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Investigating an Asset Based Approach to Housing and Homelessness: A
Phenomenological Case Study

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Urban Planning

University of Washington

2019

Reading Committee:

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Urban Design and Planning

University of Washington

Abstract

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This thesis is foundationally rooted in the argument that meritocracy capitalism is a force of production for homelessness in America. I contend that American cities are principally economic engines that function on exchange-value capitalism and through the privatization of land, excludes populations of citizens who cannot afford to participate in the pageantry of the city. Using care ethics and affect theory as my theoretical lenses to approach this problem, this research examines the structural response to homelessness, surveying how city, nonprofit, and faith-based organizations respond to this population. I argue that the community's response to homelessness is a critical missing piece if meaningful change is to be made in rehousing the homeless population. I conduct a qualitative phenomenological case study using Facing Homelessness's Block Project as a case study and primary data source to define the structural

response to homelessness in Seattle. Informality and non-market driven land uses are often overlooked aspects of planning and development. By considering these non-traditional spatial interventions, the conversation about homelessness in America can begin to be more proactive and less reactionary. The primary data was gathered by conducting recorded interviews with all current employees, residents, and hosts of the Block Project. This information will provide meaningful insights into the intangible and experiential value of community. This work acknowledges that it is short sided to limit the investigation of homelessness to an anecdote about economy. It is a circumstance created by social, political, and ecological forces all corresponding on a spatially fixed site. The role of racism, inadequate health care, and affordable housing are of course realities of this epidemic.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the staff of Facing Homelessness and Block Architects for making their resources and time available throughout the duration of this research project. Thank you to my thesis committee, Manish Chalana and Jeff Hou, for providing me valuable and constructive suggestions during the planning and development of this thesis. Additionally, I want to thank Béné, whose tireless support and encouragement made this work possible.

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

Homelessness in America is a pervasive issue, complicated by economic and social factors that reinforce its existence. These inequities are products of a choice, a socio-spatial pattern of organization that allows market forces to benefit the traditionally privileged to the exclusion of those who live in a non-traditional context. This paper will engage with homelessness by first framing a conversation around urban informality and traditional Western planning pedagogy to understand how capitalism influences the use of, and access to, the city. This understanding of urban formality and the city as an instance of capitalism provides the backdrop for an exploration of the emotional impact that the built form has on its users, known as affect theory, especially those who live unsheltered. To further explore the emotional impact, and output from the city, I will introduce care ethics as a responsive theoretical lens to the exclusionary forces of capitalism. Drawing upon care ethics will help explore how and why people are motivated to provide aid to the homeless population in Seattle. Aid provisions for those experiencing homelessness often come in the form of financial assets, but rarely in that of land, which is debatably the most finite resource a private citizen owns. For these reasons, I will support this research with literature around asset-based community planning to apply a formally accepted planning approach to messy or informal problems. These forces are all at play through the phenomenological case study of the Block Project. The confluence of these ideas help elucidate the irrational, or emotionally engaged, aspects of planning and urban design and offer alternatives to design and organization strategy. These conditions are irrational in an economic sense as they consider the social and emotional impact that the built environment has on a community. Community is the sociological cog that operates within the morphological frame of the built environment. The

container of the built environment reflects its contents and is shaped by the forces exerted on it. In exploring predictors and prevalence of homelessness, the literature demonstrates how external forces produce homelessness and suggest that the built environment can positively influence this process.

The research project will unfold at two different levels. The first level will begin with an exploration of the Block Project as a case study to understand its approach and motivations as a non-traditional housing model. It is purely operated and run as an asset-based community design project that leverages donated land, resources, and labor to build permanent housing for people living outside. Permanent meaning that these units are built with the intention of remaining available to the resident indefinitely. It is important to understand how this process functions because it may provide a window into more sustainable residential development as a product of an inside out community building model. The second level will commence with an analysis of the interview data collected and a subsequent dissection of what contributes to the creation of community. This is what has been described as the non-traditional approach to housing because the emphasis is being put on the intangible elements of the built environment. I will further explain how this will be executed in *Chapter 3* and expand on the implications of these findings.

The literature used in this thesis seeks to fuse the tangible and intangible aspects of the built environment to define the structural response to homelessness in Seattle. By structural response I refer to both community and institutional interventions, encompassing organizational, systemic, and built interventions, in the context of Seattle's urban form. The foundational planning theory is derived from Nico Larco's work on site design and suburban multifamily housing, Robert Chaskin's examination of neighborhood history and design, and Michael Conzen's study of American urban form (Chaskin, 1995; Conzen, 2001; Larco, 2009). To

contrast this work, which is concerned with formally constructed American urbanism, I incorporate Manish Chalana's comparison of urban informality and global modernity, Phillip Harrison's work on planning and urban futures in Africa, and Doug Timmer's study of poverty and the urban housing crisis (Chalana, 2010; Harrison, 2006; Timmer, 1994). These authors consider urban informality and accept the reality that conventional forms of urbanism have led to the displacement and exclusion of others. For this reason, literature on participatory planning is important to understand how to incorporate underserved voices in the planning process. I draw from Jeff Hou's work on asset-based community design, William Leach's study on stakeholder partnerships as a collaborative policymaking strategy, and Antoni Folker's reflection on the Beeker Method and planning with informality. Finally, to better understand the population this thesis seeks to benefit, I include research on the factors of homelessness. Dr. Melissa Johnstone's study on breaking the cycle of homelessness coupled with Dr. Carol Caton's study on the risk factors for long term homelessness and Dr. Folsom's research on the prevalence and risk factors for homelessness provide a clear picture of how people in this population have successfully transitioned into stable housing. The combination of literature focused on informality and planning theory, with participatory design and factors of homelessness, will yield a rich exploration of how the power of community can be leveraged through design to disrupt traditional Western planning theory. I will further discuss the tensions that exist between traditional planning practices and urban informality in the literature review.

This literature will inform my phenomenological case study approach using the Seattle based non-profit Facing Homelessness and the Block Project as my primary data sources. I classify this as a phenomenological case study because I write about the described experiences of those impacted by, and participating in, the Block Project by analyzing the responses collected

through in person interviews. This written description will attempt to capture the essence of the respondent's experiences. I collect this data through recorded in person interviews and then code the conversations to find themes between participants in order to gain a better understanding of the essence of their experience and motivations to participate in the Block Project. This phenomenological approach is critical in marrying the emotional, intangible human experience to the spatially fixed elements of the built environment. My findings will be a product of emergent design and will largely depend on the content of the interviews.

1.1 A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Describing homelessness as a condition is problematic and divisive. Homelessness is not a disorder or personality trait; it merely describes an individual's living condition and therefore is something that should be discussed as an experience. I intentionally refrain from writing about "homeless individuals" and instead prefer to write "individuals experiencing homelessness" because it places the emphasis first on the individual. By using language that stresses the importance of the individual, it helps us recognize them before we consider their circumstance. This verbal shift is significant in changing the perception of this population, therefore destigmatizing it over time.

1.2 PROBLEMATIC ASPECTS

Traditional Western planning ideologies have a narrow concept of land use, born from Euclidean zoning, which privatizes parcels and produces a repetition of private amenity spaces. As I will describe in the literature review, planning in the American context has traditionally resisted mixing land uses and spatial ambiguity. A block of 20 single family homes will have 20 kitchens, 20 living rooms, 20 backyards (community spaces) et cetera. This is neither equitable

nor sustainable and has created an urban climate of exclusion. I am interested in contributing to the theory of block organization to understand how asset-based community design can be applied at the neighborhood level to disrupt Western centered ideas of planning. The conversation connecting affect theory at the block level is limited and, through a phenomenological analysis, can yield a nuanced understanding of the study participant's lived experiences. Narrowing the scope to the residential block level is important to focus the study and center the conversation on community at a more reasonable scale.

Over the evolution of the project, I considered how I would gain access to the community that I am studying. Building trust required me to spend time with the community and understand who the gatekeepers were in order to gain their permission to conduct interviews with the participants of the Block Project. Since the participants will be trusting me with their opinions and thoughts in the interviews, I have a moral obligation to represent them authentically and to not alter the information to illustrate the narrative I am most interested in advancing. I am aware of the bias that I bring into my work and will be conscious to prevent my personal bias and opinions from entering into the research design. I mitigated this by working with Facing Homelessness to identify a problem that would benefit the participants by conducting a needs assessment with the participants. I met with the founder of Facing Homelessness about this project who vetted this case study and agreed to make the resources of his organization available to me. We discussed how this work can be a valuable tool for his organization to use in response to the public's resistance of welcoming a formerly homeless person into their neighborhood. I have also volunteered with Facing Homeless at their Window of Kindness and with the Block Project on the build site for Block Homes 2 and 3 to show my commitment to working with this population. While collecting the data, I needed to be thoughtful about transparency and careful to

not misrepresent those who have participated. It is important not to build an expectation with the participants that I am collecting this information for a purpose that my analysis will ultimately not address or agree with. I have a responsibility to report the data I collected honestly and with academic integrity, and the findings will either lend to support the approach that the Block Project is taking or produce recommendations for how to improve their process moving forward.

1.3 APPROACH

I have approached this research with a transformative worldview, as it cannot ignore the pressures that politics and capitalism place on those who are experiencing homelessness. As I will unpack in *Chapter 7*, I believe that this research will inform how the future use of residential space should be conceptualized. Participatory social justice theory will drive this study as my underlying assumptions rely on the ethics of inclusion and in questioning the widely accepted social structures that create an environment of exclusion and oppression. Homelessness is pervasive and while government initiatives are in place to provide meaningful change, the issue goes largely unaddressed by private citizens. The efforts required to make a lasting change in the lives of our neighbors living outside will not come from government and non-profit aid alone but must engage the community as a whole. This is an urgent urban planning question, striking at the core of social justice theory and participatory planning practices. This study will be positioned to critique the current conception of private land ownership and suggest a new residential housing strategy that would leverage existing/underused land to increase the dwelling unit capacity of a neighborhood. The outcome of the study may lead to a suggestion for land use and layering of privately-owned spaces in a non-traditional way.

1.4 EXPECTED RESULTS

The outcome of the study may lead to suggestions for land use policy which would allow privately owned spaces to be used in a more non-traditional way. The Block Project will be the case study to measure the acceptance of community building projects and gain an understanding of the willingness to participate at the block level. This information could yield, through phenomenological study, insights into how backyard cottages and DADUs are perceived by the neighborhoods who can accommodate them. Ultimately, the results may provide an opportunity for readers to reflect on their experiences in and through the built environment, and prompt them to treat people that they don't understand or relate to with more humanity.

Another outcome of the project could lead to a better understanding of the rehabilitative power that community has on an individual. Social support is a strong predictor for wellness in those who have previously experienced homelessness and is a critical component in creating positive housing reentry outcomes (Johnstone, Parsell, Jetten, Dingle, & Walter, 2016). Could this logic be applied more broadly to the built environment by looking at the benefits of increasing residential density with infill housing? I predict that the families offering to host a Block Home feel more connected to their community and are enriched by the process. Furthermore, this research could act as the foundational text for further ethnographic study of the participant population including future hosts and residents of the Block Project. Potential opportunities for further study include comparative studies of indigenous and heterogeneous cultures who build around a shared community space. These built forms are structured around shared spaces and rely on the dwelling for more minimal levels of activity.

Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 CAPITALISM AS CULPRIT

It is important to first frame how economic forces, principally those of capitalism in the American context, shape the physical development of the built environment. Market forces guided by capitalism do not champion shared or ambiguous commodities, but instead, favor exchanges that can be attributed to a credit or a debit. Applying a structuralist understanding of the city, the built environment shapes and informs how people act within the physical frame of built space. The work of David Harvey, a Marxist geographer and professor at City University of New York, can be applied here to critique capitalism and support a theoretical vision for a new block typology. Harvey states that “urbanism, as a general phenomenon, should not be viewed as a history of particular cities, but as the history of the system of cities within, between, and around which the surplus circulates” (Harvey, 2009, p. 250). Harvey describes the city as an instance of capitalism and has developed to create and circulate economic surplus. Approaching this understanding of how the forces of capitalism have shaped the built environment with a structuralist lens I argue that the private realm has been championed above shared public space to the exclusion of those who are unable to afford the comfort of private amenity spaces. This has frayed the relationship between the public and private realm, creating urban environments filled with physical exclusion and social stigmatization. This can be seen most starkly in the design of privately-owned public spaces (POPs) built in commercial districts near the city center. POPs are often a land use requirement for new development but are not executed thoughtfully and result in the production of ineffective public space. Hannah Arendt, an American philosopher and author of *The Human Condition*, writes that “to live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life: to be deprived of the

reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived of an "objective" relationship with them that comes from being related to and separated from them through the intermediary of a common world of things, to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself" (Arendt, 1958, p. 58). Those experiencing homelessness in our communities are subject to the relationship that Arendt describes in this quote. The homeless are ironically a highly visible, but intentionally ignored population living amongst the housed community in the city. To extend what Arendt asserted about social exchanges that are central to our humanity, people experiencing homelessness are unseen and unheard, and as a result, dehumanized by those who are threatened by their existence.

I argue that this behavior of creating and reinforcing the other is a social measure taken to protect the resources held by private citizens. This is a behavioral manifestation of how the economic forces of capitalism have influenced social interactions in the city. Michael Conzen writes about urban morphology in the United States, focusing on American cultural values which make our urban environment distinct. Conzen states simply that, "American cities have been regarded first and foremost as economic machines" (Conzen, 2001, p. 4). Capitalist markets create a climate of supply and demand, where scarcity drives the economy and creates the *haves* and the *have nots*. In the context of this study, the binary is driven between the housed and the unhoused. The system is entered into by participants with different amounts of wealth and creates economic inequity with little attention paid to the consequences of the status quo. Bhinder, who has authored a study of homeless resident in Delhi, supports this by stating "it takes a lot of poverty to create wealth" (Bhinder & Mishra, 2008, p. 7). The owners of the surplus are engaging in a zero-sum game. As Bhinder suggests, in order to create a surplus of wealth, it is necessary to monopolize the temporal and financial resources of poor and working-

class individuals. Ultimately, urbanity transcends beyond an understanding of the built form and offers a commentary on the economic forces that have been extended to concentrate and circulate capital surplus. When the circulation moves inefficiently, when a major artery becomes clogged, the vulnerable are left without their piece of the surplus. Homelessness is then a consequence of a system that is operationalized to favor individuals who have the available resources to capture larger parts of the surplus. Without the ability to independently leverage these forces and capture surplus, private citizens are unable to engage in the purchase of property and real estate. This inability to invest financial resources in a physical space creates the division between the housed and the unhoused.

To be homeless is in many ways to be placeless. Christopher Alexander, emeritus professor at UC Berkeley and author of *A Pattern Language*, examines how design should be executed at a local level to create joyful spaces that respond to the local context of a community. Alexander writes that "people need an identifiable spatial unit to belong to" (Alexander, 1977, p. 81). Being placeless is to have no formally recognized association with the built environment. No unit of ownership with which to tax or withdraw capital from, and correspondingly build wealth. Alexander goes on to say that "the mosaic of subcultures requires that hundreds of different cultures live, in their own way, at full intensity, unhampered by their neighbors, if they are physically separated by physical boundaries" (Alexander, 1977, p. 77). People experiencing homelessness are both passively and actively excluded from assimilating into formal urban culture. Those experiencing homelessness are physically separated from those who are housed by invisible, socially constructed boundaries. Individuals who live in conventional housing solutions are quick to forget that they are neighbors to those living outside and are a part of their community. The homeless are a challenge to the way of life for people who can afford to

participate in capitalist culture and are therefore stigmatized. For example, people discuss homelessness as if it is contagious and must be avoided or contained to prevent its spread. This attitude towards homelessness is counterproductive to the solution.

Medical professionals who have conducted research on the predictors and prevalence of homelessness have found that social support and changes in social support were strong predictors of mental and physical well-being for individuals who had resided in homeless accommodation (Johnstone et al., 2016). Johnstone stresses the importance of social support in successfully rehousing those who have been experiencing homelessness, advocating that community engagement is paramount in this process thus establishing that homelessness is more than the product of a housing crisis. This sets the precedent for the need to disrupt the commodification of land because these market-based approaches to land ignore the sociological impact of the built environment.

The built environment has an emotional impact on those who use and navigate through space. This is an invisible dimension of the built environment, one that is less prevalent in the minds of academic and professional planning practitioners. This idea is referred to as affect theory. Foundationally, Anderson writes about affect theory and how space is divisive and creates pressures of exclusion. Anderson unpacks the term affect theory and explains “whilst theories of affect vary, use of the term affect signals an attention to lived experience” (Anderson, 2017, p. 2). This is an unexamined aspect of the planning and building process, considering the non-rational aspects of space and land use and the impact it has on members of the community that participate in non-traditional ways. Organizing spaces with a focus on empathy can change the way space is envisioned and organized. The Block Project seeks to do just that. Their mission is complex, but they explain their work by saying that “social injustices, including homelessness,

are perpetuated through emotional and physical separation, which allows us to get stuck on the complexity of the issue. By literally saying, “Yes, in my backyard”, we will begin to see the person afflicted by the issue. We believe this will nurture the empathy needed to catalyze a global movement” (Facing Homelessness + BLOCK Architects, 2019). This quote illustrates the value of affect theory and challenges everyday citizens to practice empathy by saying “yes, in my backyard.” Beyond the brick and mortar, their work seeks to erase the invisibility of homelessness and return this person into the fold of the community that surrounds them.

Narrowing the focus on homelessness as an outcome alone provides a limited understanding of the societal forces at work. By widening the aperture and examining the full social context, homelessness can be understood as a crisis of community. American individualism has created an atrophied understanding of how to care for, and include, those in need which contributes to the lack of social responsibility felt to care for the homeless. Virginia Held, a leading moral philosopher whose work examines the ethics of care and humanities shared responsibility to care for one another writes that “the ethics of care recognizes that there are highly important moral aspects in developing the relations of caring that enable human beings to live and progress” (Held, 2006, p. 3). She asserts that caring for one another is an essential characteristic of the human condition and is foundational to life and progress. Furthermore, Held adds that “prospects for human progress and flourishing hinge fundamentally on the care that those needing it receive, and the ethics of care stresses the moral force of the responsibility to respond to the needs of the dependent” (Held, 2006, p. 3). Held argues that there is a moral obligation to care for those in need and that in seeking these emotionally rich connections humans will collectively progress as an outcome. This is theoretically sound, but aspirational in practice. The Block Project approaches its work with a morally focused lens

which comes close to achieving Held's vision of taking responsibility to respond to the needs of the dependent. The Block Project deploys the collective surplus resources and land of a community, making it an unusual and remarkable alternative housing typology.

Care ethics emerged as a field rooted in feminist and philosophical ethics during the 1980s. Robin Dillon, Director of Lehigh University Center for Ethics, explains that "Care ethics was for some time the dominant approach in feminist ethics and so feminist discussions of virtue" (Dillon, 2017). Care ethics are reliant on the principals of empathy and self-sacrifice which are moral outlooks that place "caring for others at the heart of morality" (Archer & Cawston, 2018). Moreover, literature suggests that the value of care ethics lies in the practice of having to "leave our own frame of reference and step into the frame of reference or lifeworld of the other in order to understand the situation from their first-person or inner viewpoint" (Bos, Duyndam, Nistelrooij, & Dijke, 2018). It is through the practice of empathy that we are able to connect with another individual to gain an understanding of their world view and begin to appreciate the hardships that they experience. Furthermore, "empathy is considered our primary and most important way of knowing and understanding others" (Bos et al., 2018). In this sense, empathy binds the community together through the ability to relate to one another. Care is the foundation of community, making self-sacrifice a reasonable practice to contribute to the collective wellbeing of one's community.

Self-sacrifice is a product of an empathic practice to understand someone else's lived experience. Through that understanding, one is then able to share their resources and more effectively provide aid to the individual in need. Literature explains that "self-sacrifice may be an essential component of effective opposition to oppression" (Archer & Cawston, 2018, p. 464). It is inarguable that individuals who experience homelessness suffer from systemic oppression.

While this thesis does not directly engage with the lens of gender, the primary tenants of care ethics hold true through the case study of the Block Project. By inviting community to participate in the task of ending homelessness, the Block Project relies on the empathy of individuals to achieve its mission. Furthermore, participating in the Block Project as a homeowner requires individuals to share their land for no financial benefit, a tangible expression of self-sacrifice.

The kinetic energy held by private citizens makes more granular community level organization critical to disrupting traditional market-based approaches to land use. Asset based community planning organizes the resources of an existing group to benefit the community as a whole. Jeff Hou describes this asset-based approach as "having emerged from the field of community development, asset-based approach has important implications for future directions of participatory urban design, particularly in the context of distressed neighborhoods. Instead of dwelling on the community's needs, deficiencies and problems, asset-based approaches focus on existing capacities in the community to effect change" (Hou, 2011, p. 336). This approach is the missing piece to fighting homelessness in our communities and can be leveraged to engage compassion and empathy into the planning process. Social justice needs to be more than a lens that architects and planners use to view their work through, it needs to be an integral part of the practice. Finding the nexus between economy and equity may not be achievable at a commercial level, but communities can engage at a local level to develop vernacular spaces that achieve this delicate balance.

These ideas frame the conversation and inform the case study with the Block Project. The Block Project is community driven and is supported by surplus labor, materials, and financial capital to operate. What is irrational about their approach in an economic sense is that the surplus is not leveraged to create a commodity to bring to market, but instead gets reciprocated back to

the community. Land is not treated differently than any other commodity on the market. What makes it so contentious is that it is a finite resource, and the supply is forever fixed by Earth's geological features. Because of this scarcity, citizens cling to their private spaces and ignore the opportunities to create community. This is an example of the emotional separation that the Block Project mentions in their mission (Facing Homelessness + BLOCK Architects, 2019). Because of the external pressures impacting land use, community organization is more vital than ever.

The literature that I have discussed has framed the conversation around homelessness through the lens of capitalism. This is important to validate the need to look beyond market-based solutions to affordable dwelling units to find non-traditional approaches. With support from medical research stressing the importance of community and social services to reduce homeless recidivism, the case can be built that the intangible value of community is what creates a resilient community. The result is a case to leverage asset-based community design to disrupt these economic forces to build empathy into the urban cadaster at the neighborhood and block level.

2.2 CURRENT UNDERSTANDINGS OF FORMALITY

In order to understand informality and the characterization of homelessness in the American context, we must first turn to the modern understandings of urban formality. The two traditional Western schools of thought for urban planning come from Los Angeles and Chicago. The Chicago concentric zone model emerged from the seminal text, *The City*, written in 1925 by urban sociologist Robert Park and Ernest Burgess using Chicago as a lab to understand the “modern” city. The Chicago School reads the city as form, as something that emerged as an instance of capitalism and grew from one defined center. It is a radially emerging model of development that “views the city as a unified whole...a congruent regional system in which the

center organizes the hinterland” (Dear 2002, p. 9). To expand on Michael Dear’s description of the Chicago School of development, the center is understood as the economic core and each successive ring is populated by wealthier, and traditionally, whiter members of society. Park and Burgess sought to discover patterns of regularity in the “apparent confusion” of the city, reinforcing the difficulty western planning theory has in coexisting with informality (Park & Burgess, 1925). The intellectual hegemony of the Chicago School was sustained for nearly 60 years because of its simplicity and overwhelming body of supporting literature (Dear 2002, p. 8).

The Chicago School was challenged by the emergence of the Los Angeles model of development during the 1980s. Edward Soja, a post-modern political geographer and planning professor at UCLA, considers 1980-1992 the period of greatest impact and output for the L.A. School of thought (Soja 2013, p. 689). The L.A. model has a polycentric understanding of development where the city’s multi-peripheral form defines the center. The L.A. School of urban development reads the city as space, activity, and interaction. This is thought to be the model of the post-modern American city, thriving off of the proliferation of the automobile and the burning independence of the America spirit. Darnell Hunt, professor of Sociology and African American Studies at UCLA, examines Los Angeles through a post-modern lens and writes that “the city is instead conceptualized as an amalgamation of differentiated spaces held together primarily by structures of thought that work to pattern actions but offer little closure” (Hunt 2002, p. 323). Through the relationships of the poly-centers, one can begin to understand the center of the city, but only by experiencing the city as a process. This understanding of the modern American city was again challenged, this time by Edward Soja, who expanded the scale of the poly-centric city and recharacterized it as regional urbanism.

Regional urbanism is a more fitting model to understand patterns of future development in the American context, but still lacks the nuance of navigating urban informality within a formal context. Urban regionalism is a poststructuralist understanding of the city where the urban and regional become intertwined, signaling “the end of the metropolis era and the beginning of a new urban age in which the urban and the regional are increasingly combined and interwoven” (Soja 2013, p. 690). This connection creates a fusion of the edges which blends the lines between urban and rural in the context of rapid urban expansion. These models all seek to define the city through a lens that could be characterized as “formal” in its appearance.

