

Homelessness in the greater Seattle area

Being homeless means to be desperately lonely.

Homeless men and women experience a growing disengagement from ordinary society, often cut off from family, friends, neighborhood, church, and community. Without healthy relationships, with God and with others, many homeless people drift into isolation, often running away from the support networks they could count on in the past, and worse, not knowing how much God loves them and wants a thriving life for them.



According to the latest official count, there are over 11,000 homeless people in the greater Seattle area. Though we are only the 18th largest city in the USA, we are home to the

nation's 3rd largest homeless population. It's a crisis in our own backyard.

Though many more families are experiencing homelessness, most of our homeless neighbors are individuals living alone, apart from their loved ones. People in our communities who are often at the greatest risk of homelessness include people experiencing domestic violence, young adults coming out of the foster care system, individuals already struggling with addiction or mental illness, people coming out of governmental institutions (such as prison), and people already struggling with finances.

No matter how our neighbors find themselves homeless, two things they all have in common are that they are made in the image of God, and that God has so much more for them! God intended people, made in His image, to thrive in life, to have abundant life in Jesus. No matter what leads people to the streets, a restored relationship with God,

through Jesus, is the most important step in getting off of them.

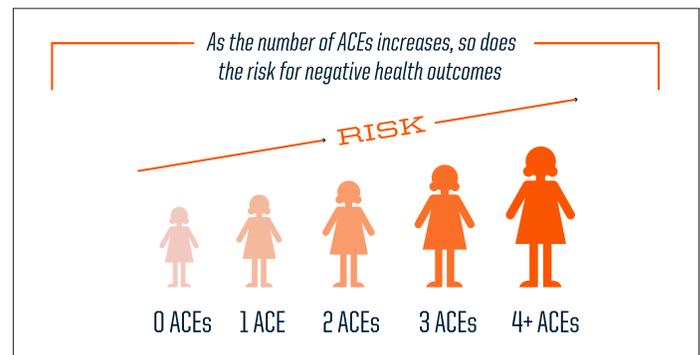
I left my parents' house as a teenager. I was probably homeless 20 years out of my life. I was cold and I was hungry. Search + Rescue asked, "Are you ready?" That night I joined the Men's Recovery program

- ERIC, MISSION GRADUATE

The path into homelessness

Many of our homeless neighbors suffer as a result of difficulties they were born with, their own choices, the choices of others, or a combination of factors. Tragically, many were set on their paths to homelessness as young children.

There are some heartbreaking truths about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). There are three types of ACEs: Abuse (physical, emotional, sexual), Neglect (physical, emotional), and Household Dysfunction (mental illness, mother treated violently, divorce, incarcerated relative, substance abuse).



ACE scores range from 0-10, with one point for each ACE a person experiences during childhood.

Each ACE a person has endured greatly increases the likelihood of risky health behaviors, chronic health conditions, low life potential, and early death. In short, the more ACEs a child experiences, the more likely he or she will experience difficulties into their adult life.

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Studies note that an ACE score of 4 or higher is where problems increase exponentially. The average person in a Mission program has an ACE score of 7!

ACE scores remind us that deep wounding comes in the context of relationships. We know, also, that it's in the context of healthy, loving relationships that people will find lasting healing – with God, with themselves, and with others.

We recognize that not all of our homeless neighbors had difficult upbringings. Everyone's path is different. Childhood trauma, however, does put many people on a path to homelessness. Regardless of how they get there, we must address the root causes if we are going to help people heal and move into the thriving lives that God wants for them.

What the Mission believes

At Seattle's Union Gospel Mission, we believe that every person is made in the image of God and is therefore worthy of dignity and love.



We believe that God desires to be in a personal relationship with us through Jesus Christ.

We believe homelessness is not a permanent state and that change is possible.

We believe people are often wounded in the context of relationships, and that it's in the context of relationships that people find healing – with God, with themselves, and others.

