

## **I. Getting Started: Making Tiny Houses for the Homeless a Priority**

Half a century of human research has proven that cold, wet, hungry and insecure people can't easily solve problems or grow unless their basic needs are met. Adults worried about food, shelter and safety have great difficulty with planning and pursuing activities needed to organize and improve their lives, even when well motivated. Those suffering from substance abuse, mental illness and trauma have trouble with the myriad schedules and appointments needed to even begin to get help. Children who grow up underfed and insecure show well documented learning, emotional and physical delays. For our society, these known facts have clear implications for how to prioritize help. Adults and children caught up in the turmoil of homelessness are unlikely to bootstrap themselves into health, productivity, happiness and even civility without direct help. This help needs to come first and foremost in the form of food and secure shelter.

Here are four themes pulled from recent research and relevant to Thurston County:

1. Overall, homelessness seems to be growing locally. Although the 2019 "Point in Time" homelessness sample results are not yet available, there is no reason to think that local rent increases and other factors limiting low income housing availability have changed. Case in point is the dramatic increase in tents downtown in the fall of 2018.
2. While most consider the homeless issue to be regional, homelessness in Olympia has its own roots. Roughly six in ten homeless people in Thurston County say they lived here before becoming homeless. Olympia, like most cities on the I-5 corridor, must seek both regional and local solutions.
3. Children, women and families are increasingly affected by homelessness in Thurston County. Unsheltered women accounted for 41% of the homeless in the County in 2018 up from 26% in 2015. Homeless families with children showed a 15% increase locally in the same period. Student homelessness is up one third since 2013 and this cohort represents only part of the homeless child count since 42% of homeless children are preschool age and therefore not counted.
4. Homelessness in Thurston County, while widespread, has clear points of concentration. Eighty percent of the County's unsheltered homeless are in Olympia. Fifty five percent of the County's homeless students are enrolled in the North Thurston School district.

Tiny houses, while only a part of any sensible comprehensive plan to resolve homelessness, are a logical and common sense first step. By providing basic shelter and security, they create a necessary base of operations from which those in need can begin to form the relationships and make use of the various types of assistance necessary for progress. Without this shelter and security, other kinds of help have limited utility.

The Faith Alliance Initiative for Tiny Houses ([faithtinyhouses.com](http://faithtinyhouses.com)) was created in November 2018 to help fill an essential part of this need:

1. Faith communities may have both the land and infrastructure available in places where help is most needed. The FAITH strategy is both scalable and distributive allowing churches to house the homeless in small clusters of Tiny Houses in various locations as an attractive alternative to the larger groups which have recently sprung up in problematic locations.
2. Faith communities, by virtue of belief and philosophy, are able to provide the kind of non-judgmental support needed by those who are most desperate. One to one supportive human relationships are a critical part of any helping process.
3. Faith communities can bring to the table a great variety of human and material resources necessary for a sustainable effort. Needed skills include construction, planning and development, social work and community organization.
4. The City and Faith partnership takes advantage of combined resources in a way that vastly improves the odds of success by combining the City's ability to help with certain infrastructure, permitting, planning and coordination issues with the power of volunteerism and physical resources enabled by faith communities.

Most complex problems have complex solutions. Certainly the causes of homelessness are complex as is the continuum of services and social supports necessary to eradicate them. The start point, however, is amazingly simple. Homeless people need a place to live. The FAITH alliance can provide it.