The Chicago and L.A. Schools, and Soja’s theory of urban regionalism are all prescribed and planned understandings of the city, so how does informality find space to exist within these models? Visiting assistant professor at Pratt Institute, Daniela Fabricius argues that “The Los Angeles model may simply be inadequate for understanding cities at a point at least thirty years after it was declared postmodern” (Fabricius 2008, p. 7). To expand on her argument by contributing Soja’s thoughts about urban regionalism, the Chicago model is also an antiquated understanding of urban development as it is now nearly 100 years old. I argue that the aforementioned models lack the flexibility to consider informality as a viable development model, and not as a piece of the built environment that needs definition. This is not to ignore the fact that “we live in a global system of urban processes, and that it is essential to theorize urban change in ways that resonate with universal challenges of natural resource threats, the uneven distribution of wealth, sustainable infrastructure management, and erosion in the quality of life” (Parnell & Robinson 2013, p. 597). Formal planning systems have shaped a largely sterile and rigid environment, creating barriers for the production of affordable housing and ways of earning a living wage.

Zoning regulations, for example, prohibit non-conforming uses within distinct sections of the city in an effort to organize both form and function. More precisely, zoning is a recognized police power of local governments that legally empowers the city to determine the height, use, density, and developable area of a parcel. The United States Supreme Court established the principles of land use zoning in the landmark case, *Village of Euclid Ohio v. Ambler Realty Co.* in 1926. The court ruled in favor of a local zoning ordinance that prevented Ambler Realty Co. from developing residentially zoned land for industrial use. This decision empowered the use of zoning as a regulatory tool and arguably devalued private property rights. As it evolved over time, “zoning became a tool of exclusion that still governs land use patterns today” (Chudacoff, 2016, p. 173). These understandings of urban development are important to frame the conversation around informality, creating opportunities to address and discuss urban informality in planning theory.

2.3 URBAN INFORMALITY: LOOKING FORWARD

Informality signals that conventional planning and design regulations are not meeting the complex needs of society and therefore need to be reevaluated (Mukhija & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014). Urban informality is often understood in one of two ways. The first characterization comes from Peter Hall and Ulrich Pfeiffer who describe urban informality as a condition of crisis and disorganization in the city. Cities in the Global South are experiencing unprecedented growth, what Hall and Pfeiffer describe as informal hyper growth, which is a condition that outstrips the existing resources of the city and increases the pollution, violence, and danger of the city (Hall & Pfeiffer, 2000). Their central thesis is that poverty is the single greatest threat to achieving a desirable and sustainable urban environment. This is a hyperbolic depiction of urban poverty, discrediting the reality of the city as an emergent process. Informality is often associated

with poverty which is measured against nations of different scales and socioeconomic drivers. Hall & Pfeiffer's explanation of informality places an unfair burden on the city to reach a point of conclusion and ignores the city as a process or state of becoming.

The second understanding of informality comes from Hernando De Soto who has a more optimistic interpretation. De Soto positions urban informality as an economic model of "heroic entrepreneurship" where innovation occurs because capitalism has failed to benefit the developing world (De Soto, 2000, p. 14). I assert that innovation has similarly failed the developed world because, as David Harvey established, capitalism functions on the circulation of surplus (Harvey, 2009). In order to create such a surplus there are actors that will not benefit from participating in the system of financial circulation. De Soto's theory of urban informality makes it clear that informality is more than a development pattern but is also an economic model that runs parallel to formal capital markets. These understandings paint a complex narrative, indicating the informality is disorganized perhaps in form, but deliberate in practice.

Ananya Roy and Nezar AlSayyad conceptualize urban informality as an "organizing logic, a system of norms that governs the process of urban transformation itself" (Roy 2005 , p. 148). While it is a transformation of space, gradually becoming incorporated into the formal fabric of the city, there is also an alternative understanding of informality as a state, not a process. It is a limitation of urban planning that formal spatial understandings create unplanned and unplannable spaces. The binary of formal and informal is a constraint of planning as an approach to spatial organization that discounts the cultural richness and diversity that exists in the interstitial spaces of the city. Informality mischaracterizes the condition of development as unplanned and condemns the impermanence of such developments. For these reasons, it is

important to reposition the understanding of urban informality and challenge academics to find more precise language to describe space.

This need for a new understanding of informality is further expanded by Manish Chalana, Associate Professor of Urban Planning at the University of Washington, who lends a critical global lens to my case study about the Block Project. Chalana's work centers on the friction created between globalization and urban informality in the context of India. He discusses the social and political importance of informality as it challenges the formal practices of spatial organization. In his 2010 publication *Slumdogs Vs. Millionaires: Balancing Urban Informality and Global Modernity in Mumbai*, Chalana states that planners have the opportunity to "bridge the gap between social responsibility and artistic experimentation" (Chalana, 2010). The role of the urban planner must extend beyond land use and zoning decisions to consider the equity of the decisions being made. This speaks to the responsibility that architects and urban planners have when considering how their projects will impact the built environment. Making changes to the built fabric of a place will change the way a community engages with that space and therefore each other.

As evidenced by the contributing scholars, literature on urban informality is grounded in the Global South. This understanding of urban informality offers important lessons about unit size, land uses, and affordability. Therein lie answers that are not sanctioned under many formalized land use codes but would allow greater flexibility and spatial utility if these lessons could be applied in a formal setting. Not to romanticize the poor living conditions that these accommodations often create, they create poor health outcomes and are subject to environmental hazards. Vinit Mukhija, Associate Professor of Urban Planning at UCLA, offers a critical lens examining American informality. He captures the essence of informality's reception by

formalized planning practitioners, stating that “planners and policymakers usually see informal activities at best as unorganized, marginal enterprises that should be ignored, and at worst as unlawful activities that should be stopped and prosecuted” (Mukhija & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014). This reception to informality informs the way that informal and homeless populations are received, and as Mukhija mentions, can be consequential as living on the margins becomes an illegal act that must be stopped.

2.4 HOMELESSNESS IN SEATTLE

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines chronic homelessness as “an individual with a disability who has been continuously homeless for one year or more or has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years where the combined length of time homeless in those occasions is at least 12 months” (The US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018). This definition puts temporal constraints on what it means to experience homelessness chronically but does little to qualify the experience of living beyond the reach of conventional housing. More specifically, homelessness as a state of being is defined by HUD as “people whose primary nighttime location is a public or private place not designated for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for people (for example, the streets, vehicles, or parks)” (The US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018). This definition subtly acknowledges that to be homeless is an unsanctioned act, as it hinges on where and how a person uses space for their own private uses. Criminalizing homelessness provides cues for how to model lawful behavior and empowers the state to dictate how citizenship is manifested. If the public realm begins to carry rules and prohibitions, it then begins to act more like a private space requiring membership for access. In this case, the

“membership” is more nebulous and requires the actor to participate in the pageantry of urban living.

Sarah Dooling, an urban ecologist whose work explores social justice and ecological design, seeks to define homelessness in more philosophical terms. Dooling suggests that “homelessness and homeless people in particular, are framed from deeply politicized positions driven, in part, by (1) the idea that homeless people are morally deficient and are therefore responsible for their plight and (2) the uncanny experience of housed residents encountering homeless people creating private home-like spaces illegally in public” (Dooling, 2012, p. 101). She creates a strong distinction between the spaces governed for use as a dwelling and those which have been chosen out of necessity. In describing this distinction, Dooling writes that “homeless people are the most visible and persistent occupants of public space and appropriate these spaces for their private means” (Dooling, 2009, p. 631). In doing so, homeless individuals exist in the interstitial spaces between the public and private realm, between legal and illegal (Dooling, 2012). Western planning pedagogy craves definition in the urban environment. People experiencing homelessness are problematic in this sense as they do little to contribute to the collective capital of the system and are then prevented from receiving social or monetary benefits.

Viewing homelessness through a wider aperture, 78% of the homeless population in King County consists of single individuals, a majority of which are white men over the age of 40 (All Home King County, 2019). Nearly 30% of the current homeless population experiences chronic homelessness, which indicates that these individuals have lived outside continuously for a year or more (The US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018). This kind of continuous instability is difficult to recover from and speaks to the complexity of homelessness

in America. Families with children are also affected, making up 22% of the homeless population. These populations are especially vulnerable as many shelters only accept single individuals and much of the affordable housing is built in the form of studio and one-bedroom units. The most striking statistic is that 27% of the homeless population in King County is African American, a disproportionately high number when you take into account that the Black and African American community only consists of 6% of the population in King County (All Home King County, 2019; The US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018). I acknowledge that it is short sighted to limit the investigation of homelessness to an anecdote about economy. It is a circumstance created by social, political, and ecological forces all corresponding on a spatially fixed site. The role of racism, inadequate health care, and affordable housing are of course realities of this epidemic. My research is more focused on the community's response to homelessness exploring how the ethics of care can influence the way residential typologies can bend to incorporate non-traditional residents.

2.5 THE CITY'S RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS

In 2018, a one night count found 12,112 people experiencing homelessness in Seattle, a 4% increase from 2017 (The US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018). Nearly half of that population was living unsheltered, accounting for 6,320 individuals across King County (Figure 1). The US Department of Housing and Urban Development considers an individual experiencing homelessness unsheltered if they are “in a place not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings” or on the street (The US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018). All Home is an organization whose role is to lead the Seattle/King County Continuum of Care by joining care providers from local governments, non-profits, religious institutions, and philanthropic organizations. According to

their 2017 data, of the 4,567 households who exited homelessness to permanent housing, 866 were homeless again within a year (All Home King County, 2019). While some individuals may choose to leave a toxic or abusive situation, they are certainly not choosing to live unsheltered. A 20% rate of recidivism begs the question if homelessness is centrally a housing problem, then why is the provision of affordable housing not ending it? To the extent that long term poverty, mental health concerns, and social stigma are central to the condition of homelessness “it is unlikely that the provision of housing would lead to long term stability” (Shinn et al., 1998).



Figure 1. Unsheltered homeless count in Seattle (2010-2018). Data source: AllHome King County Point in Time Data

The City of Seattle budgeted \$78 million dollars in direct response to the homelessness crisis in 2018 (City of Seattle, 2019). The majority of the budget, \$30.9 million, was earmarked for shelter, hygiene, and homeless outreach (Figure 2). The city’s outreach strategy hinges heavily on encampment removal. The Encampment Abatement Program identifies unsanctioned homeless camps in the city of Seattle and after they have posted an official 72-hour notice to evacuate, works to place those living outside in sheltered living. From June 4th to July 27th during the summer of 2018, 38 homeless camps were swept in a 56-day period. This is an aggressive

strategy of forced dispersal that does little to provide stability or assistance to this population. In 2017, The City of Seattle’s outreach team made 7,300 contacts with people experiencing homelessness and of those contacts, 1,117 people reportedly accepted some form of service (City of Seattle, 2019). If only 15% of interactions are positive for the population being served this indicates that there is a critical misunderstanding of that population and the services being provided are not catering to the most urgent needs of the community.

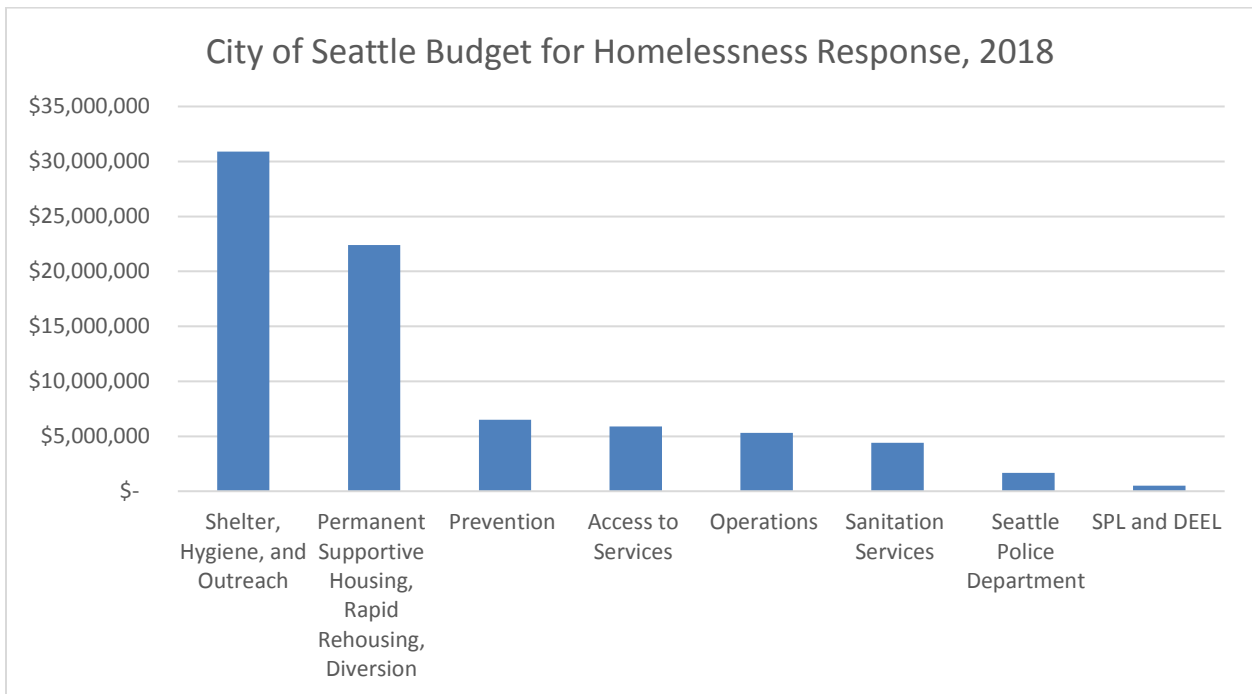


Figure 2. City of Seattle budget for homelessness response (2018). Data source: City of Seattle ‘Addressing the Crisis’

The City of Seattle partners with the Low-Income Housing Institute (LIHI) to manage and operate seven permitted villages geographically dispersed throughout Seattle. All of the villages are located on either city or LIHI owned property, and in total provide shelter for over 300 individuals each night. To ensure that community concerns are being adequately heard and mitigated, each camp is reviewed on a monthly basis by a Community Advisory Committee (CAC).

Seattle Homeless Camps

Current as of 2019

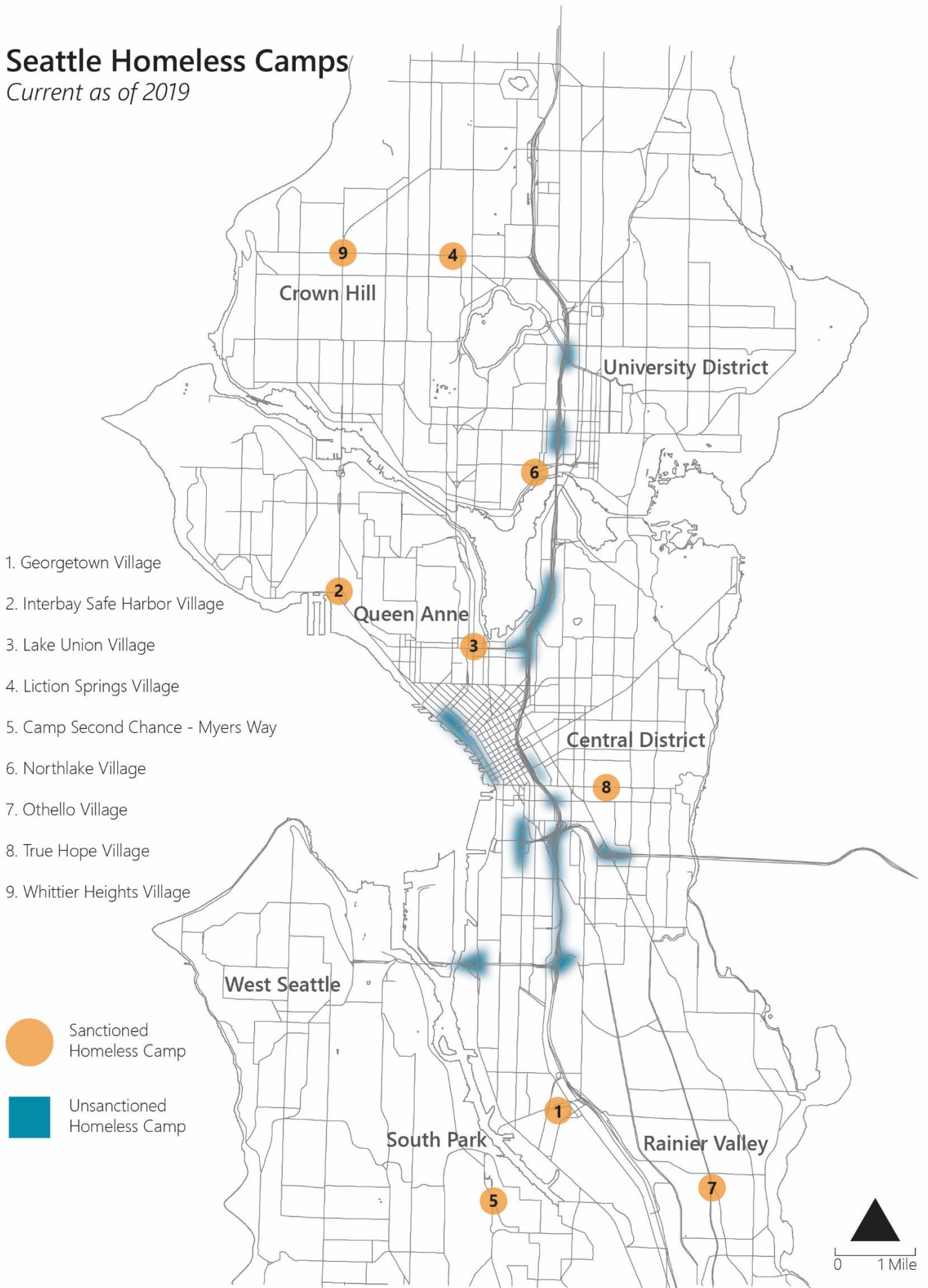


Figure 3. Seattle Homeless Camps (2019). Data source: City of Seattle 'Addressing the Crisis'

Collectively, these villages are beneficiaries of the \$30.9 million-dollar shelter, hygiene, and outreach budget allocated by the City of Seattle. The full list of sanctioned villages can be found here: Georgetown Village, Interbay Safe Harbor Village, Lake Union Village, Licton Springs Village, Camp Second Chance – Myers Way, Northlake Village, Othello Village, True Hope Village, and Whittier Heights Village (Figure 3).

Mayor Durken identifies Homelessness Prevention as Investment Area 1, allocating \$22.4 million dollars, 28% of the budget, towards permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing, and diversion (City of Seattle, 2019). While this has provided 1,000 low income households with rental assistance and utility discounts, diversion and rapid re-housing are one-time financial measures to move people experiencing homelessness directly into housing. Diversion and rapid re-housing are not truly preventative in nature but act as a reaction to the urgent need for housing. Research suggests that “...the presence of housing alone does not address associated problems such as poverty, stigma, loneliness, and social exclusion” and limited reach of those measures provides no long term housing stability (Johnstone et al., 2016). This illuminates how politics and planning can blend to produce undesirable and ineffective outcomes. Planners can identify where the housing is placed, policy makers can dictate how it is funded, but neither can address the social stigma experienced by someone living outside.

The City of Seattle budgets an additional \$12.4 million dollars on prevention and access to services. These services come in the form of Urban Rest Stops and Day and Hygiene Centers which provide basic amenities like shower, restroom and laundry services. The services provided by the day centers come at no cost to the patrons and play a key role in creating avenues for people experiencing homelessness to practice self-care. Additionally, \$4.4 million dollars were spent in 2018 cleaning garbage and waste produced by homeless camps. In total, the City of

Seattle collected over 3.5 million pounds of garbage from unmanaged encampments, trash in the right of way, and the newly piloted encampment litter bag program run by Seattle Public Utilities. Collecting and disposing of this amount of waste comes at a great financial cost to the city, and signals that more formalized collection centers could be implemented to mitigate the uncontrolled nature of the garbage.

Where planning can be effective in legislating and enacting change is through long-term strategies like inclusionary zoning, urban land trusts, rent control legislation, and reliable housing subsidies (Dooling, 2009). The irony in this is that the need for housing and stability is urgent, requiring a more expeditious response than formal planning interventions can summon. Communities experiencing homelessness do not have 10 to 20 years to wait for inclusionary zoning policies to be executed in new market-rate housing developments. Research suggests that “to break the cycle of homelessness, housing policy should build upon a framework which has individual’s wellbeing as the primary objective” (Johnstone et al., 2016). While the dwelling is a crucial, spatially fixed part of the solution, stability comes from the ability to find a sense of belonging within a community, to be autonomous, and to be free. The homeless community is not given the agency to shed the label of “homeless” and assimilate into more permanent, mixed-income housing. Often, as previously described, the homeless are continuously displaced and aided by stop-gap measures that do little to build agency or social capital. Autonomy and freedom are loosely allocated rights of citizenship in the United States of America, but again, requires the actor to be a participant of meritocratic capitalism.

2.6 FAITH BASED RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS

Faith based organizations (FBOs) are powerful and effective non-governmental actors aiding those experiencing temporary and chronic homelessness by providing emergency shelter services

and permanent housing solutions. FBOs are defined as organizations where a specific faith serves as the driving mission to serve individuals experiencing homelessness (Johnson, Alvarez, & Wubbenhorst, 2017). Specifically, this definition includes organizations that have an activity-based approach to service which requires participants to engage in religious activities, and organizations that don't explicitly incorporate religious programming but whose employees are "primarily motivated by their faith to serve others" (Johnson et al., 2017). Faith based organizations serve a critical role in providing non-publicly funded shelter and social services that would otherwise incur great costs to local governments and citizens alike.

A report published in 2017 by the Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion (BISR), *Assessing the Faith Based Approach to Homelessness in America*, shows that 63% of the emergency shelter beds available in the City of Seattle are provided by FBOs (Johnson et al., 2017). Looking deeper into the numbers, the top three faith-based organizations that provide emergency shelter services are Seattle's Union Gospel Mission (22%), Catholic Community Services (18%), and the Salvation Army (16%). Together, these three organizations make 1,313 emergency shelter beds available every night. Once housed, FBOs also provide social services to those in need, providing everything from "alcohol and drug rehabilitation to employment and social skills" (Bass, 2009). I will focus on these selected organizations to provide an understanding of the breadth of services that FBOs provide in the City of Seattle.

Seattle's Union Gospel Mission was founded in 1932, originally opening as a soup kitchen offering meal services to unemployed men living in homeless camps by Seattle's rail yards. Only six years later, the Mission would expand its services to provide emergency shelter, housing over 100 men each night (Seattle's Union Gospel Mission, 2019). Their mission is driven by the teachings of Jesus Christ, explicitly stating that their work is guided by "his

command to feed hungry people, clothe those who are naked, and provide shelter for those who are homeless” (Seattle’s Union Gospel Mission, 2019). Their approach to service is thorough and holistic as evidenced by their 365 days a year effort of conducting Outreach and Search & Rescue. These outreach teams meet people where they are and invite them inside, where individuals can receive meals and shelter. Additionally, guests can receive dental and legal services, job training and placement, and access to transitional housing. The Christian faith is a powerful driver of their work, hoping that by instilling hope to those they serve, they can encourage people to live a faith-based life.

The Salvation Army was founded in 1865 by William Booth, a British clergyman, as a means to provide aid to those who were not welcomed by traditional religious institutions. Individuals engaged in theft, prostitution, and substance abuse were his first converts to Christianity, and within a decade the organization had nearly 1,000 supporters and evangelists (The Salvation Army, 2019). The modern Salvation Army organization operates in 100 countries and provides a wide array of services. Driven by their mission to “preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination”, The Salvation Army addresses local needs by first assessing the need, and identifying challenges and obstacles that are unique to the local context (The Salvation Army, 2019). Then they build programming to provide both short term and long-range care, with the hope that by investing in a community they will inspire lasting growth.

The Catholic Community Services (CCS) of Seattle opened their office in 1937, in the Railroad Exchange Building. They were originally an organized response to orphaned and abandoned children, providing aid and assisting in placing children for adoption (Catholic Community Services, 2019). Their mission focuses their work on “individuals, children,

families, and communities struggling with poverty and the effects of intolerance and racism” and the impact of their work is staggering (Catholic Community Services, 2019). They now operate throughout Western Washington aiding homeless and low-income individuals through day centers and emergency shelters. People experiencing homelessness can come to their shelters to bathe, launder their clothes, and receive medical, alcohol, and drug treatments. In 2017, CCS provided 294,379 shelter nights and 1,517,175 meals to those in need (Catholic Community Services, 2019). This reinforces the impact that FBOs have on communities in need and how they are a vital part of the aid response.

An important finding from the BISR report, *Assessing the Faith Based Approach to Homelessness in America*, was the sentiment that “people don’t become homeless when they run out of money, at least not right away. They become homeless when they run out of relationships” (Johnson et al., 2017). This statement contributes to the argument that a three-pronged approach is necessary when addressing those experiencing homelessness. This approach consists of “1 leg of support being alcohol and drug recovery services, 1 mental health services, and 1 housing” (Bass, 2009). As I have shown by reporting on the aid Seattle based FBOs offer, this three-pronged approach is an ingrained part of their approach. Faith based organizations also provide a benefit to society by reducing the amount of publicly funded social services consumed by people experiencing homelessness. The Housing First model, which is what many FBOs prescribe to, argues that “having someone in housing and supported by lesser impact support services saves the cost of emergency hospital service, drug and alcohol clinical treatment, mental health emergency services, and jail stays for these same people” (Bass, 2009). The BISR report found that housing services and job training programs offered in the cities they studied generated “an estimated \$119 million in taxpayer savings during the three years following program exit”

(Johnson et al., 2017). These organizations are vital to communities in need and provide a tremendous benefit to society by approaching a shared burden with private resources.