At the Mission, we take our calling to love our homeless neighbors very seriously. We are constantly reminded that we serve a God who leaves the ninety-nine to go after the one. We are fully committed to walking our neighbors through a path that ultimately leads them to a new and thriving life in Jesus Christ.

The path out of homelessness

Homelessness is a complex problem. Having said that, we also believe that the lack of a home is not the problem. It is a symptom. If we simply provide homes to most homeless people, the problems will linger. But instead, we dig deeper and address the root causes.



Why this approach? One, it's based on God's design for people. And two, we've seen it work, firsthand, repeatedly, for 88 years, so we know it's true.

To escape homelessness and addiction, people must have their physical, relational, and spiritual needs met. And they need to be loved and served in the context of healthy relationships.

A key root cause of homelessness and addiction is broken relationships. We bring right relationships into our neighbors' lives, helping them know they have a heavenly Father who loves them deeply and wants to be in relationship with them. We help them recapture what was lost by helping them see and believe that they are made in His image, and that they are precious to Him and to us.

Consider the words of Richard McAdams, Outreach Manager at the Mission. Richard spent more than 10 years struggling with homelessness and addiction before God rescued him and gave him a new life.

"There are over 5,000 people on the streets of Seattle. I know 3,000 of them by name, and I know their stories. The problem in Seattle is not a resource issue. It's a relational issue. The biggest problem is broken relationships. We have to address homelessness as a human problem. We have to understand why that leads people to get on the streets, (and we need to) rebuild those human bonds and relationships."

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A cost-effective investment

At the Mission, we believe we are a part of a larger continuum of care, that includes our partnerships with other organizations, government agencies, and the community. We know our programs work. As 2019 came to a close, through our Outreach teams, we helped more than 428 unsheltered people get off the streets and into shelter, recovery, or transitional housing.

Seattle University's Homeless Rights Advocacy Project and the US Interagency Council on Homelessness point to studies showing that on average, in Seattle and King County, it costs \$50,000 to \$80,000 a year in community services for each person living on the streets. These services include emergency room visits and ambulance services, in-patient substance abuse and detox program attendance, mental health services, and police involvement.

Taking into account the fullness of our comprehensive services and annual operating budget, we spend less than \$30,000 per year per person served, a \$30,000-50,000 "savings" that results in actual changed lives, rather than simply maintaining the status quo.

The Mission's approach

Seattle's Union Gospel Mission has served homeless and hurting people for 88 years. God has worked through us and has allowed us to be seen as an authority on homelessness and related issues. The City of Seattle even asked the Mission to help build and shape its homelessness outreach team, based on our outreach model.

Today, our approach is heavily relational. We know the names and stories of over 3,000 homeless people, more than half of those living on the streets, in the greater Seattle area. Like traditional rescue missions, we serve meals and provide beds at our shelters, because such measures are necessary for survival. Unlike most rescue missions, however, we take a proactive approach. We don't simply wait for homeless people to come to us. About eight years ago, we started sending teams out to encampments to meet, care for, and build relationships with our

homeless neighbors so we are able to get to know them before they come to us. Our staff and volunteers go to some very dark places. We see despair, hopelessness, squalor, and filth that leave even the most jaded and hardened people speechless.



Our ultimate goal is to walk people through the difficult transition from being homeless on the streets to ultimately living independent, healthy, productive lives in homes of their own.

The Mission's program model breaks down into four key stages.

The first stage, we call Survival. It's the stage you see most often, people living on the streets, often in the midst of their addictions, barely surviving, if at all.

The second stage we call Stabilization, where people have made a decision to join our recovery program and they're working to detox and leave the past behind.

The third stage is Recovery, where people are in our year-long recovery program and for some, spending another 6-12 months interning at the Mission or other places.

The fourth and last stage is what we call Post Graduation. This is where people have completed the Mission's program and are establishing themselves in a healthy, God honoring lifestyle.