housing First can bring them. You can learn more about the conference at hfpartnersconference.com/2018.

Clockwise from the top: DESC staff pose for a group photo. DESC staff members Christina Clayton, Dana Dunklin & Laura O’Neill before their session. DESC Executive Director Daniel Malone with the conference co-host, Sam Tsemberis of Pathways Housing First Institute. DESC staff members discussed Housing First with attendees from as far away as New Zealand and the Netherlands.
Program Updates

Expanding Access to Buprenorphine

Thanks to help from King County, DESC is expanding our medication-assisted treatment (MAT) options to include the use of buprenorphine treatment for people with opioid use disorder. Research shows that MAT can halve the risk of death from overdose and that people who are addicted to opiates are more successful in treatment using MAT. It’s important that DESC be able to offer this service since other MAT programs have high barriers to participation. Making buprenorphine available at DESC means that this cutting-edge treatment will be available to people who need help but are unable to access other programs.

HOME Project

The HOME project made the most of a federal SAMHSA funding award from 2015 through 2017. During that time, a multi-disciplinary team worked to secure housing for people who are chronically homeless high utilizers of the shelter systems and also live with a substance use disorder. With an original goal of finding housing for 135 adults, the program succeeded in finding permanent homes for 194 people, freeing up significant capacity in the shelters where these men and women had been staying for very long periods of time!

N 96th Street Project

Our next supportive housing building, located in the Aurora/Licton Springs neighborhood, began construction in January of this year, and is slated to open in spring 2019. When complete, it will house 100 formerly homeless people with significant disabling conditions. Follow along with construction updates on the Instagram feed for the building from Walsh Construction at Instagram.com/walshn96

22nd Avenue South Project

DESC is working on a new affordable housing and clinic development in the North Rainier neighborhood, located at 1911 22nd Avenue So. Our plans include construction of two buildings on the site. Phase one, starting construction next year, will feature 85 studio units of permanent supportive housing. Phase two will include an integrated physical and behavioral healthcare clinic to be jointly operated by DESC and a medical care partner, with another 90+ units of permanent supportive housing above. This building will provide a permanent home to some of DESC’s outpatient behavioral health treatment services, and ensure that those services are integrated seamlessly with other medical care.
Generous Donors and Rockin’ Musical Performances
Make the 10th Annual Gimme Shelter Concert a Success!

Thanks to sponsorships, ticket sales, and donations from people like you, we raised more than $59,000 at Gimme Shelter! This annual benefit concert by the Dusty 45s was a rocking good time, and featured an amazing opening indie/bluegrass performance from Abbigale Smith.

We’re so grateful for everyone who was able to attend or spread the word. We hope to see you at future shows!

Top: Billy Joe Huels brings the house down with The Dusty 45s.
Above: Abbigale Smith opened the evening with an amazing Indie/bluegrass performance.
Mission Statement

The Downtown Emergency Service Center (DESC) works to end the homelessness of vulnerable people, particularly those living with serious mental illness or substance use disorders. Through partnerships and an integrated array of comprehensive services, treatment and housing, we give people the opportunity to reach their highest potential. At DESC, uncommon efforts produce uncommon results that eliminate homelessness, one person at a time.