2.7 NONPROFIT RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS

The nonprofit response to homelessness is much more targeted and specific than what the city is able to offer. Because of the wide array of populations affected by homelessness, the needs of every individual cannot be met by city-funded housing subsidies and shelter provision.

Homelessness affects men, women and children, veterans, trauma survivors, and people of every age and ethnicity. The Emerald City Resource Guide, produced by Real Change, identifies over 500 service providers for people experiencing homelessness and poverty. The identified resources range from identification services, clothing assistance, and health services, to HIV/AIDS services, immigrant and refugee services, and LGBTQ services (Real Change, 2018). This is a nuanced condition which requires precise care for each population affected; which is where nonprofits have been able to provide aid. These organizations are able to create social connections and support that are essential to augment and promote non-housing outcomes for the homeless population (Johnstone et al., 2016).

At a glance, there are a variety of organizations in Seattle that provide specialized services to the homeless community. I will discuss four Seattle based non-profits that provide targeted care to communities in Seattle experiencing homelessness. The first of which is Mary's Place, an organization that provides shelter and services to support women and children specifically. Mary's Place was founded in 1999 as a day center for women experiencing homelessness. This nonprofit specializes in providing pediatric care for newborns to support mothers transitioning out of homelessness. Mary's Place also offers employment services to assist their clients with job skill building services so that their transition into formal housing can

be stabilized by a reliable source of income. As of 2018, Mary's Place operates a day center for homeless women, and eight night-shelters providing beds and food for 560 families every day (Mary's Place, 2019).

The Chief Seattle Club was founded in 1970 in Seattle's Pioneer Square neighborhood. The Chief Seattle Club supports American Indian and Alaska Native people who are experiencing homelessness by providing food, medical support, housing assistance, and cultural events in a culturally affirming space. They offer specialized services for individuals with chemical dependencies and mental health conditions, providing treatment through traditional native healing practices. The Chief Seattle Club also assists clients with mail service, computer access, negotiating their tribal ID, and legal advice through the Urban Indian Legal Clinic. As a measure of their impact, they serve over 90,000 meals annually to their patrons (Chief Seattle Club, 2019). The Chief Seattle Club seeks to create a spiritually and culturally affirming place for Seattle's Native population.

Youth Care was founded in 1974 as one of the original shelters serving homeless youth on the West Coast. Youth Care provides support and services to homeless individuals until they turn 25-year-old, where they focus on a continuum of care if their clients are still seeking care. They offer essential supplies for people living outside including bedding, clothes, and nonperishable foods, but they focus their efforts on programs that support the education of homeless youth. In addition to providing school and art supplies, they support their clients with educational services through the Seattle Public Schools. Youth Care now operates 13 locations across Seattle, providing aid to over 1,200 homeless youths annually (Youth Care, 2019).

Lastly, Facing Homelessness, whose mission is to engage the collective support of the housed community in Seattle to end homelessness. They approach this mission through an

ongoing photojournalism project which tells the stories of those living outside. They also staff a window of kindness to have a physical place to connect with the homeless community and offer them community donated goods. The final initiative that Facing Homelessness supports is the Block Project, which is the focus of this thesis. The Block Project blends resources from the public and private sector to offer a uniquely permanent housing solution in the form of a new housing typology. The Block Project was chosen as the case study of this thesis because of the unique way they are able to engage empathy and community to create permanent housing for an individual experiencing homelessness.

This is a small selection of Seattle based nonprofits that do valuable work to support the nuanced needs of the homeless community in the City of Seattle. The common thread across these organizations is that they act as the connective tissue between the city and the individual. They function as community anchors connecting individuals to legal, educational, health, prevention, and advocacy services making wrap around care more accessible. Their power is in their nimble ability to work with specific populations in the homeless community and provide targeted aid that they couldn't access otherwise. Unfortunately, they are limited by their ability to scale and have limited touch points for the homeless community to engage with them and receive aid. Nonprofits engage with the homeless community in innovative ways by leveraging existing state institutions to deploy their services without exchanging financial resources.

Chapter 3. METHODOLOGY

This thesis attempts to qualitatively define the structural response to homelessness in Seattle.

This research question digs at the core of the sociological aspects of urban planning and is best assessed through the case study as the data will rely on the reported experience of a unique population of hosts, residents, and employees affiliated with the Block Project. The primary data source, and subject of the case study are the Seattle based non-profit Facing Homelessness and its community-driven housing and community program titled The Block Project. Facing Homelessness has a succinct mission, which is to “invite community to be a part of the solution to homelessness” (Facing Homelessness + BLOCK Architects, 2019). The Block Project was born from that statement and functions on donated labor, land, and materials to create 125 square foot detached accessory dwelling units to host a community member who is currently experiencing homelessness. The Block Project operates in a way counter to market-driven forces, leaning on the empathy of a community to share their skills, resources and time. This model is both disruptive to the market-driven forces of land value and ownership and the model of a traditional neighborhood. Ultimately, this project is a response to housing scarcity and community crisis. These dwelling units are a permanent solution to homelessness, for a single person, and with the compassion and empathy of a community, can grow into a city-wide grassroots response to a human rights crisis.

The participant population for this study included all employees of Facing Homelessness and Block Architects, as well as the hosts and residents for all finished Block Homes during the time of data collections. From Facing Homelessness, I conducted structured interviews with the following individuals: Sara Vander Zanden (Executive Director), Rex Hohlbein (Founder of Facing Homelessness and Co-Founder of Block Architects), Jennifer Tee (Programs Director),

and Béné Bicaba (Block Programs Manager). The Block Architect participants include Bernard Troyer (Projects Manager), Barron Pepper (Architect), and Jenn LaFrenier (Co-Founder). There are three pairs of hosts who participated in this study who currently have fully built and inhabited Block Homes in their backyards. Block Home 1 is hosted by Kim and Dan in Beacon Hill, Block Home 2 is hosted by Dave and Visala who live in Greenwood, and Block Home 3 was just completed in Lex and Marjon's backyard who live in Crown Hill. Out of respect for their privacy, I will only be using the host's first names in this study. The residents who participated in the study are C'zar, who lives in Block Home 2, and Block Home 3 resident who we will call "J", as they asked to remain anonymous because of their history with domestic abuse. The Block Home residents represent an at-risk population, and because of that, each participant made specific requests as to how they would be addressed in this research.

The respondents chosen for this study represent an exhaustive list of the employees of Facing Homelessness and Block Architects, as well as all Block Home hosts and residents who are now cohabitating on the same parcel. There is one exception, Block Resident 1 declined the invitation to participate in the study. Their caseworker responded expressing concerns about the content of the interview questions, stating that "in our community to ask some of these questions would not be appropriate. Especially the question centered around trauma. He is an elder and it could be re-traumatizing to be asked about trauma. Based on his past around some of these questions; this would not be a good outcome because he does not like media that imposes on his life. He has stated before that he is a private man. I will advocate that we respect his wishes on this one." While I was unable to secure a direct interview with Block Resident 1 (Bobby), the phenomenological approach to this research ensures that their absence does not compromise the results of the study. They participated in previous media engagements that I will use in my

analysis to gain a better understating of their experience with the Block Project. Furthermore, the interview with Kim and Dan, Block Home 1 hosts, provided rich insights into the experiences and lifestyle changes that Bobby has had since he moved into the Block Home which can be used as anecdotal data.

All interviews were held at a mutually agreed upon location, which ranged from homes and offices to cafes depending on the convenience for each participant. The interviews occurred between 10:00am and 8:00pm depending again on the participant's availability and convenience. I scheduled the interviews with the Facing Homelessness and Block Architects employees privately but worked with Béné Bicaba, the Block Programs Manager with Facing Homelessness, to act as a bridge to introduce me to the Block Home hosts. Once the introduction was made, I scheduled the interviews without the assistance of Ms. Bicaba. The interviews with the Block Home residents were scheduled through their caseworkers, and they were accompanied by Ms. Bicaba who works closely with both the hosts and residents as part of her role with Facing Homelessness. Her role during the interview was to ensure the comfort of the resident and advocate for their privacy if a question made the resident uncomfortable.

I began interviewing the employees of Facing Homelessness and Block Architects first to build my working knowledge of the Block Project before interfacing with the host or resident populations. I interviewed Béné Bicaba and Jennifer Tee in the early afternoon on Monday, 4/22/2019 at the Facing Homelessness office in the University District per their request. I proceeded to meet Bernard Troyer on Wednesday, 4/24/2019 and Sara Vander Zanden on Friday, 4/26/2019 at the same location because of Facing Homelessness's proximity to the University of Washington campus where I attend class. I met with Jenn LaFreniere and Rex Hohlbein on Thursday, 4/25/2019 at the Block Architects office in SODO during their lunch

break to accommodate their schedules. The interviews with Facing Homelessness/Block Architect staff were concluded on Friday, 4/26/2019 when I met Barron Peper at Broadcast Coffee in the Central District per his request. The sequence of the interviews relied on participant availability.

I interviewed the entire host population on Saturday, 4/27/2019 over a twelve-hour period. I began by interviewing Visala over the phone in the morning as she lives outside of Seattle and agreed to a phone conversation in lieu of meeting in person. I then met with Lex and Marjon at their house in the afternoon, which coincided with the move in ceremony for the resident of Block Home 3. The final interview was conducted at Kim and Dan's house in the evening of the 27th. They invited me to share a pot of tea in their living room as we discussed their participation in the Block Project. The sequence of the interviews was based on convenience, but I believe there was a benefit in ending the interviews with the first Block Home hosts before I met with the resident, due to my enriched understanding of the project.

The final two interviews were conducted with the Block Home residents. As I previously established, the resident of Block Home 1 declined to participate in the study, but due to previous interview data and supplemental information from Kim and Dan, I was still able to include his story in my phenomenological case study. The interviews with the residents were scheduled through their caseworkers. I first met with J during the afternoon on Sunday, 4/28/2019 at a café that she chose. I bought us both coffees as a gesture of appreciation for her meeting with me. Similarly, I met with C'zar on Wednesday, 5/1/2019 at a café near his house and provided coffee before we began the interview. Béné Bicaba attended both of these interviews per the request of the residents.

All participants were briefed before the interview, and consensually signed a consent form that gave me permission to conduct the interview, and record and transcribe the conversation for use in this study. I dressed casually for the interviews, but appropriately for the context of the places that we met. I am socially familiar with all of the participants in this study, which was a benefit to the interviews as ice breakers were not necessary to establish significant baseline information on the participant.

Securing the interviews was paramount to conducting data analysis and assessing the research questions proposed above. Fortunately, the data is all locally accessible and did not require any travel outside of the Seattle area. This data will help support my exploration of the irrational aspects of planning and the built environment. While this is a limited sample size as the Block Project has been in operation for just three years, the sample size is not important to provide validity as the data will not be quantitatively measured and analyzed. The intent is for the phenomenological approach to function as an emergent design model, allowing for analytical flexibility based on the interview data collected. Among other threats to internal validity, the interview data will be introducing bias into the process and I need to reflexively address my voice in this process. I am writing about a lived experience that I have not had and am being trusted by a vulnerable population to share their stories appropriately. I am ethically obligated to ensure the respondents' anonymity if they request it and will be forthright with the intentions of the study and the findings I submit.

The interviews are structured around themes drawn from the literature including social support, community, neighborhood dynamics, and gratitude. Because this project does not financially benefit the homeowner, gaining an understanding of their motivation is important to the findings of the thesis. I specifically call out social support and community neighborhood

dynamics because this is a planning intervention occurring at a granular level in the city as an outcome of an individual's generosity. Distilling these concepts down, the Block Project is an illustration of empathetic design leveraging different neighborhood components to build the 125 square foot DADU. The interview questions will parse out the components and operation of this process.

Data gathered from in-person interviews is the best way to conduct this research because of the unique nature of this case study. The Block Project model is a new approach to housing and homelessness in the formal American context and by exploring this model, I will need to understand the motivational mechanics for it to succeed. There is value in examining an innovative approach as a snapshot of the first-generation hosts and residents will create a baseline for future research into this topic. Furthermore, literature from medical journals provides statistical justification to suggest that holistic care produces more favorable outcomes for people experiencing homelessness. Importantly, Johnstone's study quantitatively validated the importance of social support in the effort to rehouse someone who has previously experienced homelessness. Her work showed that it is not only economically destabilizing but also socially isolating. Johnstone states "consistent with the research on social support and better health (Wills & Ainette, 2012), and consistent with the hypotheses, social support and changes in social support were strong predictors of well-being for individuals who had resided in homeless accommodation" (Johnstone, 2016). This academic literature is important to contextualize the tangible causes and effects of homelessness.

The interview protocol is broken up into four sections. The introduction section is designed to brief the participants on the purpose of the project and ask the interviewee if they have any questions before the beginning of the interview. This will lead to opening questions

which will begin with brief demographic questions to understand the age, gender, and the capacity with which the participant interacts with the Block Project. These baseline questions will establish the interviewee's role in the Block Project, how they became involved, and how long they have participated in the project. Once these questions have been answered I will follow with content driven questions which will be guided to answer individual components of the central research question. Finally, I end the interviews with closing instructions and provide the participants with the opportunity to ask any additional questions that they had about the project.

The results are entirely dependent on the content and quality of the interviews I conduct. Going into the interviews I expected that the variety of the people being interviewed would yield rich and compelling insights into the importance and value of community-based planning practices. The respondents fall into three distinct groups of stakeholders. First, there are the residents who are benefitting from the resources and care of the community. I expected that this gesture would embolden them to become more involved in the community and in turn assist with the healing process. Second, the hosts participating in the program, offering their land to house an individual who is currently living outside. Lastly, the employees of Facing Homelessness and Block Architects. These individuals have foregone more lucrative careers to address the social malady in society that is homelessness. Ultimately, I expect that this will be a life-changing experience for those involved. Sharing something as finite, and in many ways sacred, as land must come from a deeply motivated place. This is not a common land use practice and there must be a thread that ties the stories of these individuals together.

The data collected from the recorded face to face interviews were first transcribed and thematically coded to correspond with grounded theory. The recorded interviews were transcribed using Temi, an audio to text transcription software. The coding protocol that I

followed began with cleaning all of the transcribed interviews and merging them with field notes that were taken during the interviews. I did not interfere with the content given by any respondents when cleaning the transcripts, but removed verbal fillers such as “like, um, and so” as it disrupts the cohesion of the data. The interviews were then organized by respondent group (hosts, residents, employees), and carefully read through to identify key quotes and content that captured the direct experiences of the participants. The codes that emerged were descriptive in nature, reflecting repeated phrases, lived experiences, or motivations expressed by the participants. This collection of codes was then narrowed into themes which I will use to draw my conclusions from.

3.1 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The baseline questions establish the demographic makeup of the participants and employees of Facing Homelessness and Block Architects. Age and gender are important indicators for identifying if there is a discrepancy in the way individuals engage in care ethics. Virginia Held’s work on care ethics is informed by feminist philosophy, so gathering demographic information that can speak to those theoretical underpinnings will be valuable. Understanding where, and how long, the respondents have lived in Seattle establishes a temporal and spatial profile of the interviewee, which may inform their understanding of place attachment. Will longtime residents be more or less likely to participate in a project like the Block Project? Finally, gathering data on how they became aware of Facing Homelessness will speak to the social connection of the community engaged in this work, and how their message is being accessed.

The all staff questions serve a practical purpose to establish the employee’s role and observations about the Block Project. They also examine the motivation to work with Facing Homelessness, testing the validity of the care ethics argument established in the literature review.

Inquiring about the scalability of the project, and examining the roadblocks along the way, will uncover the ways this project is being challenged by social and political institutions. These answers are important to inform the transformative worldview that I approach this work with and provide challenges to address once the data has been gathered and coded.

The interview protocol for the hosts and residents follows a similar format as the staff interview questions. The baseline questions position the respondent’s demographics, which might yield insights into who is interested in participating in a project like this. The pre-construction and care ethics questions will provide data on the reservations the hosts and residents had when considering this project and whether or not those concerns were addressed. The community building and construction questions ask the respondents to discuss the circumstances that led them to participate in the Block Project. From the homeowner’s perspective, did they have concerns before committing to the project? From the resident’s perspective, did they have other options for housing and what led them to choose the Block Project? Facing Homelessness advertises the Block Project as a community building project and housing initiative, with that understanding, getting input from the participants about the strength and extent of their relationships will provide data to draw conclusions from concerning the success of the project. Lastly, the scalability and post-construction questions ask the respondents to reflect on their experience with the Block Project and provide feedback on their future commitment to the project. An important part of capturing their reflection is to understand if they have any regrets with how the process unfolded, opening an opportunity to provide constructive feedback in the *Chapter 8*.

	Staff Interview Questions
Base Questions	Age
	Gender

	How long have you lived in Seattle? Where?
	How did you first become aware of Facing Homelessness?
All Staff Questions	What motivated you to seek employment with Facing Homelessness?
	What is your affiliation with the Block Project?
	From your observations, how has the housed community responded?
	Has the Block Project been effective in achieving its mission? What are the immediate challenges of the Block Project?
	How do you imagine the Block Project scaling in the next 5 years? 10 years? 20 years?
Staff Specific Questions Based on Role	What was the origin and inspiration for the Block Project?
	How does the Block Project secure funding?
	How does the organization interface with the City of Seattle? How has the City responded?
	What role does volunteer and community support play into the production of the Block Home?
	How do you pair the host with the resident?
	What kind of social support do you provide to aid with the transition?
	Host Interview Questions
Base Questions	Age
	Gender
	How long have you lived in Seattle? Where?
	How did you first become aware of the Block Project?
Pre-construction and care ethics questions	How long before you decided to participate in the project?
	What circumstances led to you committing to the Block Project?
	Did you have concerns? If so, what were they?
Community building and construction questions	What was your role during the construction of the block home?
	Did you participate on the build site? If so, how often?
	What is your relationship with the resident now that the Block Home is finished?
	Do you interact with the resident? If so, how often and in what capacity?
Scalability and post construction questions	Now that you've participated as a host in the program, do you have any second thoughts or regrets? If so, did you resolve them?
	Has anything from your experience with the Block Project surprised you?
	What is your future commitment to the Block Project? How long do you envision yourself participating?
	Resident Interview Questions
Base Questions	Age
	Gender
	How long have you lived in Seattle? Where?
	How did you first become aware of the Block Project?
Pre-construction and care ethics questions	Were there other housing options available? If so, what were they?
	Are you comfortable sharing what led to you experiencing homelessness?

	How has, or hasn't, the Block Project helped you address that trauma?
	Why did you trust that this was the best option for you? How did you decide to go with this option?
Community building and construction questions	What was your role during the construction of the block home?
	Did you participate on the build site? If so, how often?
	What is your relationship with the host now that the Block Home is finished?
	Do you interact with the host? If so, in what capacity?
Scalability and post construction questions	Now that you've participated as a resident in the program, do you have any second thoughts or regrets? If so, did you resolve them?
	Has anything from your experience with the Block Project surprised you?
	Would you consider future participation in the project? Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Table 1: Interview Protocol

Chapter 4. PRECEDENT STUDIES

The Block Project is a thought leader in the field of permanent rehousing options for people experiencing homelessness. It is a free permanent home, with private amenities and the promise of a secure tenure while also partnering with social service providers to integrate reentry support. The Block Project's approach is unique, but they are not alone in providing solutions to the housing affordability and homeless crisis. There are a variety of responses that range from market driven models to more production-based models that focus on output. While there are other models in operation, Sara Vander Zanden stated that "it [the Block Project] is still to this day, the only integrated approach to homelessness in Seattle. It is the only approach that directly asks us to think of people living outside as neighbors and not as other." This is what makes it distinct from the other models available, it does not operate under a separate but equal model, but challenges people to learn from each other by coming closer. This precedent study will cover three models that are similar to the Block Project in scale but differ in their approaches to providing stable housing solutions for low income or homeless tenants. The three precedents being discussed are Blokable, the Low Income Housing Institute's Tiny House Program, and the Multnomah County Idea Lab's A Place For You program.

Blokable is a Washington based affordable housing developer who relies on innovative construction techniques to deliver low-cost housing. Their model is built on prefabrication and standardization to create modular housing, leveraging technological and construction innovations to respond to market pressures. More than anything, Blokable's provides a process, a streamlined take on housing development that hopes to deliver on their mission of building real estate equity. Their built dwelling units are not designed with a particular community in mind but hope to create more affordable units by saving on construction, design, and assemblage costs. This model

does provide insight into the value of prefabrication and warehouse assemblage which will be valuable for any affordable housing developer to learn from. To find out more, visit their website at: www.blokable.com

The Low Income Housing Institute's Tiny House Program is a Washington state based initiative to provide temporary housing for low income and homeless individuals. It has been an incredibly productive project, LIHI owns and manages over 2,000 units in six counties in the Puget Sound region serving populations earning below 30% of the area median income. Each tiny house is 96 square feet and is equipped with electricity and a door that locks which is critical to providing a safe and sanitary place to sleep. The houses are situated in tiny house villages that have shared kitchen and restroom facilities for the community to share. Where this model falls short is in reintegrating those individuals into more economically diverse neighborhood typologies. This is still segregated housing, keeping the low income and previously homeless populations contained and separated from more formally housed members of the community. To find out more, visit their website at: www.lihi.org/tiny-houses/

Multnomah County Idea Lab located in Portland, Oregon launched a project called A Place for You in 2017, to test the viability of constructing Accessory Dwelling Units to serve families earning less than 60% area median income. In under a year, more than 1,100 families volunteered their backyards for this project. Two design-build firms partnered with the Multnomah County Idea Lab to install four ADUs in 2018, each of which house a low-income family. After these families have lived on site for five years, the homeowner will have the option of purchasing the house at market rate, thus evicting the current tenant. This option offers a 288 square foot cottage to a previously homeless or low-income individual, at a reduced rent for up

to five years. To find out more, visit their website at: www.multco.us/multnomah-idea-lab-mil-innovation-government

These three precedents are important in understanding the variety of approaches to housing low income and homeless populations. I chose them because they are culturally and geographically relevant to the Block Project being in the same regional context. This makes a comparative analysis more effective, without having to take different climates, cultural norms, and planning approaches into consideration. Blokable engages in the market-based competition for housing but leverages process and design innovations to save costs and deliver a product at below market rate. This is made possible by their prefabrication techniques and standardized unit configurations which streamlines the entire construction process. The Block Project has experimented with prefabrication, which is an approach to construction that could save considerable time and skilled labor costs since the Block Home's design does not change property to property. The Low Income Housing Institute's Tiny House Program is an adequate solution in creating transitional housing for individuals experiencing homelessness, but does not provide a variety of unit sizes to accommodate families or couples living outside. These units also reinforce the spatial segregation of low-income communities, in some ways perpetuating the negative stereotypes of people experiencing homelessness. The Multnomah County Idea Lab's A Place for You program shares similarities to the Block Project in their approach to housing. They work with a private homeowner to place a DADU in their backyard, but where their approach differs is that the resident of the home pays rent to the homeowner. Also, the homeowner has the opportunity to purchase the DADU after five years which means that they dictate the use of the unit. This could lead to it being rented at a market rate, or used for private purposes, both options taking an affordable unit off of the market.

Chapter 5. CASE STUDY

The Block Project is an effort established by the Seattle non-profit Facing Homelessness. Facing Homelessness was founded in 2013 by Rex Hohlbein, a longtime Seattle based architect and artist. After three years of personally interfacing with people experiencing homelessness in Seattle, he was compelled to stop his architecture practice and devote his time to addressing homelessness. The mission of Facing Homelessness is both accessible and aspirational. It is simply an invitation asking the community to be part of the solution to homelessness (Facing Homelessness + BLOCK Architects, 2019). This is an integrated approach inviting people to contribute their unique skills and resources to help however they can. Facing Homelessness began as a photojournalism project to share the stories of people living outside. By posting images of individuals with their story, Facing Homelessness was able to leverage the power of social media to provide community supported aid, one person at a time. This grass roots response expanded to The Window of Kindness, which is described as a “physical place of connection between our (Facing Homelessness) office and people experiencing homelessness” (Facing Homelessness + BLOCK Architects, 2019). At the window, Facing Homelessness provides clothing, food, and hygiene essentials to the local homeless community. The window is regularly stocked with donations from the surrounding community. In 2017, the Block Project found its footing and broke ground on the first Block House in the North Beacon Hill neighborhood. The Block Project is an innovative approach to housing, finding cohesion between issues around “homelessness, cross-class integration, social inclusion, and architectural design” (Facing Homelessness + BLOCK Architects, 2019).

The BLOCK Project approach as described by (Facing Homelessness + BLOCK Architects, 2019):

- Integrated: By building homes for those experiencing homelessness in residential backyards, the BLOCK Project fosters cross-class integration and social inclusion.
- Sustainable: BLOCK Homes are designed to achieve the highest standard for sustainability in the built environment (Living Building Challenge).
- Supported: The BLOCK Project creates an intentional network of support for each resident, including professional social services, thoughtfully matched hosts, and engaged neighbors.
- Affordable: The BLOCK Project makes use of the free, available property and leverages the community's desire to get involved to dramatically reduce the cost of housing.
- Dignified: BLOCK Homes are permanent, sophisticated dwelling units designed to provide stability for residents as they define and achieve success.



Figure 4. Block Home 1, Beacon Hill (2018). Adapted from Block Architects

Facing Homelessness believes that The Block Project approach will “nurture the empathy needed to catalyze a global movement” (Facing Homelessness + BLOCK Architects, 2019). This is the context that makes the Block Project so compelling as a case study. It is a non-market driven housing solution that operates on altruism and empathy. Facing Homelessness works to identify homeowners who are interested in participating in the program and interviewing them to see if they are a good fit. Once it has been established that the homeowner is suitable to participate in the project, funding, materials, and labor are sourced from volunteers and industry professionals. Fundraising dollars cover the raw materials needed to build and plumb the 125 square foot homes, and local contractors, electricians, landscape architects, and carpenters come together to bring the vision to life.

During the construction of the Block Home, the Block Programs Manager at Facing Homelessness works with local social service agencies to find a resident that is seeking this kind of housing solution. As they have found, the Block Home is not for everyone and has been passed on by individuals living unsheltered. Once the resident has been matched with the host, they are encouraged to meet to build their relationship before they become full-time neighbors. Once the Block Home is finished and the landscaping has been completed, there is a block wide welcome party for everyone in the neighborhood to come and meet their new neighbor. This entire process is counterintuitive if you apply the assumption that the market will dictate how land is used, but this organization has been building homes with donated resources and labor on donated land for two years. Moreover, this reinforces the literature on affect theory and care ethics by demonstrating the community’s sustained enthusiasm for a project that they receive no financial benefits from. The scope and scale are still to be determined as they have just finished

building their third home on-site in two years, but there are more than 100 home owners in the City of Seattle on the waiting list to receive their own Block Home.



Figure 5. Block Home 2, Greenwood (2018). Adapted from Block Architects

To contextualize their approach in practice, three block homes have been installed on site and are currently inhabited by individuals who previously experienced homelessness. The first Block Home is located in the Beacon Hill neighborhood and was fully installed on site in just three months (Figure 4). Construction was completed in October of 2017 and cost just \$30,000 to build, which was in budget and delivered on time thanks to the collaboration with Turner Construction. Block Home 2 is located in the Greenwood neighborhood and took twice as long to assemble on site, finishing in November of 2018 (Figure 5). The seven-month project cost \$52,000 which was over budget and construction was slowed because of the lack of consistent

skilled labor and general contractor oversight involved in the build. This Block Home was almost completely built with volunteer labor which is an astounding feat. Block Home 3 recently finished construction in April of 2019 in the Crown Hill neighborhood, taking three months to build (Figure 6). After learning from the hurdles faced during the construction of Block Home 2, Facing Homelessness partnered with Schultz Miller, a general contractor, to manage the build and the project was delivered for \$30,000. Block Home 4 will be installed in the Rainier View neighborhood before the summer of 2019. This was the first block home to be fully prefabricated off site, which has costs and benefits. Block Home 4 was fully built in just three weeks, but the project cost \$89,000 (nearly the price of the first three block homes combined). Offsite prefabrication is a more efficient avenue for construction as it concentrates all of the necessary labor and materials in one place where the sequence of construction can be executed more thoughtfully. All of the construction components for the Block Home like siding and interior paneling can be prepared in bulk in a non-weather dependent location. Also, unskilled volunteer labor can be focused on siloed tasks making their impact greater. The Block Project delicately balances financial donations (exchange value) with volunteer labor (use value) to deliver these thoughtful housing solutions.



Figure 6. Block Home 3, Crown Hill (2019). Adapted from Block Architects

5.1 BLOCK HOME DESIGN

The Block Home is a 125 square foot symbol of community, the ultimate act of coming closer. The home was designed by Rex Hohlbein and Jenn LaFreniere, Co-Founders of Block Architects, over the course of many coffee shop conversations about the importance of architecture, and its power to unite people. In 2016, those conversations grew into a design response that dared to elevate what it means to be a neighbor. It was important for the Block Architects to design the Block Home so that it aesthetically responded to the diverse neighborhood contexts of Seattle. This was an important first move in ensuring that the design itself would not be a barrier for participation. The materiality of the structure was an important consideration in making the design feel timeless. The designers believe that a timeless look will create longevity for the Block Home and chose metal siding over more popular materials like Hardie board which is omnipresent in new development. The size of the home was intentionally

designed to reduce circulation through the footprint so that it was both an efficient and comfortable space to live in. This eliminated the need for hallways, and also respected the limits of the buildable area being on a single-family parcel. The second design consideration that was made was to include a covered front porch, making the space more inviting while simultaneously extending the living space beyond the interior. The porch is designed to face South, backed by a window that extends the length of the living area. This is the only glazing in the home, which both protects the privacy of the resident and the homeowner. The design also implemented passive design techniques, which means that the North, East, and West sides of the unit are heavily insulated to keep the warmth in during the winter months, and to keep the building cool during the summer months. The South face also has a large glass window and door to allow for ample solar heat gain and for natural light.

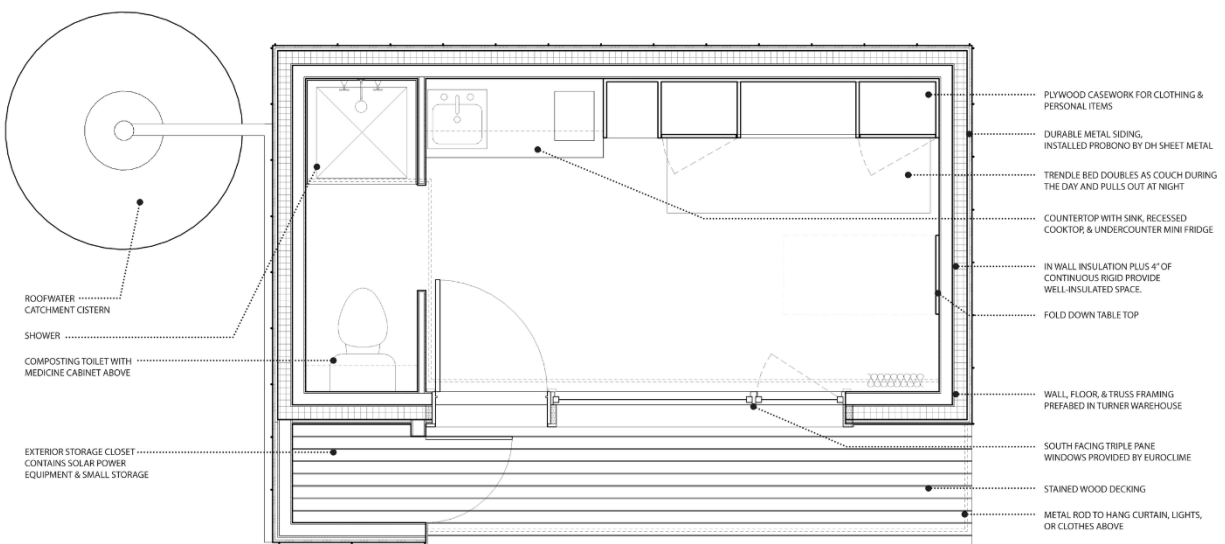


Figure 7. Block Home floor plan (2018). Adapted from Block Architects

Ultimately, it was vital that the finished product be a dignified place to live. This meant that it must have utilities and all of the essentials that a resident would need to live independently. The home includes a kitchenette, toilet, shower, and places for sleeping and

storage. The Block Home is fitted with solar panels and the design hopes to evolve into a Living Building Challenge structure. This is the most rigorous performance standard for buildings, demanding that they be self-sufficient units, using solar to generate electricity, recycling rainfall, and disposing of waste with a composting toilet. The Block Home is a structure that asks us to rethink the way we approach sustainability and one another. Block by block, individuals can make incremental change in addressing the monolithic crisis of homelessness. This also addresses the reality that this is a community crisis. When asked about the inspiration for the project, Rex Hohlbein said that “we're all part of this problem, and it requires us all to be a part of the solution.”

5.2 FUNDRAISING

Securing unrestricted funding is essential to the success of the Block Project. This model relies on donated materials and labor to deliver a permanent home at well below market value. The Block Project has relied on a peer to peer fundraising model during its first two years of fundraising. This model operates by appointing team leaders from the Architecture, Engineering, and Construction community (AEC), each with the goal to fully fund a block home. They do this by then inviting their top vendors, customers, and suppliers to fundraise collectively and help them achieve their goal. This effort is galvanized at a kickoff event hosted by Facing Homelessness where all of the fundraising stakeholders are invited to join in a friendly competition to see who can achieve their goal for the year. The 2019 fundraising event set a target to raise \$120,000, and by the end of the night, more than \$220,000 had been donated. For more context, Rex Hohlbein has been a high-end architect in Seattle for over 30 years and is deeply connected to the AEC community. This social capital has taken the burden off of the Block Project to demonstrate success early on and has leveraged professional connections to

create buy-in from key stakeholders in the AEC community. The peer to peer model is effective in creating a sense of social reasonability which is a core tenant of what the Block Project hopes to achieve. Community is at the core of the support for this project and, as Jennifer Tee, Facing Homelessness Programs Director, articulated that “as long as we have community engaged, I feel like the sky is the limit.”

The Block Project has also received funding from King County, providing a grant for operational overhead. This funding was associated with targeted goals that the project must reach. In response to this, Jennifer noted that “the most important thing an organization can do is try to stay true and pursue funding that’s aligned with what you’re trying to do.” This is how the Block Project is able to stay in control of its mission and approach its work with the focus and intent needed to succeed. Sustaining these fundraising efforts long term will hinge on the Block Project’s ability to be transparent and communicate with funders through the entire process. This transparency is vital in keeping the community a part of the conversation. The Block Project has approached fundraising with an emphasis on community. Executive Director of Facing Homelessness, Sara Vander Zanden, expanded on this idea, saying that the model doesn’t stop at fundraising. This asset-based approach “creates space for people to bring whatever they’re best suited to bring to the table, and we (Facing Homelessness) rely on that.” This will be important for the future of the project as its nuanced approach to homelessness relies on the support from an entire network of stakeholders, funders, and volunteers.

5.3 BLOCK ENGAGEMENT

The Block Project is a community first initiative, run through collective support at the neighborhood level. Block engagement is a vitally important part of the process, involving all stakeholders at a more focused scale. The prospective host is encouraged to independently meet

with their neighborhood once they have committed to hosting a Block Home in their backyard. This is not required by Facing Homelessness, but it is important for the homeowner to have agency in the process and take the first step in building community at the neighborhood level. This is a valuable process because it creates space for face to face contact with the neighborhood so that concerns and fears can be addressed through a productive dialogue. A second block meeting is held once the match is made between the host and resident, which is then facilitated by the Block Programs Manager at Facing Homelessness. Throughout this process, the names and emails of the surrounding neighbors are collected so that people can stay up to date on the progress of the project. Anecdotal evidence indicates that five to ten people normally participate in the meetings, depending on the size of the block. Facing Homelessness continues the outreach process into the construction of the Block Home by inviting the neighborhood to participate in all of the volunteer-driven construction activities. Volunteer activities range from clearing the lot, to digging utility trenches, landscaping, and clearing the property of discarded construction material. Once the Block Home is complete, everyone is again invited to the move in celebration, welcoming their new neighbor to the block.

Responses to the Block Project at the neighborhood level have been varied from the surrounding community. Most of the concerns center around fear-based and stereotype-driven questions about the new resident. They are concerned about their individual privacy and safety, assuming that the new resident will have a history of crime or drug use which will impact the neighborhood. They question the stability of the resident and have concerns about their mental health. Facing Homelessness has accounted for and addressed these concerns by designing the match making process around a continuum of care that involves social service support once the resident is placed in the home. The matchmaking process is also a vetting opportunity for the

host to decide if the potential resident would be a good fit in their immediate space. Because this is an education-focused community project, block engagement is an important method that Facing Homelessness builds into the Block Project. From my own encounters with the neighbors around Block Home 3, they all share stories about how delighted and surprised they were when they met J, the resident of Block Home 3. The neighbor across the street reported that J helped her take her groceries in when it was apparent that she was struggling with them, and how moved she was by the gesture. By coming closer, and through conversations with the resident, the stereotypes surrounding homelessness can be deconstructed. This type of incremental change is necessary for the perception of this population to change in a meaningful way.

5.4 HOST CULTIVATION

When the Block Project was launched in 2016, property owners who were interested found out via word of mouth and emailed Facing Homelessness directly to express interest in participating in the project. The process is now driven through an online interest form that potential hosts fill out and submit to Facing Homelessness with a list of character references. The Block Programs Manager then reaches out to the interested hosts and interviews them to evaluate their commitment to community building, and gaining a baseline understanding of their connection to homelessness. To qualify, the potential host has to have a 4,000 square foot lot, meeting the requirements for constructing a DADU on the lot. The list of interested hosts has organically grown, reaching nearly 100 Seattle based homeowners. Because of the early success, 2019 is the first year a formal request for new Block Home hosts has been circulated throughout Seattle, following three years of organic, word of mouth growth. Before this ask, Facing Homelessness relied on social media and volunteer engagement as their communication strategy.

The Block Project is designed with the intention of being a permanent housing solution for the resident. Of course, the circumstances of life cannot guarantee that each host family will own the property that the Block Home is located on in perpetuity. In the event that the host moves or sells their property, there is a process in place for what will happen to the Block Home. The Block Home is designed to be disassembled and removed from the property if the host is no longer capable or interested in participating. The resident would then be rehoused in a Block Home on another participating hosts property, pending an amicable matchmaking process. The homeowner can also sell the house with the DADU in the backyard, keeping it in the ownership of Facing Homelessness. This is further complicated by the fact that the new homeowners would have to go through the matchmaking process with the original resident. These processes have not yet been tested by Facing Homelessness as all of the first-generation hosts have maintained ownership of their property.

Chapter 6. FIELDWORK RESULTS

Over the course of ten days, I conducted interviews with 14 individuals who are integral to the Block Project either as employees, hosts, or residents. Each interview produced unique insights into the Block Project that built a rich database of stories to draw from and code. From these interviews, three overarching themes emerged that linked these 14 stories together. The first theme that emerged was *Resident Trauma*. After analyzing the interviews with C'zar and J, it became clear that these two individuals suffered from cycles of abuse and trauma in their life that led them to experience homelessness. This is further supported by my conversation with Kim and Dan who shared Bobby's story with me, illuminating the circumstances that he lived in for nearly nine years on the streets of Seattle. The second theme was *Social Responsibility and Engagement*. There was an overwhelming amount of feedback from the participants that signaled their dedication to service and desire to provide aid and resources to those that need it the most. The final theme that I will discuss is *Personal Growth and Fulfillment*. As a product of the journey that these individuals have gone on with each other, and through their efforts to come closer to one another, there emerged a sense of satisfaction and joy. I will discuss these themes in greater detail and punctuate them by sharing biographical vignettes of the participants.

6.1 RESIDENT TRAUMA

C'zar is a 50-year-old African American man who was raised in an upper-middle-class family in Riverdale New York, just North of Harlem. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Fordham University with a focus on television and broadcast programming and moved to Seattle in 1991 to pursue a career in public broadcasting. This is not the story you imagine when you learn that C'zar was also homeless in Seattle for eight years. His future was promising, but as he puts it, "I

was living my dream when I met my nightmare.” C’zar’s partner, Brad, was self-destructive, taking him down a path that “led to basically my financial ruin, my mental breakdown and then my substance abuse.” C’zar reinforced that his experiences while being homeless led him to substance abuse, not the other way around. He expressed that living homeless is a dehumanizing experience where “you can’t sit down anywhere. You can’t lay down anywhere. There’s nowhere to sleep. They say go to the shelters, you go to the shelters and you get robbed, you get assaulted. You catch parasites and diseases. They’re very unsafe and unclean.” When he did find a clean shelter that provided a safe place to sleep, the waiting list often prevented him from being able to stay there. He mentioned that the Emanuel House Winter Shelter run by the Union Gospel Mission in Phinney Ridge was one such shelter. He preferred the Emanuel House Winter Shelter because it was one of the cleaner safer places to stay with a small and predictable population. This was a much different shelter experience than he had while seeking shelter in downtown Seattle.

When I asked C’zar to share his story, he pointed out that “I think what a lot of people forget is that everyone wants to know how you became homeless. Homelessness is a very traumatic and victimizing situation. What we try to get people who have not been homeless to understand is that when you ask someone to share that story, basically you’re asking them to revictimize themselves.” The cycles of trauma are pervasive through his story and make it clear that the institutional responses to homelessness are inadequate and reinforced by social stigmatization. C’zar would be considered someone who was chronically homeless, meaning that he has been continuously homeless for one year or more. Homelessness in King County also disproportionately affects African American men who make up 26% of the homeless population, but account for only 6% of the total population as classified by race (All Home King County,

2019). Additionally, history of domestic violence and abuse is more prevalent in the LGBTQ community (25% compared to 15%); yet another indicator illustrating C'zar's statistical risk of experiencing homelessness. Homelessness disproportionately affects queer people of color. C'zar is a part of this ultra-minority and is statistically four times more likely to experience homelessness because he is a single, gay, African American man. I want to close his story by sharing his thoughts on how people perceive and discuss individuals experiencing homelessness, he emphasized that "no person is illegal. No person is an outsider. We're all humans."

Bobby is an elderly Canadian First Nation who has been homeless in Seattle for nearly a decade. His smile is quick and effortless, making you immediately comfortable in his presence. He spent most of his time living homeless near the Pike Place Market, sleeping along the waterfront and panhandling in front of Nordstrom's on 3rd Ave. He spent a majority of his time downtown because The Chief Seattle Club provided critical services and community that Bobby desired. The Chief Seattle Club is a service provider for urban Natives peoples who need access to food, social work, and transitional services. Bobby and C'zar share similar stories in relation to their experiences with shelters. He said that he slept with his pants and shoes on for nine years to prevent them from being stolen in the middle of the night. Additionally, he had to chain his wallet to his belt as a preventative measure. American Indian or Alaska Native peoples account for 8% of the homeless population in King County but represent 1% of the total population (All Home King County, 2018). This means that this population is demographically eight times more likely to experience homelessness. Bobby declined the request to be interviewed for this thesis, but as his case worker suggested, "He is an elder and it could be re-traumatizing to be asked about trauma" experienced while homeless. This sentiment was echoed by C'zar earlier, again illustrating the vulnerability of this population. In my attempt to come closer, I discovered that

experiencing homelessness is in itself an incredibly traumatic experience. This is further compounded by its disproportionate impact on vulnerable and minority populations.

J, who asked to remain anonymous, is a 38-year-old woman who recently moved to Seattle to escape an abusive partner. She moved to Seattle to be closer with family, but because of personal circumstances, she was unable to stay with them long term. Her mother currently lives in a mobile home community in Auburn which restricts the number of occupants that can stay in each unit. Her sister also lives in the Auburn area but lives with an abusive partner in her home. Because of her family's inability to house her, J's options were limited and further complicated by her severe food and environmental allergies. When asked about her housing options she said, "the shelters wouldn't have offered me much help at all because with my food allergies and my environmental allergies, it would have been a dangerous environment for me." Her opportunities seemed bleak, either stay with her sister and re-experience the domestic violence that she moved to Seattle to escape or seek refuge in a shelter that could severely endanger her physical health. Individuals who are domestic violence survivors account for 36% of the homeless population in King County (All Home King County, 2018). This is a staggering number, but research suggests that "Abuse and separation from the family of origin in childhood and domestic violence in adulthood were also important predictors of shelter seeking. Domestic violence was the only family characteristic associated with failure to receive subsidized housing, perhaps because batterers pursued women in shelters or because women returned to live with their abusers" (Shinn et al., 1998, p. 1655). While this reflects J's story, she eventually sought care with Mary's Place, a women's shelter that offers a variety of resources and helps its clients find permanent housing. Women in King County account for 35% of the homeless population and make up a majority of the sheltered population at 58% (All Home King County, 2018).

The stories told here illustrate that homelessness affects a diverse population and can create a dangerous cycle of abuse if there are inadequate support systems in place. These individuals represent vulnerable and minority populations who have experienced domestic violence, and drug abuse as a result of their experience. They all engaged with non-profit and city-funded aid during their homeless experience but ultimately found permanent housing through the Block Project. Their stories also uniquely humanize individuals experiencing homelessness, which is a critical part of building empathy toward this stigmatized population.

6.2 SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ENGAGEMENT

The theme of social responsibility was informed by several subcategories that emerged from the respondents. Volunteer and religious service were clear categories that provided a historical precedent for these individuals to engage with the Block Project as well as feeling the need to act in response to the changing political climate. The displayed interest in providing aid manifested through varying degrees of engagement. Principally, the Block Project provides opportunities for non-prescriptive engagement and has grown from grassroots, word of mouth interactions. This growth strategy is a display of asset-based community engagement, accepting the community as a collective asset through volunteer labor, donated materials, property, and funding.

The host and employee respondent groups both share a history of volunteer service that led them to either working with or participating in the Block Project. The levels of service varied greatly, but the nexus between all of the respondents was their previous work with the homeless community. The host for Block Home 2, Visala, has followed the teachings of Amma, a spiritual leader and humanitarian, for 20 years who advocates for acts of service. She has answered this calling by regularly volunteering downtown at homeless shelters, serving meals to those in need. When asked to provide more insight into her motivations to participate in the Block Project, she

asked rhetorically, “how can I be so privileged to live in this home, and then other people are living outside.” For Visala, her land is a powerful resource that she believes should be shared to improve the life of someone who doesn’t have the same privileges that she does. Interestingly, the residents for Block Home 3, Lex and Marjon, also have a history of service with the homeless community. For years, they housed homeless youth from the YMCA in their single-story home. The Block Project was another opportunity to provide a home for someone in need.

Nearly all employee respondents share a history of volunteer involvement that led them to work with either Facing Homelessness or Block Architects. Jennifer Tee volunteered directly with Facing Homelessness before seeking full-time employment with the organization. She was researching different organizations to volunteer with and was moved by the mission of Facing Homelessness, which is to walk alongside those in need without a power differential in place. She added that volunteering with Facing Homelessness “felt accessible, I felt like they were giving people an opportunity to get involved. Prior to learning about Facing Homelessness I felt really lost and I feel like that’s true for a lot of people.” Her desire to act was answered by an avenue for engagement. This is where Facing Homelessness has been effective in leveraging the collective will of the community to achieve its goal.

The employee population also communicated that their values and convictions extend from their personal lives into their work environment. Barron volunteered with Sawhorse Revolution while he was working with Mithun, a design firm in Seattle, as an architect. Barron’s volunteer service was incredibly valuable to him, stating that his “volunteer activities there (at Sawhorse Revolution) felt like a really important part of my life that I wasn't willing to back out on.” He went on to say that his volunteer experience “was really rewarding and it felt like it was more emotionally challenging than my job.” These challenges were what motivated him to quit

his job at Mithun and work for Block Architects. Jenn, Co-Founder of Block Architects, also left what she considered her dream job with Graham Baba Architects, to focus her passion full time on the Block Project. As an undergraduate student at Washington State University, Jenn volunteered at Roots Youth and Hope House women's shelter, both shelters that provide aid for people experiencing homelessness.

This sense of social responsibility was also a response to the political climate after President Trump was elected in 2016. The hosts for Block Home 1, Kim and Dan, said that they decided to participate after the election when they "were not quite used to the new level of hate and ugliness." Kim said "it [participating in the Block Project] was something to do that met the magnitude of the problem. We're not out there passing policy or funding any low-income housing units, but it felt like something that was concrete and big enough that it does make a difference. It was two citizens worth of effort to make a dent in the problem." Two citizens worth of effort to change someone's life, the power of their actions is a reflection of their personal motivations to seek change in their community. Bernard expressed a similar call to action, stating that "when President Trump got elected, I felt the urge to do something positive that could bring people together, but also just erase the negative feeling that I felt that society was going in the wrong direction. I wanted to do something that had the power to, perhaps unite people, and also just feel good about the way I was living my life." He spent that Summer volunteering over 300 hours building Block Home 1 in Kim and Dan's backyard while also working a full-time job with Turner Construction. This sense of social responsibility is shared between Bernard and Barron's story, believing that the emotional rewards from their work were more important than the title or salary at a more prestigious firm.

These expressions of *Social Responsibility and Engagement* are illustrative of Virginia Held's work on care ethics and provide a critical lens into why individuals feel the desire to serve. Held writes that "prospects for human progress and flourishing hinge fundamentally on the care that those needing it receive, and the ethics of care stresses the moral force of the responsibility to respond to the needs of the dependent" (Held, 2006). This moral responsibility is being felt and acted upon in different capacities by all stakeholders associated with the Block Project. Community engagement is critical to the Block Projects model. Sara states plainly that "the community is defining what it [the Block Project] is. The community is defining the pace. It is a community supported, funded, built, led project. That's what makes it feel more like a movement than a charity."

The Block Project is where social responsibility meets engagement to create a community-driven project. Community in this context broadly encompasses all actors who support and interface with the Block Project. This ranges from the employee, host, and resident populations which are the focus of this thesis, to volunteers, financial supporters, and private citizens who collectively support Facing Homelessness. This asset-based approach is effective because a path has been provided for people to be part of a solution when they previously didn't know how. Béné punctuates this assessment by adding that "each individual doesn't need to be an expert, but if we pool our resources and ideas, we will really be able to achieve something great." John Kretzmann and John McKnight, Co-Directors of the Asset Based Community Institute, publish on the collective power of community assets. Kretzmann and McKnight write that "historic evidence indicates that significant community development take place only when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort" (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). They suggest that this is why communities are never

effectively built from the top down but must be self-generated from the inside out. Rex strongly believes that in order for this to happen, “we have to learn about each other, and we have to do that through proximity.”

6.3 PERSONAL GROWTH AND FULFILLMENT

Destigmatizing the other is something that can take generations. It’s a process that requires social movements, revolutions, and considerable political effort. At the individual level, it is a product of personal growth. The themes of *Personal Growth and Fulfillment* drew from the through lines that uncovered the motivations for the respondents to participate in the project. Jenn believes that education is important for community growth. She says that “the more you know, the more educated decisions you can make, and you can only do that by coming closer. By asking people to come closer to the issue of homelessness, we believe that in many ways it’ll be harder for people to ignore it and that’s a good thing. It allows people to grow and to in turn help people that are living on the street.” Collective change at a large enough scale can positively influence the way people perceive and treat people experiencing homelessness.

Bernard spoke about his motivations to work for Block Architects and how that experience led him to a greater sense of fulfillment. He was drawn to “serving those on the margins and it was clear that Rex was discovering himself in community in ways that was just like very self-generating and fulfilling.” He desired this sense of fulfillment and believed in the regenerative power of service. Bernard added to this by saying “at that time I wasn’t feeling fulfilled in my job and I’d always wanted to do something that had some deeper meaning. It [the Block Project] really connected with me on an emotional level.” This sense of fulfillment and satisfaction was informed by the emotional response he received from participating in the project. The literature on care ethics states that “Those who conscientiously care for others are

not seeking primarily to further their own individual interests; their interests are intertwined with the persons they care for” (Held, 2006). While Bernard’s assessment was self-reflective, the feedback that he received as a result of his participation was a product of the value he provided to the project. This pattern is exhibited by Barron and Sara as well. Barron mentioned that when considering employment with Block Architects, it was “a total mystery of where it would take me, but it felt very true to myself to take that path.” Sara stated similarly that “It [working with Facing Homelessness] felt right both in terms of like personal and professional growth.” These feelings of reassurance and affirmation catalyzed them to explore those feelings and seek full-time employment with their respective organizations.

The host participant group unanimously expressed that they have undergone personal growth from opening their backyards to a new neighbor. Kim exclaimed that “This kind of feels to me like the best thing I've ever done...being part of this has been pretty amazing and life changing and kind of in those subtle ways, like Bobby's life changing, just seeing the love and compassion of people in this community has restored my faith in humanity at a time when it was suffering.” Dan added that “This was our way to get deeper and closer to the issues and the people, to do more.” Ideas of education and proximity are prevalent in these stories, acting as the connective tissue between the act of engagement, feeling of fulfillment, and realization of personal growth. Visala echoes this sentiment when reflecting on the community support that went into the production of Block Home 2. She said that she was “just blown away by the love and compassion that so many people showed.” These reciprocal relationships are the essence of inside out community building as described by Kretzmann and McKnight. The literature on care ethics explains that “persons in caring relations are acting for self-and-other together. Their characteristic stance is neither egoistic nor altruistic...but the well-being of a caring relation

involves the cooperative well-being of those in the relation and the well-being of the relation itself” (Held, 2006, p. 6). One member does not receive all of the benefits from the exchange in the interactions, but instead all parties that foster goodness will benefit.

The residents also have grown as a result of their participation in the Block Project. C’zar said, when reflecting on the circumstances that led him to become homeless, “I think the first thing I had to do was just realize that I created my own problems by my associations and affiliations. And in the process of doing that, I started acting a lot on social justice issues. The neat thing about the block project is that it addressed the growing concern of how to help a population that's at need without putting them at risk. Which is by in large what happens when they go into the shelter system.” He is now able to turn his self-reflection into activism and serves on the Poverty Reduction Work Group advocating for equity in employment and education. C’zar envisions himself living in Shoreline in five years working to advance social justice issues in King County. He doesn’t see the Block Home as his final residence in Seattle and says that he “will leave the place exactly the same way that it was given to me, for the next person.”

By removing these individuals from cycles of abuse and trauma, they can begin to grow and heal. Even though J has just recently moved into her Block Home, she says that “The people that work for the block projects are looking out for me and it's a safe space...Everyone is aware of the fact that I came from a situation that was abusive and they're working to keep me safe.” She recognizes that this is not a permanent housing solution for her but has a place to stay while she enrolls in a welding apprenticeship. In five years, J sees herself living in Port Orchard to be closer to family and hopefully a welding job with the Navy. When asked about her future involvement with the Block Project she says, “I definitely want to be volunteering with this later

when I'm up on my feet again." By investing in J, she hopes to contribute to the Block Project however she can in the future.

From what Kim and Dan report, Bobby is now able to sleep in for the first time in nearly a decade and has much more control over his diet. He suffers from diabetes and is able to monitor his health more closely and has stopped drinking alcohol completely. Dan grounded the transformation Bobby has gone through by saying "it's not like the Dickens novel where you pick up the poor person and plunk them down in the wealthy family and suddenly, they're just changed. It's definitely more subtle things that are maybe more life changing than what I was expecting." The Chief Seattle Club is still a cornerstone of his social life and community, he still panhandles in front of Nordstrom's on 3rd, the difference is that now those are his choices. He is given the agency to live the life that he sees fit and often invites Kim and Dan out to dinner once he's earned \$100. This might sound unremarkable in any other context, after all, these are just two neighbors sharing a dinner with one another.

There are extraordinary parallels between the literature and interview data. Held writes that the individual who takes action does not do so to benefit all of humanity, but instead seek to find something more innate. She writes that "neither are they acting for the sake of all others or humanity in general; they seek instead to preserve or promote an actual human relation between themselves and particular others" (Held, 2006, p. 6). This passage corresponds strongly with a closing thought that Bernard shared. He said that "whenever I felt most human or whenever I saw something beautiful, I couldn't help but think about the block project." The desire to feel human, to feel seen is pervasive in all of use. It is after all in our nature, and it is the trauma that those experiencing homelessness suffer the most. They are robbed of that recognition, that human experience. These emergent themes are connected through the participant's willingness to

make change. Each individual believes in the project and because of that three people who have been formerly homeless now live in permanent housing. The lines between housed and homeless blur, and we can begin to understand one another as neighbors, and perhaps as a community.

Chapter 7. LESSONS FOR PRACTICE

This thesis argues that the American city has been shaped by the influence of capitalism which, as an economic system, operates in a binary model of credits and debits. The rigidity of capitalism has influenced the way space is divided and commodified, becoming both a measure of wealth and unit of inventory in a city. The way American cities have developed an organizational understanding of space, what I have described as urban formality, siloes uses and building typologies into distinct spatial zones. The literature on informality has established that formal planning mechanisms create rigid constraints on the built environment. Mukhija stresses that “to address informality in sophisticated ways, and to recognize its implications for cities, their built environment, and spatial justice, it is necessary for planners and policymakers to have a more comprehensive understanding of such activities...” (Mukhija & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014). The research conducted in this thesis provides phenomenological data to explore the complexities of the structural response to homelessness, acknowledging that formal market solutions have been ineffective in creating margins for improvement. The Block Project creates a new housing paradigm that hasn’t been widely accepted in the American context by building dwelling units on land leased by private homeowners at no cost to the tenants. This response occurs in the grey area between formal and informal where the market is not yet involved in its operation.

These intellectual understandings of capitalism and the built environment are important in how we perceive and understand the problem of homelessness. With that being established, the spatial response in Seattle is being discussed in the form of residential infill housing. Taking advantage of opportunities to pursue infill housing as an option to create affordable units will leverage existing single-family infrastructure and the fact that 66% of Seattle is zoned for single-

family use. Residential infill housing is a solution that can begin to make an impact now. Over 66% of the land in the City of Seattle is zoned for single-family use (Figure 8). That’s more than the land zoned for industrial, commercial, mixed-use, multifamily, and downtown use combined. The prevalence of single-family zoning is what makes infill housing such an attractive option for affordable housing. In a City of Seattle document, *Removing Barriers to Backyard Cottages*, policymakers write that “Accessory dwelling units provide many benefits to communities, such as allowing for more efficient use of our existing housing stock and infrastructure” (Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection, 2015). The development costs associated with extending utility mains and gaining access to an electric vault can be avoided by constructing small dwelling units on parcels that are already up to code.

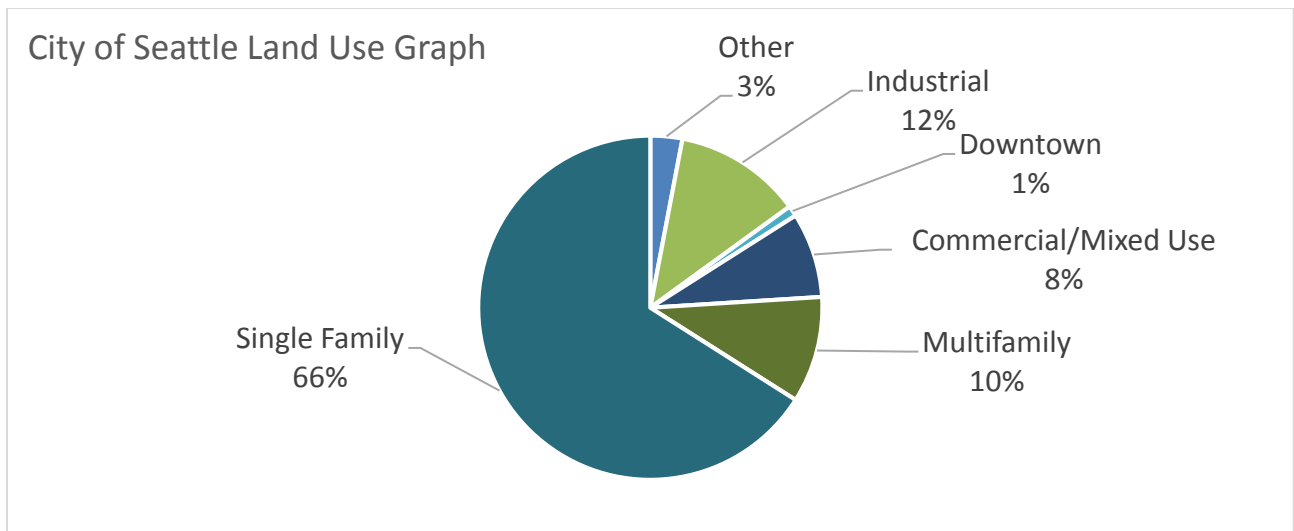


Figure 8. City of Seattle land use chart (2018). Adapted from ‘Main ADU FEIS’ by the City of Seattle, 2018, *Main ADU FEIS*

The City of Seattle defines Accessory Attached Dwelling Units (AADU) and Detached Accessory Dwelling Units (DADU) as “small secondary dwelling units inside, attached to, or in the rear yard of a single-family house. An attached ADU (AADU), often called an in-law unit or basement apartment, is contained within or attached to a single-family house. A detached ADU

(DADU), often called a backyard cottage, is a separate structure allowed in the rear yard of certain single-family-zoned lots” (City of Seattle Department of Planning and Development, 2018). These are nimble and effective structures that build equity into the single-family residential fabric. A 2015 assessment calculated that there are 74,958 lots eligible for backyard cottages in lots greater than 4,000 square feet. With that figure in mind, Seattle currently has about “348,000 housing units. Between 2010 and 2017, the city gained about 40,000 new housing units” (City of Seattle Department of Planning and Development, 2018). Accessory Dwelling Units could nearly double the number of new housing units that the city gained since 2010. This is something that the City of Seattle needs to not only take advantage of but needs to get right.

Infill housing is often correlated with affordability, but is infill housing viable as an option for those who need it most? The City of Seattle supports this by saying that “DADUs support many of the housing goals and policies in the City’s Comprehensive Plan. For example, increasing production of a more affordable rental housing option in single-family neighborhoods supports Policy H16, which directs the City to encourage greater economic integration of neighborhoods. Production of DADUs also helps the City adapt the housing stock to accommodate residential growth and provide affordable housing options” (Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection, 2015). These lessons for practice will further examine the number of new lots created if the FEIS is passed and will make recommendations for how Seattle can make this program more accessible.

The Final ADU Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) that the City of Seattle released in October of 2018 had many thoughtful alternatives to the cities current approach to how and where DADUs and ADUs are currently allowed. The three changes that could be most

meaningful as an avenue to fight displacement are first, removing the minimum lot size requirement which is currently set at 4,000 square feet. This would potentially open up smaller, more affordable single-family parcels for DADU development. The second is the removal of the owner occupancy requirement for DADUs. The FEIS stated that “An ADU operated as a rental unit may provide a revenue stream that might help people stay in their homes” (City of Seattle Department of Planning and Development, 2018). This change in itself could motivate more people to explore this as a way to create a secondary income source. The third change that would be beneficial for place keeping is removing the off-street parking requirement. New development around Transit Oriented Development (TOD) sites already have the option to not provide parking. Since Seattle is making enormous investments in public transportation, and if more affordable units can be in proximity to bus and rail lines, this would make the units more affordable and open more of the lot for outdoor amenity space. These changes reduce many of the barriers to entry the landowners previously faced and makes the use of future AADUs and DADUs more flexible.

Housing affordability is, of course, a complicated subject that is impacted by a multitude of variables. While many of those variables are difficult to account for, some of them can be immediately addressed by the city. For example, “Many other cities have been timid when it comes to tinkering with the zoning rules for “single-family” neighborhoods, and they’ve crafted ADU policies that simply aren’t scalable. For decades, city councils have used exclusionary zoning to prioritize single-family “character” over everything else (including climate change and affordability), and now we’re in a situation where many of our vibrant cities face chronic housing shortages” (Davidson, 2017). This is exactly what the City of Seattle has been battling with the Queen Anne Community Council, who has appealed the FEIS on ADUs. Because one

of the most stable neighborhoods in Seattle is concerned with the built character of their neighborhood, they are preventing the rest of the city from benefitting from less restrictive AADU and DADU legislation. With the advent of expanding urban village boundaries and city-wide up-zoning, the urban fabric is going to change dramatically in the next decade. The City of Seattle needs to recognize this and make a concerted effort to deploy as many options for affordable housing as it can.

The City of Seattle has come a long way in how it proposes to legislate where and how AADUs and DADUs can be developed. Reducing the minimum parcel size, removing the owner occupancy requirement, as well as the off-street requirement will certainly benefit the housing market. While reducing the lot size minimums and owner occupancy requirements will make AADUs and DADUs a more attractive option for homeowners, there is more that the city can do to reduce the barriers to entry. I recommend that the City of Seattle implement policy changes that are targeted at reducing the displacement risk of vulnerable communities. First, the City of Seattle needs to commit to providing cost reductions, fee waivers, and streamline the permitting process for the Master Use Permits. This would make engaging in the process more appealing and would expedite the time it would take to break ground on the new dwelling unit. This could further be expedited if the city had pre-approved designs that the applicant could select based on their lot size. Because this is an anti-displacement solution, it would benefit the city and the applicant to have a streamlined process that was designed to produce results. Second, the City of Seattle needs to eliminate the lot size requirement and allow DADUs to be constructed on any single family or residential small lot. This gives all property owners the opportunity to build additional units on their lot but does not require it. Concerns about neighborhood character would surely arise, but I believe it is more important to keep the community intact than be

concerned about the materiality of an AADU or DADU. The sum of these changes would aid housing affordability by adding to the rental stock and providing a secondary income source to residents who are most vulnerable to displacement.

A land capacity analysis Seattle's Single Family and Residential Small Lot zones reveal the total developable land available for infill housing opportunities. There are 109,359 single family parcels greater than or equal to 4,000 square feet in the City of Seattle, which accounts for 36.4 square miles of land. Current land use policy designates single-family parcels greater than 4,000 square feet as the minimum parcel size required to build a DADU in Seattle. This restriction prohibits the 21,764 single-family parcels that are smaller than 4,000 square feet. It also does not include the 6,947 parcels zoned as Residential Small Lots within urban village boundaries. Together, these 28,711 parcels would create a 7% increase in buildable land in Seattle (Figure 9). Beyond the sheer increase in single family parcels made available for infill housing, the proposed single-family parcels below 4,000 square feet are centrally located in their respective neighborhoods which increases access to transit and localized services like grocery stores and post offices. This would further serve Seattle's sustainability initiatives by locating infill housing near existing transit hubs so that new residents would become less reliant on automobiles.

Additionally, the city can explore other mechanisms to incentivize participation such as property tax credit models, but I argue that the social capital approach will be more effective in determining the long-term success of the Block Project. The property tax credit model is an incentive-based policy approach where the City of Seattle could fund property tax breaks as an incentive to participate in the Block Project. For example, the 2019 median home value in King County is \$582,000.00. After applying the average tax rate of 1.017%, the annual property tax on

a median home in King County would be \$5,924.00 (King County, 2019). The City of Seattle allocates \$78 million dollars a year addressing the homelessness crisis, a budget that could reasonably absorb property tax payments for participating property owners into the foreseeable future (City of Seattle, 2019). While financial mechanisms have shown to spur change and action, it is as meaningful as the social and emotional aspects of the Block Project that I argue in this thesis, as I have articulated in *Chapter 6*. The fulfillment and personal growth expressed by the participants in the Block Project are immeasurable as a return for their investment in the project.

If the City of Seattle is truly committed to ending homelessness, it must take stronger measures to do so. The importance of making the recommended changes is twofold. Land scarcity forces competition amongst consumers, which in turn increases the price of land and housing. If accessory dwelling units and backyard cottages became a more prevalent typology, a paradigm shift would occur in the market where more than half of the city's land would become available for infill density. Opening previously restricted land to infill development would theoretically decrease the cost of housing as a market response to an increased supply. This is an important first step in removing the barriers to entry for property owners who have the desire and ability to add additional units to their property but are prohibited from doing so due to zoning and land use restrictions. This is a roadblock preventing more organic, and asset-driven approaches to increased neighborhood density. The Block Project has proven that there is a desire by private homeowners to use their land as a platform for social justice by providing free permanent housing for people who were previously homeless. The City of Seattle should capitalize on this desire by sharing the burden of creating affordable dwelling units with private citizens and becoming a champion of collective action.

Infill Housing Land Capacity Analysis

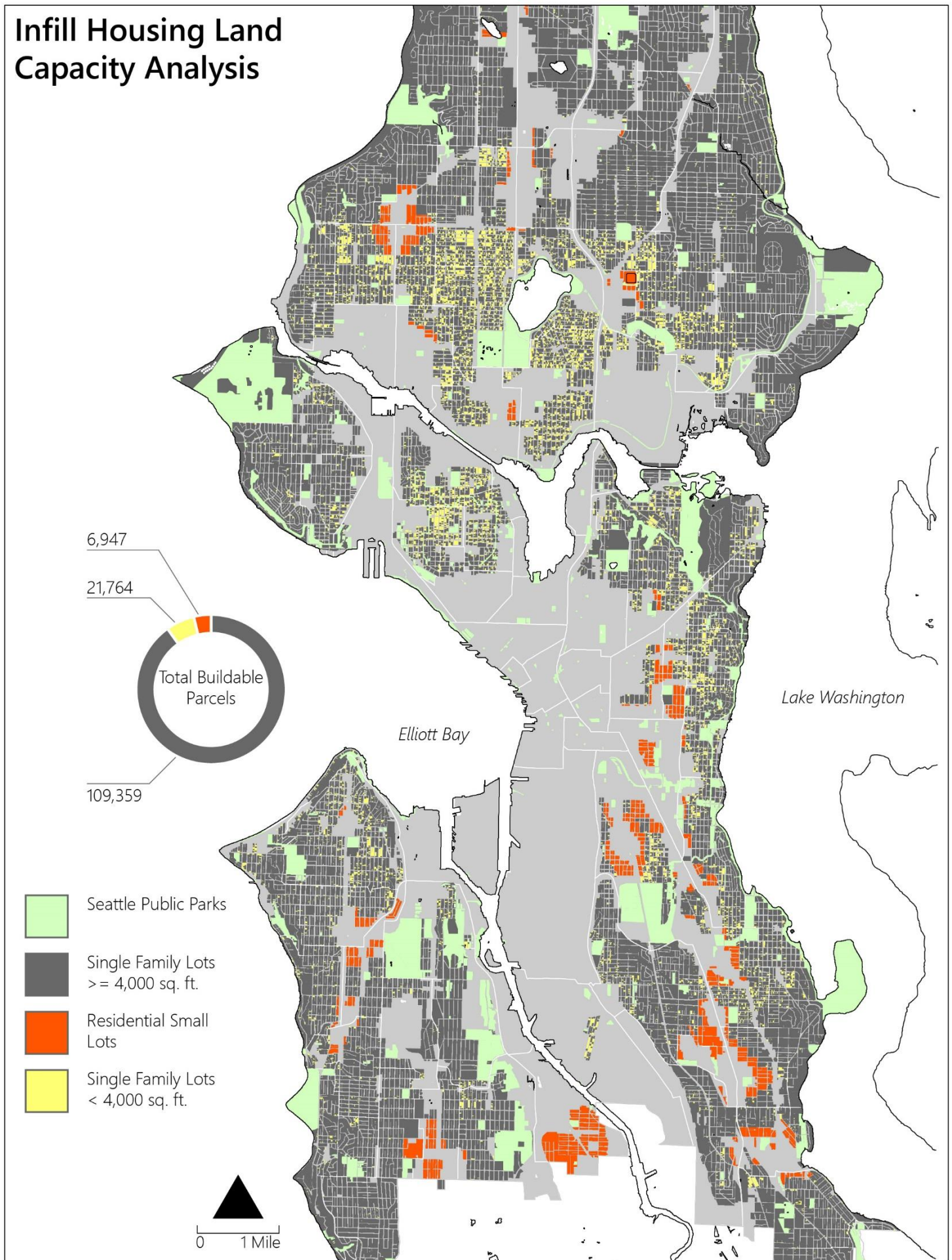


Figure 9. Infill Housing Land Capacity Analysis (2019). Data source: King County GIS open data portal

Chapter 8. REFLECTIONS

This thesis concludes with reflections on the Block Project model and recommendations for how their current processes can be enhanced. I will first discuss potential barriers and challenges that the Block Project will face when planning for growth, followed by strategies for scaling. Those recommendations will lead to an in-depth market analysis punctuated by a discussion on developing a messaging strategy around Facing Homelessness's core competencies. The final section will illustrate the limitations of this work, and how it can be used moving forward.

8.1 BARRIERS TO GROWTH

The Block Project is in its infancy, just now eclipsing its second full year of operation. The project faced an unusual challenge in the fact that in order to garner financial support early on, the concept wasn't enough. To create buy-in, Facing Homelessness needed functioning prototype and a pair of hosts and residents that were living the concept on a day to day basis. The burden of proof rested on the Block Project to address early skepticism and the mechanics of the business needed to catch up as a result. Now that three residents are paired with three host families, the footing for the Block Project is more secure. What this means is now that the project has come to life, the team at Facing Homelessness must now define what success means to them, and how they will execute that vision in the future.

From a construction lens, the Block Project faces challenges with skilled labor. The fundraising model for the block project raises enough to fund the materials for the home but does not allocate money for skilled labor such as carpenters, plumbers, and electricians. By lacking reliable and consistent sources of skilled labor, the core components of the Block Home can't be delivered on time, thus delaying the move-in date for the new resident. Bernard Troyer, the

Projects Manager with Block Architects, provided more insight by saying “when you're working with people on a volunteer basis, it's challenging to maintain the proper sequence and challenging to have people complete tasks they started.” Block Home 2 was built without the guidance of a General Contractor and took nearly seven months to complete compared to Block Homes 1 and 3 which were built under the guidance of Turner and Schultz Miller respectively. Block Home 1 and 3 were each delivered in three months. While volunteer labor is critical to the overall success of the project, the realities of construction and scheduling demand reliable progress for the skilled labor to make an impact.

There are hurdles at the city level that prevent the Block Project from operating as efficiently as it would like to. First, the zoning restrictions that currently prevent Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) from being constructed in single-family lots smaller than 4,000 square feet. The permitting process takes two to three months for each Block Home, which requires a tremendous amount of foresight to integrate it with the social services and matchmaking process with the hosts and residents. Sequencing the permitting, with host and resident matchmaking, and construction is difficult as each individual component is susceptible to unforeseen hurdles. As discussed in *Chapter 7*, the City of Seattle has an opportunity to open more land for infill housing if properties smaller than 4,000 square feet could be considered for ADU and DADU projects. This change would make an additional 28,711 parcels eligible for infill housing. Until this change occurs, current zoning and land use regulations ultimately stand as a barrier to homeowners who wish to participate in the project but are ineligible due to their lot size. This could be a significant limitation the Block Project because, unlike volunteer labor and materials, land is a spatially finite resource.

The Block Project faces another potential limitation from property owners. The Block Project functions on a community-driven asset-based approach to housing, which means that the community will ultimately define the fate of the project because their property is the most essential asset. If Facing Homelessness fails to secure new hosts for future Block Homes, the project will stall as it is designed today. The community acts as a double-edged sword in this sense. Facing Homelessness is relying on the sustained empathy and self-sacrifice of the community to achieve its mission. While this has proven successful thus far, the project has not broken outside of the early adopter group, which I will discuss in greater detail in *Reaching Beyond the Early Adopters*.

8.2 SCALING FOR SUCCESS

The most important question to ask is, what does success look like for the Block Project and how do they respond to homelessness at large? For Jenn LaFreniere, Co-Founder of Block Architects, she believes “the goal is to change people's lives, not just to produce homes.” This sentiment is echoed by Béné Bicaba, Block Programs Manager with Facing Homelessness, who adds “we are doing more than just building homes. If we are able to tap into 6-10 different blocks in the city, that means that all these people are getting activated and are trying to understand the crisis more... which could push those communities to help in their own ways.” This is important in framing how the Block Project approaches success and is also evidence for the difficulty in creating measurable metrics to track that success. When it comes to production, Sara Vander Zanden said that the goal is to double their impact year over year until they have reached scale and that they have “been intentional to not define that number because we don't know enough yet about how we're going to be resourced.” The goal for 2019 is to produce six homes, then twelve

in 2020. This will be a real test on the production framework that is currently in place while also asking for a greater level of volunteer support.

Long range scaling depends on efficiency. From the construction side, this means panelizing and prefabricating components of the Block Home in a warehouse space where materials can be stored in bulk and are readily available when needed. This also means being more intentional with how community volunteers are engaged, and having workstations assembled in the warehouse where community volunteers can come in and donate their time in a productive way. By creating distinct roles for volunteer labor, the sequence of the build can be more deliberate and skilled labor can then be leveraged more efficiently to complete construction of the home.

The model of the Block Project relies on significant volunteer support which may put a heavy burden on the community that predominantly backs it. Therein lies the danger of being unable to scale successfully and why their grassroots model of growth could be insufficient in securing enough future interest and financial support. Also, as it grows more popular, there may be attempts to co-opt and formalize the model within a municipal framework which presents both opportunities and challenges. As Jennifer Tee mentioned in her interview, the success of the Block Project depends on the community's willingness to engage and provide support. She said that "We never stop having the community be a part of it and feeling like they have ownership over this project. As long as we have the community engaged, I feel like the sky is the limit." To achieve change on a greater scale the Block Project may have to sacrifice a level of community voice in the project in exchange for more robust support at the city or county level. These are strategic choices that will ultimately be decided by the vision and mission of Facing Homelessness.

Looking beyond the Block Home, Barron Peper, Architect with Block Architects, asks “what more can we do to build deep roots and deep community beyond the number of houses that we’re building in a year?” This question shifts the focus to community building and asks if the Community Network Services in place to support the block residents are adequate. From the beginning, this project was created as a response to a community crisis, and part of the success is then to measure the health of the community. Barron goes on to say that “so much of what architecture does is it creates opportunities for connection” indicating that the change can start with a built gesture, but the community needs to respond to that invitation.

Facing Homelessness is adamant that the Block Project is principally a community building project, which provides permanent housing to someone experiencing homelessness. The semantics of this is important because it infers that in order to change the built environment as a container, you must first change its contents. This post-structuralist argument places an emphasis on the community to make collective change as opposed to a top-down city guided approach. Compromising this mission would reorient the focus, placing an emphasis on housing first in hopes to grow community around those interventions. As I have discussed, the literature on predictors and prevalence of homelessness does not support this strategy as community integration and social services need to be part of the equation to achieve successful outcomes.

8.3 REACHING BEYOND THE EARLY ADOPTERS

In *Scaling for Success*, I spoke more broadly about the future definition of success for the Block Project and how to strategically scale to achieve that goal. This section will focus specifically on marketing theory as it informs an approach for establishing new host populations beyond the current first-generation hosts. Everett Rogers, a communication theorist and sociologist, originally published on Diffusion of Innovation theory in 1962. Rogers explains that “diffusion is

the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (Rogers, 1983, p. 5). Rogers goes on to write that diffusion represents a kind of social change around a new idea which acts a catalyst for structural and functional changes in the social system, while also introducing a degree of uncertainty (Rogers, 1983). The Block Project can be characterized as an innovation in its early stages of adoption with the potential to lead to social and structural change. The categories of adopters as characterized by Rogers are first the innovators, the early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards (Figure 10). The Block Project was launched in 2016 making it difficult to assess the stage of its diffusion. I believe that the first generation of hosts for the Block Project represents the early adopter category. The literature describes the early adopter category by saying that more than any other, they have “the greatest degree of opinion leadership in most social systems. Potential adopters look to early adopters for advice and information about the innovation” (Rogers, 1983, p. 249). Early adopters are thought leaders and are indicative of social change as they represent a trusted group of individuals who signal that change. Based on the interview data, I argue that this group is comfortable with the uncertainty associated with their participation in the Block Project because of the social responsibility they feel to act and the emotional response they receive in the form of fulfillment.

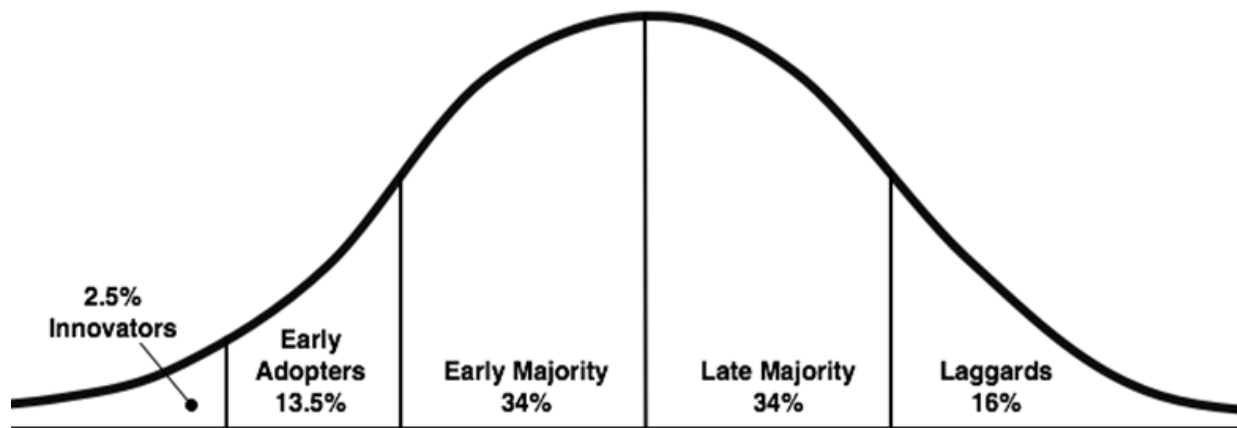


Figure 10. Diffusion of Innovation model. Adapted from ‘Diffusion of Innovations’ by E. Rogers, 1983, *Diffusion of Innovations*.

Geoffrey Moore, an organizational theorist and scholar, builds on Everett Rogers’ work on Diffusion of Innovation theory by exploring marketing and branding strategies necessary to navigate through the five adopter groups outlined in Rogers’ work. In the context of the Block Project, this analysis is concerned with reaching beyond the early adopter group by successfully appealing to the early majority. The key difference between these two consumer groups is that early adopters are comfortable with disruptive new technologies and the early majority wants “evolution, not revolution” (Moore, 1999, p. 15). Moore emphasizes the importance and difficulty in reaching this group by explaining that “they [the early majority] want to see well-established references before investing substantially. Because there are so many people in this segment—roughly one-third of the whole adoption life cycle-winning their business is key to any substantial profits and growth” (Moore, 1999, p. 9). While the Block Project is not a profit-driven enterprise, growth is an important consideration for how they intended on scaling and increasing the number of Block Homes they install on an annual basis. They are reliant on market momentum, meaning that an accumulation of kinetic consumer energy is needed to

maintain and increase the level of operation and output. This is especially valid because they are community funded, a model which disallows for unexpected periods of negative growth.

The Block Project now faces the challenge of “making the transition from an early market dominated by a few visionary customers to a mainstream market dominated by a large block of customers who are predominantly pragmatists in orientation” (Moore, 1999, p. 4). Moore goes on to explain that pragmatists will “undertake risks when required, but they first will put in place safety nets and manage the risks very closely” (Moore, 1999, p. 31). Market leadership, and in the context of the Block Project, thought leadership, is critical for the early majority population to adopt the project. Establishing a position as a market leader is paramount, because by becoming a recognized as accepted model two things occur. First, the Block Project will establish a precedent where social capital is introduced as a valued currency. Secondly, the Block Project is able to mitigate the risk that the consumer faces by proving, through peer adoption, the appeal of their product. Together, these actions will impact the way pragmatically minded property owners approach the Block Project by creating an argument for a new paradigm where social capital is just as valuable as financial gain.

Facing Homelessness has been effective in positioning the Block Project as an organic and community-driven initiative. Because of this early success, The Block Project’s communication approach should continue to focus on guerilla and grassroots channels but should do so with greater intention. Moore states that “for word of mouth to develop in any particular marketplace, there must be a critical mass of informed individuals who meet from time to time and, in exchanging views, reinforce the product’s or the company’s positioning” (Moore, 1999, p. 51). The Block Project has already established an effective network of brand advocates who self selectively donate their time and resources to the Block Project. This passage underscores

the value of enhancing what has already made the Block Project effective by actively targeting and recruiting new volunteers and industry supporters. A way to operationalize this approach is through the block engagement methodology that has already been established by Facing Homelessness. Personalizing the message of the Block Project and sharing it on a person to person level will create more opportunities for conversation and education around homelessness. More energy and emphasis should be put on engaging the surrounding neighborhood, which also means expanding the radius of influence beyond the immediate block context.

This can also be effectively done by selectively capturing and sharing testimonials of the stakeholders engaged in the project. This goes beyond the resident group and incorporates the hosts, employees, and volunteers who donate their time and labor to the project. This is important because testimonials create more opportunities for individuals to relate to the project, while simultaneously reinforcing the critical mass of informed individuals who are able to advocate on behalf of the Block Project. Social media is an effective channel for sharing content of this nature because of its immediate reach and potential virality. Facing Homelessness has 51,839 followers on Facebook and 5,701 on Instagram, grossing a social media reach of 57,540 unique individuals (Facing Homelessness + BLOCK Architects, 2019). Having an established communication network to incite engagement, beyond creating awareness, is the first step in challenging current subscribers to share with their personal networks. Returning to literature on care ethics, sharing testimonials is also an effective way to model the behavior that the Block Project is seeking in the community by appealing to the moral responsibility that individuals feel to provide aid to those in need. Furthermore, this is strengthened by the non-prescriptive approach to engagement that the Block Project has created by meeting people where they are and removing barriers to entry for individuals who are interested in participating. The Block Project

also has the benefit of attracting a varied volunteer population, achieving horizontal integration across disparate demographic and socioeconomic groups. In doing so, the Block Project has the potential to have a greater viral reach by permeating into diverse social groups.

The diverse appeal of the Block Project should be viewed as an opportunity to capitalize on. Recalling Moore's statement about developing word of mouth engagement around a product, his emphasis was placed on the importance of individuals meeting to exchange different perspectives (Moore, 1999). In practice, Facing Homelessness can create opportunities for encounter by hosting a programmed event featuring stories told by hosts, residents, neighbors, and volunteers who have been impacted by the Block Project. Through sharing personal stories about *Volunteerism, Personal Growth, Fulfillment, and Service*, the audience will be exposed to the benefits of building social capital. This strategy of peer to peer storytelling is effective because it reinforces the brand by building connections through trust and commitment. Also, this would attract a different population from Facing Homelessness' social media followers by localizing the event at the neighborhood level and providing more accessible ways for people to engage with one another. Furthermore, these stories can catalyze attendees to register as potential hosts at the conclusion of the event. The Block Project relies on relationships and connectivity, which means that its most effective messaging and recruiting will need to happen in person and not virtually.

The literature has established that the early majority group is composed of development-minded pragmatists. Reaching this population will require more than an emotional appeal to successfully achieve market adoption. I argue that it will require Facing Homelessness to leverage their established social media and volunteer networks to expand the current audiences that they reach. Similarly, increasing their block engagement efforts to extend their scope beyond

the immediate block context will yield greater returns by engineering more opportunities for encounter. This is a relationship-based strategy, generating appeal through personal engagement.

8.4 LIMITATIONS

This study was conducted over an eight-month period, during which the City of Seattle released their FEIS on ADU and DADUs, the Block Project completed Block Homes 2 and 3 and welcomed C'zar and J to their new homes. This study is temporally limited which put constraints on the degree to which I was able to adapt to the changing circumstances of the information I was gathering. The Block Project also just reached its two-year mark and has only had one resident living in a home for a substantial period of time. In light of these shortcomings, I argue that there is still tremendous benefit in examining the mechanics of the project and recording the responses from the community that it has impacted the most.

The sample set for this study was a small, self-selecting group of individuals. The participants represented an exhaustive group of employees, hosts, and residents who have participated in the Block Project thus far. One limitation to this was Bobby, the resident at Block Home 1, declined the invitation to participate in the project. This reduced the number of available residents by 1/3 and limited my understanding of his experience with the project. The interview conducted with the hosts for Block Home 1, Kim and Dan, provided important insights into Bobby's life which supplemented some of the missing information. An analysis of the interview data revealed that no Block Home hosts had significant concerns or regrets associated with the project. Kim and Dan expressed that there was a slight concern early on about how the neighbors would react to the project, but what reassured them was the care that the team at Facing Homelessness and the care they took in addressing that concern. This presents an incomplete critical analysis of the Block Project as the interview data presented an

overwhelming positive reflection of the project, revealing a potential early adopter bias. This early adopter bias can be explained by literature on diffusion of innovation theory stating that this population is remarkably risk tolerant.

An alternative explanation is that I misunderstand their motivations, and the hosts are doing something that is not as radical as it may seem. Reflecting on the interview data with the host respondent group, there are indicators that support this theory. I asked Marjon, the host for Block Home 2 “could you tell me more about the circumstances that led you to committing to the block project? You have a property that fit, and it was going to fulfill a need?” She responded, “That’s pretty much it, and that was it about homelessness.” There wasn’t more that needed to be said in her mind, they saw a need and felt that their property met the ask. Visala, the host of Block Home 2 expressed a similar sentiment when asked if she had any regrets now that she participated. She said that her only regret was wishing she “had more space for more people.” There is a synergy between Visala and Marjon’s statements that indicate their participation being a response to a need. It also supports the characterization of an early adopter being comfortable with uncertainty.

Interestingly, the resident of Block Home 2, C’zar, expressed some frustration with his host. He shared that “by the time I finally moved into my place, they had relocated. That to me was really disappointing because I was really counting on having my homeowners there to introduce me to my neighbors.” The significance of this statement is twofold. One, it clearly communicates the power of an integrated housing model. The host is the bridge into the neighborhood and through personal connections, the neighborhood is able to come closer and get to know their new neighbor through an already accepted member of their immediate community. Secondly, C’zar moved in during the Fall of 2018 which means that he has only lived in his

Block Home for five months. I would be interested in following up after a year to ask how integrated he feels as a member of that neighborhood. This could evolve into a lengthier ethnographic study, following the resident population of the Block Project to establish a deeper understanding of the circumstances that led them to homelessness and how the Block Project has provided an avenue for stability. This would also provide important information about housing reentry and tenant tenure for this population.

There is an opportunity to build on this research due to the temporal limitations faced by the study. As the second and third generation of hosts and residents begin to participate in the Block Project, there will be data to build a precedent from and an established methodology to guide future work. While the conclusions of the study are marred by these limitations, the value lies in the themes that emerged from the interview data. The themes of *Resident Trauma*, *Social Responsibility and Engagement*, and *Personal Growth and Fulfillment*, tell the story of a collective response to homelessness in Seattle. Homelessness can seem like a permanent state of being, a label that distinguishes “us” from “them” and suspends members of our community in a cycle of abuse and trauma. By humanizing this monolithic crisis, individuals are able to respond on a personal level. In doing so, homelessness is disassembled, brick by brick, by an asset-driven approach to community building.

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APPENDIX A

Employees

Bene Bicaba – Facing Homelessness, Block Programs Manager

4/22/2019 at 11:08am

H: What is your age?

B: 25

H: Gender, how do you identify?

B: Female

H: How long have you lived in Seattle? And where?

B: Almost seven years, mostly in the U-District area or within a mile and a half from the U-District

H: How did you first become aware of facing homelessness?

B: It was actually pretty random; I was getting ready to transition from my previous position in tech and went on the Idealist website to look at different positions because I know that where a large portion of non-profits in the area post positions. I came across the Block Project Manager position and became very excited and started learning more about them.

H: What made you excited?

B: The mission. The mission of the organization was very unlike any other that I came across. Their mission is to engage community into the task of ending homelessness and I thought it made so much more sense than what other organizations were doing in the city and I could relate to it because I really value community and I think there is a lot of untapped potential in our communities. Also, the job description was very ambitious and gutsy and was inspiring more than anything. In the job description they were looking for a manager to help build 500 homes in every residential block in Seattle in 5 years and as I read that I thought "this is easy, we can do this."

H: On the same tangent, what motivated you to seek employment with Facing Homelessness?

B: I just needed to be in an environment where my values aligned with the work that I was doing. Through a lot of my search before leaving my tech job, this was the one that resonated the most. They lead with love and compassion and it is just so unheard of because so many people focus on hard metrics. It's hard to measure love and compassion and I wanted to be part of a team that tried to do that.

H: I think we already covered this, but your affiliation with the Block Project is the Block Programs Manager?

B: That is correct.

H: What does that entail?

B: What this means is that I am responsible for all of the programs associated with the Block Project. Facing Homelessness owns the Block Project meaning that the Block Project is just a program that we operate at Facing Homelessness. As the Block Programs Manager, I am only focused on Block Project related programs, and we have other programs in our organization that I do not work on as much. So I work with constituents like the hosts, residents moving into the block homes, the block neighbors on the residential blocks were building the homes in. I work with the volunteers on site because we do tap into community labor to build block homes. It's another way to make sure we are engaging community into the task of ending homelessness and everyone can come and share their skills. I also work with the partnered agencies. We provide the block homes that we partner with agencies such as Mary's Place, Chief Seattle Club and Community Psychiatric Clinic. They refer clients to live in our block homes.

H: From your experience and observations, how has the housed community responded?

B: The housed community has responded really well to this project. I think that if you go back and look at the history of Facing Homelessness you would see that because of the response we have gotten from the community from the other programs we've had, it was really encouraging to see that the community is very much wanting to be part of the solution and very much wanting to help, but they just don't particularly know how because the homelessness crisis in Seattle is so big and so polarizing and overwhelming that we often lose faith. Facing Homelessness, from the beginning, has offered a pathway to help those that are facing homelessness. If you look at the Facebook page for example, we post stories of those who are living outside and we associate an ask with it, we literally ask something for that individual. It could be money, it could be rent, it could be for somebody to fix their car, it could be a tent, but every single time the community has responded very positively. So that has been an encouragement to start the block project because everybody wants to do something about this, they just don't know how. This is another way that you can participate and help alleviate at least one individual's suffering. And again, that's the main goal of Facing Homelessness. If we focus on the whole lot it's very overwhelming, but it's very accomplishable when you focus on the individual and make sure you're being there for that person and supporting them the best way you can. It's been met really well.

H: From your observations, has the Block Project been effective, and what are the immediate challenges of the Block Project?

B: Has it been effective? I do think so. We say that we are a housing initiative, but we are also a community building project and in that sense, I think that we have made a lot of progress in the community. We are having people more engaged in the conversation that otherwise would not be. We are pulling more people to share their skills and people realize that they don't have to shoulder the whole burden. Each individual doesn't need to be an expert, but if we pool our resources and ideas we will really be able to achieve something great. In that sense it has been very effective. It has also connected a lot of agencies in the city that wouldn't otherwise speak to one another because we are so focused on the deliverables that we have. I think that our organization has done a good job coming out of the go go go mindset and communicating with one another and sharing resources and engaging people in the conversation.

H: And what are the immediate challenges of the Block Project?

B: I would say that if we could get the zoning laws to be more flexible or if we could get exemptions because we are building homes for people living outside and we are not currently charging rent, so we are not benefitting from this. It is just for the great good, the city's good. It would be nice if we could get an exception to build these homes, not necessarily faster, but yes faster. To get a permit for the Block Home, it takes 2-3 months and I feel that we could expedite it and get someone off the streets. It would influence the amount of money the city is spending on individuals living on the streets, and it would affect our healthcare budget and have a greater impact than we realize not having these permits sit in review for 2-3 months. I get that the city is busy, I just feel that this is a huge community crisis that we are trying to address. I feel like the Block Project does do a pretty good job. We work at a low cost and engage community and all we need is for these permits to be released more easily. If we could pass some legislation that says the Block Project could get an exemption from this long wait time, or put a special task force from the city to approve these faster, it would help to keep the momentum going and engaging people and getting them off the street and into recovery.

H: How do you imagine the Block Project scaling in the next 5 years?

B: What do you mean by that?

H: How do you foresee its growth? Do you think building 500 homes in 5 years is achievable? Based on the rate of growth that you have experienced, what do you realistically think the Block Project can build in the next 5 years?

B: There are a couple things that play into this. We have talked about all of the zoning laws and some neighborhoods not wanting to go through the change which is being discussed right now. I think funding will play a part too, even though we are able to build these homes for \$35,000. We rely on donations and volunteer labor and want to make sure that we are not exhausting our donor base. It will be tricky finding a way to diversify our donor base and the fact that we are a small team. Facing Homelessness is currently a team of 3.5 because Rex works not only at Facing Homelessness but also at Block Architects, so it's a little tricky to try and grow this at the rate that we would like. We face some pretty big operational challenges. We do have a lot of block homes already funded, but the trick is trying to make sure we have enough staff to handle everything.

H: What I am hearing from you, this sounded like the immediate challenges the Block Project is Facing. Do you think these next 5 years will be a time where the Block Project grows its capacity to scale where it has aspired to be?

B: Absolutely. When it comes to scaling, the challenge will be to make sure we have enough lots that qualify and fit the cities lot requirements to build more homes. I think that, of course, the initial thought to build 500 homes in the next 5 years is not something that we are currently saying anymore. I can see us building 6-10 homes a year which is still quite a bit with our size and the resources that we have. Just imagine how big of an impact that would be. Remember, we are doing more than just building homes, if we are able to tap into 6-10 different blocks in the city, that means that all these people are getting activated and are trying to understand the crisis more and understand how they can help. This could push those communities to help in their own ways, it doesn't necessarily need to be with Facing Homelessness. They could start doing more work with Mary's Place, or encampment sites, or it could simply mean that they are being more compassionate to one another on the streets. That is success for us.

H: How do you see the Block Project scaling in a 10-20 year timeframe?

B: I see this scaling in the way that it will grow to different cities. We have the blueprint and we can share it with other cities so they can try to incorporate it to address their own homelessness crisis. I think that's the ultimate goal, to share what we have learned here so others can benefit from it and do good in their cities too. Right now we are only operating in Seattle proper, and because of that our reach is more focused. We have gotten attention from a lot of folks. We have spoken with reporters from Brazil, France, and Germany. People are turning and taking a look at us to see what we are doing. We have a firm in Utah building us a block home and trucking it here, so it is a project that grabs people's attention. They want to be involved and bring it to their communities as well. When we talk about scaling that the best course of action, is being able to share our blueprint and what we've learned so they can adapt it to their own crisis.

H: What role does volunteer and community support play in the production of the block home?

B: It not only reduces costs because we save a lot of money on labor, but it makes sure that we are opening up to the community to be able to help. Everybody sees the problem and they don't know how to help, and sometimes feel like they can't help because they don't have a specific skill set or financial resources. By making sure that the block project is able to accommodate everybody, and anybody is very important. It puts people in the same room to connect about something that they are passionate about and want to see change in their community. Strength in numbers so we can attack this community crisis.

H: How do you pair the host with the resident?

B: That's where our partnered agencies come into play. We understand that we can't do it all, that's why we have volunteers as well, we really try to look at community to ask how can you help and how do you want to help? We try to leverage everyone's skills and talents to make this work. Those partnered agencies have been working with clients in homelessness for a long time now, so why would we go and reinvent the wheel when they have it already figured out. We partner with them so they can look through their list of clients to see who is a perfect fit for this project. We do realize that this won't be for everybody, so we work with the case workers to make sure they are referring clients who will be successful in the program. The case workers make the referral to Facing Homelessness, I then look at the referrals and I share that with the hosts. I share the hosts profile with the partnered agencies to inform the referrals they are making. We start doing one on ones with the host and resident so they can start building a relationship to see if they want to move forward as a match. I like referring to it as a match.com situation to see if you are compatible. It has to be a yes from both sides. The first few residents have been handpicked, but as we grow we are building applications so that we are able to streamline this process and keep a good database of the different matches we are making.

H: What kind of social support do you provide to aid with the transition?

B: The partnered agencies provide ongoing care. We have a contract with each agency to do business together and part of the contract is to make sure they are providing care to the resident even after they move in, because we realize that just because you are indoors all of your problems aren't fixed and you still need support. Because of that, the client needs to remain in the care of their case manager moving forward. They connect them to any services that they need, and provide any other support that they need. Facing Homelessness also keeps a relationship with the clients to connect them with other organizations.

Jennifer Tee - Facing Homelessness Programs Director

4/22/2019 at 3:49pm

H: What is your official role with Facing Homelessness?

J: My new title is Facing Homelessness Programs Director, before that I was Block Project Manager

H: Does that bring lot of new duties?

J: I mean good question, now instead of just being on the Block Project I'm going to be supervising the person who is in Béné's position and the new role that is emerging which is the Community Engagement Manager. I will still be doing block project like strategy and scaling and tracking and then on top of that supervising these two roles.

H: If you tell me your age

J: 47

H: And the gender you identify as

J: Female

H: How long have you lived in Seattle?

J: Since I was 18, on and off (29 years)

H: Where is Seattle?

J: All over. I've lived in Ballard, Lake City, Columbia City, Mt Baker, and Kirkland.

H: Is there a place in the city you feel particularly attached to or someplace that feels more like home?

J: South Seattle

H: How do you first become aware Facing Homelessness?

J: I found them on Facebook. I was looking for resources around homelessness and they popped up

H: Were you looking for those resources just for your own personal edification?

J: I wanted to volunteer somewhere, I wanted to get involved and I wasn't sure how. I wasn't even totally sure what I wanted to do.

H: How long was it from when you found Facing Homelessness on Facebook to when you started seeking employment with them?

J: Probably a year and a half

H: What motivated you to seek employment with Facing Homelessness?

J: The mission really resonated with me. The whole idea of kind of walking along side someone and there not being a power differential. To me it felt accessible, I felt like they were they were giving people an opportunity to get involved. Prior to learning about Facing Homelessness I feel really lost and I feel like that's true for a lot of people where you feel like you to have to make a ton of money or be a policy wonk or have some special skill in order to do anything. Also, I had volunteered here so I felt like I loved the environment and I loved the people working here so it just felt like a really loving, embracing, joyful space in of spite of working on a really difficult issue with people who are suffering everyday. Also, I felt like they were doing their work well which was important to me.

H: When you first started working here, what was your immediate job description?

J: It was evolving because it was a brand-new position. When I first came in the idea was to wrap my arms around the project and find out what I needed to know. It was looking at systems like the project management system, figuring out what I was looking at, what is that, how is it going to serve the projects, how does it help aid in communication and make things more transparent. Save time. There was also a lot of stuff I had to learn. Getting my head around construction and understanding how that process works. What the elements are and figuring out what my role was in that. It ended up being work on legal stuff, thinking through all the different steps of the process. Social services needed to do certain things, legal needed to do certain things, how do we categorize them, how do we organize them and how do we communicate them out so everyone knows where the project stands at any given moment. Then creating systems for organizing all that stuff. Figuring out roles was a big part of it because I was new, Bene was new, Sarah and Sara were adjusting to having two more people and so they were figuring out what is still mine, what am I handing off. Fundraising pretty early on was vital. So getting involved with the team leader for the peer to peer fundraising and trying to compile resources and put together a cohesive document that would help, through individual fundraisers, figure out how to do that effectively.

H: From your observations, how has the house community responded to the Block Project?

J: When I first came in, I had heard that 120 people in the housed community has immediately responded that they want to be part of the project. So, I felt, coming in, that there was a real desire for people in the housed community to be involved. My sense is that it has given a lot of people an avenue to do exactly what they already wanted to do. We say that a lot, but it actually feels true. We sat with the BH009 family and they literally said, "we've been trying to find a way to make this work and for lots of different reasons we couldn't, and now we can." Kim and Dan said the same thing. That being said, I don't interface that much with people who are against the Block Project. I have not had interactions or heard from anyone, but I know they are out there.

H: Is there any way, shape or form that the Block Project interfaces with that community? Do you get emails or Facebook messages?

J: I think its possible Rex, maybe through Facebook. I haven't seen much negative about the Block Project, I feel like the negativity ends up being more around the issues in Seattle around garbage, violence, public safety, and drugs and stereotypes people have. Blaming the people living outside instead of the system that created it. If we were more involved in advocacy work and doing stuff with the DADU legislation, or if we were more involved in the neighborhoods that are outspoken against homelessness, then I think that's where we'd find it. I think, on a house by house level, the way that this project was set up to go to the block and have the neighbors talk to each other and tell the person's story who is moving in. I feel like in terms of the immediate project, its been received positively because we're not working at such a scale that we're like "we're taking over this parking lot in this neighborhood and 15 RVs are moving in and there's nothing you can say about it." Whereas the city, and the county are having to do things like that and people really struggle when they don't have any opportunity to weigh in or have a role in creating it. If we were working with the city in a more visible way, I think the Block Project would receive a different level of scrutiny in terms of receiving funding and in terms of being more high profile. That would invite a lot more feed back. Right now it is kind of small still. It's big, but its small.

H: Has the Block Project been effective in executing its mission and what immediate challenges does it face?

J: I do think that it has. The Block Project has worked really hard to stay true to its mission. It would be easy to get caught up in a housing race and make this be all about the number of houses. There are moments where we have had to pull back. Why are we here and what is this about? Its about the community every single time and I feel like everybody in this staff, in our program, and even out to the people we communicate with about the project. I think we've done a really good job of saying it's about community, this is about all the things that Facing Homelessness is about. Extending opportunities for people to get involved in breaking down negative stereotypes and bringing people closer. I think it's doing all of those things. The challenges are that there is a lot we don't know. We've got one resident who's been in his home for year and a half. We have the long term experience with one person, and every person who moves into a home is going to have a different set of challenges and experiences. I think we have the structures and mechanisms in place with case managers who know folks we have really caring, loving staff we have hosts that are being educated and trained to figure out how to negotiate. Also, scaling. Scaling at the level that we want while still making community the center of the project. That's just going to be a matter of resources and creativity. I have no question that we will. That tension will always be there I think,

H: How do you imagine the Block Project scaling the next five years and then extrapolated out 10 to 20 years? Do you imagine this being a project where you are building and implementing 10 homes each year. Is it going to be something that spreads to other states and cities?

J: I think what's cool about the Block Project, the more people get involved, the more our work shifts a little bit because the more we have hosts talking about it, the more we have blocks talking about it, the more we have neighborhoods talking about it, and social service organizations talking about it then we won't be the only people sharing what it is and what its about. There is real growth that happens there that isn't dependent on us staffing up. Its this beautiful thing that organically happens and I believe that will happen. I believe that a neighborhood who, right now, says "no I don't want this." In five years there will be enough examples of it being successful that that same block might say "hold on, we want to know more." Those examples are going to make a huge difference so that's why we have to continue to be really intentional about the placement process, the matchmaking process, all that stuff that cannot be lost. The integrity of our systems is very much going to determine the success of the project ultimately. If we aren't intentional about how we scale those things, the things that take time and patience and love and cultivation, then we lose what most important. We need to constantly check back in. We want to do 52 houses this year. Can we do that, and can all those other things be true and really assess what makes that possible. How do we leverage the community, what are our needs in terms of staffing, how are we diversifying fundraising and making sure that year after year we can grow so we're not relying on one funder.

H: Is it a goal to build a house a week?

J: I think it's a dream. A year ago I wasn't sure how we do that and now I can actually see the road, I can actually see how that could be possible, but I think before I can get to 52 (houses) in my head I need to see us do some houses simultaneously, being built at the same time. I need to see us doing 12 (houses) next year and I believe we have the right team. I believe we have the right people around us wanting to succeed. I believe we have the most amazing platform to make it happen, but I think it's all going to come back to how is the community piece going? We've said, if we can't successfully bring 52 homeowners, or blocks into the fold then we won't go to 52. Whatever number is going to be sustainable is where we will work. But we are also a team of dreamers who want to make a really big difference and want to engage youth, and all these different organizations in our work, and really figure out how to collaborate. That, to me, feels like there's a lot of potential out there to where we're not doing it all. As far as other states, I think we can certainly share what we've done, but I think every city or state that takes this on will have to do it in their own way because they're not going to have the same resources we do, or put together the same organization that we have. They won't necessarily have the same needs we have. And we have shared the model, and I think what's challenging is a lot of cities are really interested in it and getting buy in as a city government vs a nonprofit that's working within a community that already supports us, is different. You've already got a super polarized conversation. So if the city were to come to the public with the Block Project right now, I think it would be rough. Because of a lot of concerns about the DADU changes that have been proposed, there are a lot of neighborhoods that haven't bought into that at all. We are operating anyways, we actually don't need that to happen even though it would really open up the field for us and make so many more homes possible. People that are already interested and engaged with us are trying to figure it out. There's that difference and that's why the question "where do you take your funding from" so that you have time to scale and make mistakes and figure out what the project wants to be. The one thing I'm learning from this project is, it's really about figuring out what the project wants to be and how it's going to evolve. I think we have been able to stay pretty true to our mission for the Block Project, if not 100% true, but we definitely had to figure out how that's possible and what's the give-and-take around that. But if you're bound by a high level of scrutiny and the things that another entity wants over what you want, then obvious that can shift very quickly.

H: How does the Block Project secure funding? How does that let the Block Project achieve its mission?

J: I think the fact that it's been community funded so far is the best articulation or best example of it fulfilling its mission as there could be. The fact that, not just individuals who are part of our community, but the Architecture, Engineering, and Construction (AEC) community wants to be a part of this. And if we can get tech involved and all the industries that have engaged with Facing Homelessness over the years, and if we can keep that going for the Block Project as well that's what we want. When we say community I think it's easy to think of the person living down the street and the people on the Facebook page, but we want businesses, the private sector, government. King County has given us a grant for overhead and that's fantastic because that's not sexy, nobody really want to give to overhead, but it absolutely makes a huge impact on our ability to scale the project and we aren't out front saying that we're gonna build 60 homes this year to get that funding. We have other metrics to demonstrate progress obviously. So I think it's kind of that really being clear and calculated about what funding moves this forward, and in what way, and how do we structure that, and how do we really clearly articulate that to funders. How do we get as much non restricted funding as we can so that we can decide where we need funding and how it's gonna help us the most. Everyone wants to fund a block home, but in order to build 12 block homes next year we need more than one construction manager. It's about coming back to the community model that we set up and I know that the goal for fundraising is that we never lose that. We never stop having the community be a part of it and feeling like they have ownership over this project. As long as we have the community engaged I feel like the sky is the limit. As long as we can keep that, if we can keep extending that if we can engage people in every way. I want to help someone with a move in kit, I want to help someone build, I want to raise money for a block home, I want to be the person on the block that organizes everybody to make this person feel welcome.

H: Looking forward, how do you keep the same AEC community engaged while reaching out and trying to incorporate more diverse private and public funders?

J: I think with any fundraising effort it's about diversifying and showing that there's no one place you're relying on. I think if any funder feels like "if you ask me to give 100% of anything, no" they want to see what else you're doing to procure funds. We walked into this project without approaching AEC having families who are raising 35,000 for a block home, that's astounding. We need to show progress. If they see their money going into, this year it was an acceleration fund and a workshop, they're going to see the workshop built, they're going to see the progress we can make with that workshop. They're going to see volunteers coming in and using jigs and putting together homes with very little experience. If we can realize, and I believe we will, the things that they're finding us for, I think that's how you sustain funders partially and then if you are transparent and communicative and making sure that they know what's going on every step of the way. And you know where we're not just talking to them about our successes we're talking to them about what we're learning and being very transparent about that and inviting them into the process. That's part of everyone having ownership over this project. We are hiring a development director for that very purpose and we're building a development strategy so that we can start tackling some much bigger grants.

H: How does the organization interface with the city of Seattle, and how has the city responded?

J: My understanding is that they have really embraced the project, like helping us figure out the permitting process and navigate that as easily as possible. Some members of the Seattle and County council have really embraced the project. I feel like people are intrigued by it and they're excited about it, and they're willing to engage to see if it could be possible. Part of that has to do with, they can see we've engaged really solid partners and they can see we have a really solid plan. I don't know across the city council, I know Jenny Durken has been to see a home, Mike O'Brian has been to see a home and Sally Bagshaw has been very involved. I haven't seen a lot of really negative anything. I think people sometimes scuffle at the expense of it, but people need to remember that this is permanent housing. Importantly, nobody's being forced to do it. If the city adopted this tomorrow and said everybody's going to have a home in their backyard, it would be very different. We've been really lucky that a lot of our money has been unrestricted and we can stay true to our mission.

H: That's my last question, if the city were to say "we want to embrace and support this financially, we want you to hit this target for this much money" would there be a conversation about staying true to your mission?

J: What we learned from working with King County is that it's ok to sit down and say, here's what we actually can do. I think it would just be a conversation. Can we really hit those targets, is that really what we want? Is that where this project is headed? If they want us to go one way with quantity and we want to focus on diversity of neighborhoods and diversity of homeowners. I think our values would have to align and that would be true for any funder. It's the most important thing an organization can do, is try to stay true and pursue funding that aligned with what you're trying to do.

Sara Vander Zanden – Executive Director, Facing Homelessness

4/26/2019 at 1:38pm

H: What is your age?

S: 29

H: The gender you identify as?

S: Female

H: How long have you lived in Seattle?

S: Four years

H: and where?

S: Capitol Hill and Wallingford

H: Is there a place in the city do you feel more attached to than another?

S: I still really love Capitol Hill. When we have guests in town, that's always where we take them, which I feel like maybe a good sign that that feels like home, maybe it's just because they have the best restaurants.

H: How did you first become aware of facing homelessness?

S: I was looking for a job and a newly cultivated mentor suggested that I look into it. They were, at the time, Rex and Sarah were softly recruiting for an office manager. They weren't posting it. They were just kind of doing word of mouth. The reason for that is that they were secretly recruiting for a future Executive Director. So they really wanted someone who could come in, learn the business side of the nonprofit, and then take over for Rex as the block project emerged. Hmm. Just knowing that Rex wanted to start doing more architecture with this daughter. He is an extremely talented man and never wanted to run a nonprofit. His skillset just wasn't best suited to do that. So yeah, she needed suggested I reach out. And I did.

H: So what was it about facing homelessness that drove you to seek employment?

S: At first I wasn't excited. I really did not want to work within the issue of homelessness. I really wanted work that was centered in community, but for me, homelessness, was so vast and overwhelming. Honestly I didn't know about many opportunities outside of, or like even work being done outside of shelters. I contacted Facing Homelessness and I was just like, "hey", you know, or I think maybe Veronica put me in touch with them. I can't remember how it happened. But it was just kind of out of respect for her. And then I met with Rex and Sarah for a formal interview. Again, thinking it's always good practice to interview. But I was mostly interviewing for like program manager, program director roles and this was an office manager role. But I really enjoyed meeting with them. I loved immediately that it just kind of quieted all of the things that I had been telling myself about homelessness, which is, it's too big, it's too overwhelming. And they're like yes, and that doesn't give us an excuse to do nothing and we don't have to know or agree on the systemic solutions in order to begin. And you don't need to know how to fix someone's crisis in order to reach out to them with kindness. All of that was really resonated with me. And then, they invited me to come back in for a second interview, which was basically a full day. It was a Friday. And the window used to be open all day on Fridays and it was just kind of like a drop in time. The three of us were at the old office and like, people who are homeless for dropping in, people who were living in houses were dropping in. And I just remember feeling like I was in like an anthropological study. I was just like, "oh my God, this is so fascinating". Some of the stories still, of people living outside in particular, have affected me even to this day, so personally. So that was a really beautiful experience, but I still left it. And I was talking to my best friend on the phone and I was like, yeah, I can not do that work. Like I needed like a full day to decompress from that one day. And then I ended up getting another job offer, which I accepted at the Washington State Farmers Market Association, which was super aligned with what I did in Michigan. Basically like my same job just transplanted here in Seattle. Working at pike place market, there were a lot of super cool parts of that job. Then two days later I got the job offer here, which I declined because I had already taken another job, and it was better job making more money and all of these things. Rex basically did not take no for an answer and was like, "will you at least come in and talk to us?" And so I did. And he was like, "what are your concerns?" And I was just really honest. I was like, "you know, this is not my ideal position. I don't understand where the opportunities are to grow. It's not enough money. There are no benefits." Just these really real things. That's when they told me about the idea of the block project and how this role was really designed to grow into the role of an ED. The sky was the limit at that point in terms of possibilities and opportunity and salary growth and all of that kind of stuff. I asked if they would be willing to lay it out, put it in writing, and they were, and so I decided to do it. It felt right both in terms of like personal and professional growth. Like it was the more challenging thing and the less obvious thing and it just was this feeling that it was also the right thing.

H: So then for some more background, you're executive director of facing homelessness, which oversees the block project. How much do you interface with the components of the block project?

S: That's a good question. As we were preparing to launch and had just launched the block project, it was probably like 70-80% of my time, super consuming. Now with Jennifer and Bene and Berns and others on board. It's maybe like 50%, 40-50. Within facing homelessness, it's a program that requires, demands the most resources in terms of time, staffing, money. It's so complex. And we're building permanent homes, so it's expensive.

H: How do you think the housed community has responded to the Block Project?

S: In general we received a ton of interest from hosts as you know. Immediately there was an outpouring. Once we announced the idea of the block project, before we ever said like, "we're going to be looking for hosts", it was like dozens right off the bat who expressed interest. We received a little bit of mixed feedback. It wasn't negative, but it wasn't positive media towards the beginning. Where the reporter was just kind of like, he literally just went around to residential neighborhoods and was interviewing people and was like, "how would you feel if a sex offender moves into your yard or your neighbor's yard?" Clearly you don't know what you're talking about. I think that there is a portion of the community, even though we don't frequently hear from them, I'm sure that they carry those concerns. So honestly, we had that one bad media clip. We had one call right around that time as it was first starting to talk about it from a guy who was an anonymous caller, didn't leave his name, but was just like enraged. Clearly so full of fear about the idea that we would even suggest it. But other than that, we've received almost unanimous support, and if not support I would classify it as like reasonably concerned curiosity. People who are just wanting to make sure that we've thought through things and that were not, just thinking like this is just going to be beautiful and perfect, but that we can say, "we value the safety of your community and your kids too and here's what we've put in place to ensure that's as likely as possible." For most people who are kind of on the edge, walking through those things together usually appeases them.

H: Do you think it's (the Block Project) been effective in engaging community and breaking down the barrier and the stereotypes that are associated with people experiencing homelessness?

S: It's such a good question. Unfortunately, we just don't have data. Eventually we will know. We'll have data that shows we are effectively building community and this is the desired impact of the block project and here's how we know we're having that impact. We don't know that yet. I don't know how to answer this question because I feel differently about it, coming from different angles. So from one angle, I think the block project does shift the way people see homelessness. It is still to this day, the only integrated approach to homelessness in Seattle. It is the only approach that directly asks us to think of people living outside as neighbors and not as other. I think that that it's super effective for people who are waiting and ready for that invitation. People who have always kind of questioned the negative stereotype or who believe that can't be true of everyone. It's been super effective with those people. I think we had a vision for the block project from the beginning that I don't know if it's

reflective of what the community actually wants. Jennifer's leading an evaluation figuring out what our theory of change is. An evaluation process for the block project. Very excited for all of that. But originally we imagined having every relationship being like Bobby and Kim and Dan's. All of the blocks, like every, we would have this block meeting and everyone on the block be there. People would be raising their hands and saying, "I'll do the laundry, I'll make the lasagna, I'll garden and community being so hungry for that. That's not been our experience. I don't think that that makes supply project unsuccessful though. It's just kind of like we're still figuring out how we want to define success. We want to build community, what does that mean? Are we successful when five of the 10 neighbors come, when two of the 10 neighbors come? How are we measuring success?

H: What do you see as the immediate challenges of the Block Project?

S: From where I sit, the challenge is scaling a startup that has limited resources. In addition to having to deliver a project that's addressing an extremely complex issue, we're also still tackling all of the questions I just mentioned. What is success for us and how do we define community building? what is our three or five year business plan? We really are building the plane as we're flying it. That is the greatest challenge. I think in a lot of cases you have all of those answers and then you start the business. We couldn't do that because we are experiencing a homelessness crisis and we just knew if we wait to have all of those answers were never going to begin. So we just had to do it. And that was the advice that a lot of our advisers gave us. It's like including the tax assessor. You just have to prove that it's possible. Like just build it and then trust that the things will start falling into place. But nobody's going to believe this is going to happen until it's happening. You're not going to get the support you need until it's happening. So it's just the complexity of still defining what it is while also doing it. Because we're doing it, we have a responsibility to so many people. We have a responsibility to our funders. We have responsibilities, such a profound responsibility to our residents, to our homeowners, to the people working here. To all of the neighbors, to the builders. I think that's the greatest challenge, balancing those three worlds. It's defining what it is, really building it. Doing what we're doing extremely beautifully and taking extreme care with all of our stakeholders and figuring out how to scale this project so that it can have as big of an impact in Seattle as possible.

H: How do you imagine the Block Project scaling within a five year window and then from a 10 to 20 year window? So immediate context and then pie in the sky future.

S: So I right now this changes. What we're saying is that we're doubling our impact year over a year until we've reached scale. We've been intentional to not define that number because we don't know enough yet about how we're going to be resourced and we just don't know enough yet to know what scale looks like for us on an annual production basis. We know this year the goal is six homes. Next year, the goal is 12 homes. I think scale in the next five years looks like really getting a super-efficient workshop space that allows us to buy materials in bulk and store them. That allows us to panelize and prefabricate as much as possible. Getting super effective about how we engage community volunteers. Right now, the idea is that we'll have the workshop space where the homes are being panelized and we'll have jigs and everything set up so that anyone who can reasonably use tools can just do it. Then that way when the structure gets to the back yard and we can really effectively utilize the skilled, professional labor. We know we have to do that in order to scale the block project, we have to make better use of the contractors and subcontractors time. Right now we can't guarantee a plumber you can be in and out in four hours. That's what the donation looks like. Just eliminating as many variables as possible for the professional labor that needs to happen on site. We're permitting block homes through SDCI, which is basically the building department. Right now we're doing that. And as you know, that's a really lengthy process. It's taking the normal person or organization six months, they've put us on a priority track so those are taking three months. It's still \$1,500 per permit and it's taking three months after we identify a willing host before we even start construction. We are right now working on getting our first LNI permit which we don't have the capacity to really manage at scale yet, but that would allow us to not have to go through that process every time. As I understand it, the design and the structure would just be permitted. And there would be like one inspection that would have to happen one time in the warehouse. But that requires the home being moved in a much more assembled fashion than it currently is. So Berns is really excited about that as an option for like 2021 and beyond. His thought is if we are going to scale, we need to figure that out because this is not scalable either. Both from a financing perspective and construction timing. We're submitting permits for 2020 builds in August of this year. We are recruiting all of the 2020 hosts in addition to the 2019. I think in next five years we'll really need to figure out a staffing structure for the build sites. So, for example, Habitat for Humanity has an Americorps volunteer who's responsible for every build site. That way, yes they are managing the volunteers better, but they're also there to receive the plumber like the superintendent basically. They're really just managing that site. We can't afford to pay multiple construction managers, so we're going to need to develop like some sort of education program for onboarding Americorps people and deploying them on site. Certainly looks like having a development director who can help us raise the money. We really haven't even begun to explore the grants world yet. So right now we're still almost entirely community funded. That also probably doesn't scale at the level that we aspire to even in the next five years.

H: Is there anything that stands out for a 2040 project? Is this model being duplicated in other spaces?

S: My vision is that we are doing this beautifully and efficiently and effectively across Seattle and that we, the block project, is a serious player. If its 2040, people will say "wow we've made a lot of progress in the homelessness issue. Like remember when you used to walk downtown and you would just see tents everywhere." People are like having that conversation about like, "oh, it used to be so bad." I believe that the block project will be one of the things, one of the solutions that really helped shift things. If I were to just guess what scale means for us, if we could get to the point once we're staffed up and we were producing maybe around 50 homes a year by 2040. I think in terms of other cities. I don't know how familiar you are with the FareStart model, but they basically did something really beautiful here in Seattle. They provide training and job opportunities for people who have been formerly incarcerated. They are one of the leading nonprofits and providing its own revenue streams that's not fundraised. And they did that through their restaurants. That's super cool because every nonprofit under the sun is like, "I don't want to fundraise anymore." They've just built that in because their business model. They have tons of nonprofits reaching out to them being like, how did you do this? Do this in our city. We need this. And instead of going around in other cities and doing it, they basically made a train the trainer program and now they have another revenue generating arm of their nonprofit, which is a consulting arm. They send their consultants all over the country to train other nonprofits on how to do this. They have kits and tons of resources. Its in the hundreds of other communities that have adopted this model now because of the training that fare start is providing. So I would imagine something like that for the block project where we're not going and starting it in other communities, but we have a super robust packet and training that's like, "here's all of the barriers that we had encountered, here's what you can anticipate, here's the timeline, here's the resources you'll need." Just try to make it as replicable as possible. Like plug and play. Here it is. Take the kit and you, nonprofit in Milwaukee, implement and manage this.

H: I'd like to get a better understanding of how the block project secures funding. How actively are you making connections within the community and do you hope that other industries can come together to help fundraise outside of the AEC community?

S: This is always a frustrating thing for people to hear because people always ask how do I replicate that? I think have had so much success with fundraising early on, especially before we had demonstrated success because of Rex and Jen's connections in the architecture, engineering and construction community. I know rex was a high end residential architect for 30 years. He worked with a lot of these players and demonstrated a lot of integrity. He built a lot of trust to over three decades. Then Jen worked for two of the most reputable architecture companies in Seattle,

Miller Hall and Graham Baba before going out and starting block architects. She's also extremely well networked and well respected for her work. That is how we were able to pull off the event the first year. That's how we were able to get the team leaders in the room. And then it went from there and we were leaning on their connections in the community. I think it would've been a lot harder, longer. We would've just had to prove more success in order to get that much support if it hadn't been for the respect that Jen and Rex had earned. We have relied on the team leader, it's called peer to peer fundraising. Both for the AEC event and for all of our other block home funding, where we say, "okay, here's a person or a company that loves what we do and it's super bought in, let's get them to commit to funding a home." And in the case of the event, inviting their top 30 vendors and customers and suppliers to fundraise. We have eight team leaders, each team leader is responsible for funding a home. We don't really care how you do that, but we're going to have this kickoff event and it would be strategic of you to bring people to this kickoff event who can help you reach your goal. That's how we've done it. Some of the firms have really bought in, their principles really bought in. They pledged to match whatever's raised. We've had a couple of team leaders that, the corporations didn't do anything at all. And it was really just the partners and employees. It's been extremely successful. I would say in terms of partnership, like active partnership cultivation, it's kind of been word of mouth. The first year the event wasn't even supposed to be a fundraiser. It's just a networking event, just to build awareness about the black project and we want every contractor, every architect and every engineer in the city to know about the block project. And then it just kind of evolved. I loved studying social movements and I just can't wait to have enough time and probably distance from the black project, to understand what actually happened there. But I feel like a part of that is that we really create space for people to bring whatever it is they're best suited to bring to the table and we rely on that. We can't go out and pay attorneys to give us counsel on this project. And so we had to sell it. Like we had to be reliant on people who have that skillset to come forward. The biggest law firm in Seattle came forward and said they'd love to donate what we're good at to make this move forward. And we've done the same thing with how the contractors, it's like, we just want you to come in and contribute to this what you already are good at. Like what you do, what you're best at in this life. Like what everyone already knows you as. Just take that and bring it here. We've always thought about the block project, at least I always have thought of it as, Facing Homelessness. Like we are the stewards of it. But that's kind of really it. The community is defining what it is. The community is defining the pace. It is a community supported, funded, built, led project. That's what makes it feel more like a movement than a charity.

H: Do you have any questions for me or anything else you'd like to add?

S: I feel like that's it. Thank you so much.

Rex Hohlbein – Facing Homelessness/Block Architects, Founder

4/25/2019 at 12:02pm

H: How old are you?

R: 60

H: The gender you identify as?

R: Basically mail

H: How long have you lived in Seattle?

R: 60

H: and where?

R: I grew up on Queen Anne. I've lived in other neighborhoods such as West Seattle, Montlake, spent some time in Woodinville.

H: Is Queen Anne the neighborhood you identify most of?

R: It's where I grew up and live and even after college. And then even after college I bought a house on Queen Anne. So yeah. If somebody said, what do you identify with? I would say Queen Anne, although all of that was in the first part, it was the most, I spent most of my life living there other than and any other area but it also was the furthest from today. You know, I don't really identify with the neighborhood, I identify with Seattle. I really love Seattle and I, and I don't know that I would say that about Queen Anne. I loved growing up there, but I don't necessarily love Queen Anne. I love Seattle.

H: What was the origin and inspiration first for facing homelessness and then we can talk more about the block project

R: Facing Homelessness. The thing that's really interesting for me in that journey was that it was never the intent to have a nonprofit. It was never the intent to get involved in homelessness. So, I truly just came to by happen chance and meeting people that were outside. So many of the things that facing homelessness beliefs did come from just the journey that I happen to get onto, which is, the closer you come, the more you feel, the more you feel, the more you act. I was meeting people on the street that were affecting me. It began an internal conversation for me. One is that the polarization of wealth in our country and our cities, specifically in our city, with people being exceedingly wealthy and others having nothing to their name. And why that was highlighted for me was as an architect, I was working with exceedingly wealthy people. And so I was going from meetings that we were talking about spending, millions of dollars on one home for, for a couple, and then sitting with somebody that had everything they owned only did a backpack and their basic needs weren't being met. That right there, that just, that clarity of juxtaposition popped into my head, maybe in a way that I would never have come to if I hadn't had the extremes come so close for me. And, and then of course that produced another conversation, which was, the negative stereotype just didn't seem to be holding up. All the boogey man type fears of the negative stereotype on homelessness such as criminals and, you know, lazy and everyone's a drug addict. All the things that would dehumanize that person. I was seeing the humanity. That, again, the contrast between dehumanization and the reality of humanity ultimate brought very close to each other, made me realize that, there's something going on here that's just not true. And also, it appeared to be what was holding people, in a lot of ways, down. So that instantly made me realize that not only is community, not helping people that are homeless community actually is playing a part by embracing the negative stereotype. Just by embracing it, by just not speaking out against it we are all part of the problem and therefore we need to be a part of the solution. I think a mixture of a cocktail of all of that is, is what got me to say, I'm going to start a Facebook page for people that are outside. And there's a lot of steps in between there, that I'm glossing over, such as my experience with chuck and Dinkus and Steve and lots of people that, that were all part of that slow evolution. But if you spend it all forward in a nutshell that was just the change that I experienced and I want to do something about it. And I didn't even think of it as "I'm going to be an activist" or "I'm going to start a nonprofit". In fact, I am, and was very much in love with architecture and in love the process. And I just wanted to do this as to get it out of my body. And of course, what happened was people started commenting and agreeing and stepping forward themselves. And it made me realize that, wow, this isn't just my thought. A lot of people are feeling this way. The more people that came to it, the more I wanted to continue it. And so I would say maybe I would have done it for three months sharing black and white photos and sharing stories with people to show beauty of person. Maybe that would have lasted three months. I'm very capable of picking up things, getting excited and then dropping them. But the community didn't allow that. They're continued rushing in and then not only the Facebook page but also in my office just showing up, propelling me forward. Then there was a long period of time where I believed I could do both. I could run architecture practice and juggle this. And that actually also proved not to be true. There was no way, because everything that was coming in my door was more important than what I was drawing,

everything. And it was the humanity of it. So, a few years of struggling financially, the conversations at home turn to what, what am I going to do? And that grew into the idea that we'd started a nonprofit. And the nonprofits mission would be just to get community involved. If we're going to be serious about ending homelessness, if we're really going to say "we don't like homelessness, we want it to end", then how do you do that? And it was apparent that government, nonprofit religion, while doing great work, it's not enough. It's not enough by a long shot. And then, and then what's the missing link then? And the missing link is us. And partly that's because, ending homelessness is not just putting people in houses. That's a very important misconception about what homelessness really is. And so we at facing homelessness are really trying to push forward the idea that this is not a homelessness crisis. This is a community crisis. And that instantly involves us. Homelessness crisis, it's about them over there. It was a community crisis. It's about all of us. Here, them downstairs, those people outside them in the store. We're all part of this problem. And it requires us all to be a part of the solution.

H: And I think those shipped to marine, which has been really powerful. And where can people reflect and how their non action was contributing to it as well? I understand, the origins of facing homelessness began as a photo journalism project and integrated into the window of kindness.

R: First begins with just say hello. We were doing the window of kindness, but we didn't know it was window of kindness in the beginning and it was the door of kindness. I've never actually articulated that, but just say hello was the first real, besides the Facebook page, was the first real effort to say, hey, you know, "it changes when you come closer." Then you can start with just giving some dignity, eye contact, smiles, just saying hello. And that actually moves you out of the being complicit or complacent to actually taking one little step forward and say, no, I'm not, going to just ignore this. I'm actually going to do something. And even though it's small, it actually a lot of ways is a pretty big first step. You know, from there, who knows where it goes. But that's the point is that you started and now you're on your own journey to find your own creative, compassionate answer.

H: When did the block project manifest out of facing homelessness?

R: The shorter version of the long story is that Jen and I, once she decided between photography and architecture, we started talking about starting a firm together at some point. And so she went to WSU as I did for architecture. When she graduated, we were kind of looking at each other going ok. And we had agreed that she would work five years for somebody else just to get different influences, more experience. Then in that time that she was working in Graham Babba, I decided to quit my architecture practice and start facing homelessness. And she looked over at me and said, "what's up? I thought, what about what we were going to do?" And that morphed into Friday morning coffees up by where she was working at Graham Babba. We said, well, let's trust this is going to go somewhere good. And we don't know yet where. But let's begin a conversation about what, as architects, can we do to employ the philosophies of Facing Homelessness. Specifically meaning the closer you get, the more you feel, the more you feel, the more you act. Just issues of proximity. And we talk about, just say hello. We talked about all of the things that were a problem with people not getting involved, including nimbyism. And those conversations and sketches led to this idea that we would put homes in backyards as the ultimate coming closer and in fact looking squarely in the face of the Nimbys and asking if they want to be an imby. Once we realized, that's is a crazy idea and it could work, um, we got super excited and we realize in that moment that I needed to step down as executive director at facing homelessness. Jen would leave Graham Babba and we were starting a new architectural firm. And that was kind of like this, like, Holy Shit, we're going to do this! Jen gave notice. We hired Sarah Vander Zanden and began the process. I don't know if it was nine months or whatever, as Jen and I were beginning to draw things up and get the layers of it understood. They finally her time for leaving came. And then we started.

H: And then when did block architects become a separate entity or a part of that conversation?

R: I think in that conversation we realized we were starting at an architectural firm. I mean really in that moment we said we're going to start block architects. Specifically to run the block project but also, to do something we were calling ourselves a social justice, architectural form, and we still don't know exactly what that means. The point was that we were as architects wanting to do work that was more than just working for wealthy clients doing any expensive homes and expensive buildings. We have a lot of conversation in this office about flipping the process, like going after projects first and then fundraising for much like facing homelessness does. And so actually choosing projects instead of projects choosing us. And that way we can control the social direction of what we think, how we can make the world a better place by actually being on the other end of the process. Not just waiting for that project, but actually creating that project. But that's still in our future.

H: From your observations, how do you think the housed community has responded to the project overall?

R: Well, this was our biggest fear was nimbyism and that the house community would truly go, "are you kidding me?" You're going to bring the people that were so afraid of, you're going to bring it into our backyards, where children play and our flowers are growing. In fact, and that informed a lot of Jen and my design. How do we make it small, compact. We didn't want to make it, so modern that it would be off putting and we didn't want to make it so traditional that it wouldn't fit with various types. We only put windows and door on the south side because we wanted to create a high level of privacy both for the neighbors, the primary resident, but also for the in the block home. And it also fit our more environmental push to make these homes extremely energy efficient. So that means, only having glazing on the side where the sun is. These were all ideas that just kind of like we're out here and then we just started pulling together. While that was our biggest fear, it never materialized. I mean we really, as you know the numbers, but we have over 130 people that have expressed interest. We have four built, we're building six more this year, 12 more next year. The hurdles to get over, or whatever you want to call it, just never materialized, you know? And, and the hurdles are just simply the ones that we have to take care of to get this project successful. But they haven't been external pressures.

H: Do you think in the way that you imagined the block projects as you created a, do you think it has been effective in addressing that mission?

R: I do. I think tremendously so. I think people's lives are being opened to this issue in a way that, a lot of other number one housing projects can't, is a very important part of the project is the integrated solution part. You know, the reason that integrated solutions are so important, especially in this issue, is that currently all the issues while they are, they're better than letting people sleep under bridges and in bushes. They still segregate and that means that the focus is on the other still. Take the other and put them inside and let's get them off the street. But it's still them. And what it takes out of the process is us, which is we to have to be on a learning curve. We to have to learn more about this issue. And we can't do that through segregation. In other words, you take this. Here's the homeless, here's where we are now and you, and you move this group up. But you haven't moved this group, right? Like we haven't come up together then even though you might have these people, housed, this group is still looking at this group as the other, so the only way that that we overlap and become really become one is that we have to learn about each other. And we do that through proximity. By coming closer and that's the block project through all of the volunteers and the people living on the block through. Through media that just challenges the notion of like just dinner table conversations, people saying, "can you believe they're going to be putting people in backyards that are homeless?" You know, that conversation unfolding in some of these families private conversation, that's beautiful. Even if that person says that's crazy that will never work, then they've said it. And then year after year, they see that it's working. They have to go back and revisit that. They say I sure thought that wasn't going to work, but it looks like it is. There's just a lot of stories of success coming out of that. And you know, of course when you're 1,700 homes or some crazy number, it wont even be a conversation anymore. The paradigm will have flipped. Much like airbnb and Uber and all those other things that we didn't use to do it that way. But now we do it this way.

H: Is there anything you want to add about the immediate challenges that you see with the block project?

R: I think, I think the immediate challenge for us is really successfully navigating scaling. Going from the process that we have now, which has so many facets, to making sure that when scale we scale we bring all those up at the same time. Because you know, the world's full of stories of the little Italian restaurant. It was perfect when it was 14 seats. Right. Then they went to 44 seats. Nobody started coming in. Everyone stopped becoming right. They somehow lost would they have, and I don't believe that there's anything inherent in the project, the block project that says we can't scale it. I think if we don't do it correctly, we don't manage our Ps and Qs. If we don't do what it takes to bring it up together. And that includes funding, legal, taking care of the social services, the matchmaking, the integration, and then conceptually not losing sight of what's important. Not let turning this into a housing race. Remembering this is a community building project, not a housing and all these very grounded things that are fundamentally important that could be forgotten in the hurry to get more people inside.

H: How do you imagine scaling in a five year span and then as far out as 10 to 20 years. Keeping everything in mind that things need to grow at the same pace to keep those core competencies.

R: We've been having these conversations lately, its a timely question. We don't yet nowhere where the sweet spot is and we're trying to find that out. We're trying to look ahead and say, oh, we're doing this now, but how many can we do in the future? And because, cause there, there is a sweet spot, right? Like a hydroplane has a certain RPM, certain speed. All that is the most optimum for that to actually do what it does. Right? We don't know what that is for the block project as far as what's the most optimum number of homes or communities that we're building and we're in the process of finding that out. But I think what I would say in the forecasting out the three, five, 20 years is that we're committed to finding that and operating at that level. The ultimate goal, is to provide enough housing and homelessness. And then beyond that is to see these homes for anyone in need, maybe refugees, maybe crisi that unfolds, whether that's a medical crisis or it's an earthquake or tsunami. That these homes have flipped the idea about what it means to take care of each other by giving them a part of your backyard and saying I'm privileged to own land. I'm a human being on this planet with 7.5 billion and soon to be 10 billion people. I'm one of the people that got to own a piece of land and I can use it to help someone else. As opposed to, I got mine too that you don't, and I think that's a profound part of the future for the block project. How it shifts the paradigm of what we are making important. Shifting away from getting as much as I can versus getting what you need and then helping others with what they need.

H: That's the end of the questions that I've prepared, but is there anything else you want to talk about? Do you have any questions for me?

R: Whats your hope of hopes that you want to see happen?

H: I've been reflecting a lot on that. The thing I'm so interested in, and it has become so apparent from talking with everybody, everyone has this feeling that they need to get engaged and they find this calling that they cant not listen to. I'm really interested in using this study as a way, to break down the stereotypes of homelessness and hopefully reframed the way, like you said, that we think about residential housing and the way that we're using 60% of the land that we have in our cities. To rethink what a community could be. Anything really like what, what sustainability is going to look like going forward. I would love to make a compelling argument to have people say, I'm maybe like you said, I need to rethink how I'm engaging with the built space and question why I have these stigmas or bias. I think it's a privilege to own land. I don't want to say it's like not a right, but I think you're buying into a community. You're buying into a city. Yeah. I think as more people as we need to share more space on this earth, I think it's just going to have to mean something new.

Jenn LaFreniere – Block Architects, Co-Founder

4/25/2019 at 12:38pm

H: Can you tell me your age

J: 31

H: The gender you identify as?

J: Female.

H: How long have you lived in Seattle? And where in Seattle?

J: My whole life. For the most part, Montlake. You could also say I lived in Woodinville. I was born in Seattle in Queen Anne and then moved out to Woodinville for a little bit of my childhood and then when I was 12 we moved to Montlake.

H: I'm interested in knowing more about like your origin and inspiration for Facing Homelessness and the block project and then how you and Rex ushered Block Architects into existence.

J: Dad and I have a lot of similar interests. When I went into Undergrad and I was going through architecture school, I had a vision of going into the peace corps. I spent a lot of time with my then boyfriend doing volunteer hours, because you have to have 300 hours to the peace corps. So I was doing a ton of volunteer and I found the time I was spending the most was at homeless shelters. And so when I came back for the summers, I would do lots of hours at Roots Youth. Then when I was in Spokane, I was volunteering at Hope House quite a bit, which is a female shelter. And that was kind of this side bar track on my own. And then when my dad started meeting people outside when he was working as an architect, that sparked my interest and definitely was something else we had in common, apart from architecture, which was our main kind of a common thread. I ended up landing my dream job here in Seattle as an architect. It was extremely happy. So those conversations fell off a little bit and he continued on with Facing Homelessness journey. I stayed involved through helping with graphics and helping with a lot of the marketing for it. It's funny because I don't remember exactly why we decided to, but we started meeting for coffee at 7:00 AM on Fridays and we did that for about a year. It was mostly to just talk about the importance of architecture. We both had interest in homelessness. Just what more can we do? I had reached a point where I had worked on a project that I knew was possibly the highlight of my career and I was in my twenties and I was a little like all of the things that I wanted in school to work on, I felt a little like I gotten there but didn't feel satisfied. I wasn't feeling the feeling full like I thought I was going to on these really incredible projects. So I realized I wanted more. And so I started talking to my dad about at facing homelessness. Clearly he left architecture because he felt more fulfilled with homelessness or helping people that were living outside. And so that really started the conversations of working together, which then started conversations of how do we do that? What does it look like to come closer? And through many, many chats in the idea of the Block Project. And then there was another, that was in 2016 and then there was another year of working on that and then a few months in, bringing in facing homelessness to the discussion. And then in March of 2017 launching the Block Projects and on May 4th, 2017, I cut down part time at my job and we started Block Architects.

H: Why do you think it's so important to come closer? What about this project drives you? There's clearly so much passion and emotional involvement on everybody's behalf here. I'm really interested to understand the "why" better. Because like you said, you provided aid to a lot of people in need but found yourself drawn to this group of people

J: When you say this particular group of people you been just people that were living outside versus other people in need? I would say it wasn't a draw necessarily. It was just more that I kind of fell into it. And then I do believe the closer you come, the more you get to know something. The

it takes over your life. I like to use the analogies, as soon as you learn about a company that's doing bad things, then you know it and you don't like to support them. It's the whole thing of, I say this all the time, like when I found out that the Jimmy John's creator is a big game hunter and it made it very hard to then purchase Jimmy Johns even though I had had it twice a week for years. I like to talk about it through like an education lens. The more you know, the more educated decisions you can make. And you can only do that by coming closer. It's the whole ignorance is bliss a little bit. By asking people to come closer to the issue of homelessness, we believe that in many ways it'll be harder for people to ignore it and that's a good thing. It allows people to grow and to in turn help people that are living on the street. Um, so for me it's education. The more you know, the more you can do.

H: From your observations through working on this project, how do you think the housed community has responded?

J: I would say a million times better than I thought it would. When we first started the project, that's right about the time. It's funny because we had actually told one of our good friends about it, Greg Curtis from Miller Hall. We told him about the project and he said, Oh gosh, you're going to have problems seeing as all those Queen Anne people are throwing a big fit about the ADUS, and so that, you know, that was the initial like, oh my gosh, this is going to be harder than we think it is. But from that point on, everyone we talked to was in extreme support. It was almost this like the wave of the people pushing back on Queen Anne forced the people that felt differently and much more like I think that was kind of the tipping point of our city going into racists and a lot of people realizing that we need to do more, that we can't push people out. The housed community has stepped up much more than I thought it was ever going to. We were prepared for nimbysism like crazy and there hasn't been any of that. It's been really, really beautiful.

H: At the block level, have there been conversations with neighbors about their support for or against the block project of people?

J: I would say it's kind of the typical Seattle response. Not being opposed to it but also not being super supportive or engaged. All of the community gatherings that we host, you know, there's one or two people that come in and are like, oh, this is cool. Like, yeah, sounds good. And then the rest of them were like, Yup, thanks for doing this I got my own stuff going on. I would say that envisioning the project we hoped for more engagement and I think we will get there. I think right now it's still this small project that people just aren't aware of and don't really know how to react to it. But on the other end, like I said, the amount of people that are against it, it's just nothing. So it's kind of just this in between.

H: Do you think the block project has been effective in honoring its mission and effective in achieving what it was created to be?

J: The block project has evolved so much over such a short amount of time, but the essence of having someone move into a backyard so that we break down this monolithic crisis and allow a group of people to come together to show support. Whether that support is very evident or if it's just being part of the neighborhood, I think has been super successful. You know, we haven't had any pushback. We haven't had any real problems. It's bringing people closer, which was the ultimate initial mission. So I would say yes, I would say that in some ways it's far exceeded. When you're sitting at a coffee table and you're dreaming up this idea, there was always a part of me at least, maybe not my dad that was like, this is insane. This is crazy, but it can be so beautiful, which is what pushed us along. And I think recently, especially at the last AEC event I feel like it was the first time that it was really like, this is here to stay and it's really made a mark and people understand what it's about. I think for a while it was kind of this like, "what is this thing you're doing?" So that's been really, really amazing is that I feel like people can start to understand what we're doing.

H: I was wondering too about the design of the block home. I had never really thought about this, but of course stylistically it has to be designed to fit into so many neighborhood of contexts. Was that difficult in arriving at the final look of the home?

J: It was a huge discussion. We originally thought we were going to do like three or four options people could choose from. And then we quickly realized like that's a lot to bite off. You know, we should start with one. Making sure that it worked within the context of many neighborhoods and in many backyards it was really important. So first one is making sure that it's not big in scale. That it fit in nicely that we didn't want to hit the barrier of people feeling like this is huge. This is taking over our backyard. So that was a huge thing. The second one was doing things like putting in a covered front porch, which makes spaces more inviting. We went away from some of the typical siding materials that are used, so things like hardy and stuff we wanted to stay away from because we didn't want it to feel like this like modern little box in the backyard. That was kind of the aesthetic of a lot of new developments that are going on. We wanted it to feel like it was a little bit timeless. So we felt like metal siding was a durable, timeless to some extent material that could fit in with a lot of different options that can be painted if needed. If the gray wasn't of the host families liking. Kim and Dan tried to get it to be bright red at one point we were like, hm. They were very cute. They thought the red was welcoming and stuff, and we're like, this is our first home, lets play it down. It was definitely a key factor in the design and it was also, you know, trying to think of the people living in the space. Like what would they want as well. So there lots of things going into it.

H: Can you say more about that? Was that just a team discussion or did you meet with people living outside based on their needs?

J: There were lots of different factors. A huge one is that my dad is working closely with people that were living outside. Starting to understand the essential needs. The other one was that we really felt strongly about making it a dignified place to live. So it had utilities. So you had the, all the essentials of the kitchen and the bath and kitchenette or the toilet, the bath, places for sleeping storage. I specifically started looking at like RV designs and little, really efficient, boat design. How do we get crazy efficient because there's this balance of giving someone what they need, but also making sure that we're not taking away too much space from the homeowner. One of the things that we did was we drew a box, which we thought was kind of the best size to put in the back yard. And we said, what is the least amount of circulation that we can make in a space? So that's why the front door is where it is because you've come in and then you just, your circulation is the front door and then into the bathroom and basically a few steps over to the bed, and that's it. So you don't have any hallways. A Lot of shotgun homes. You know, you enter at the front and then you move through the whole space and programs kind of like unfold as you move through. But that's not efficient cause you'd have to have circulation in every space then. So there was discussions about that. Just little things. How can we hopefully keep decreasing the size? So the first home was actually 109 square feet not 125 and the city said no, that's too small.

H: I just have one last question about scaling? How do you imagine the blog project scaling in the next five years?

What did my dad say to this because this is a huge discussion yesterday. We said, we're going to table this discussion because we can't agree on how you're going to get different answers from him. I would say the answers we need to. We need to scale, and we need scale it a rapid rates in order to stay fresh. Stay at the top. When we started this project, you could Google search tiny homes backwards and almost nothing would pop up. I mean it was crazy and now you, you know, you Google it and it's like there's things in Multnomah County and there's things in LA and there's things popping up here and there. Not to say that we are in competition with those people, but it is to stay at the forefront of the discussion of how to lead that movement. We can't just sit back and watch it go by. We have to really push ourselves to continue producing. That being said, the discussion right now is what is the right number? What's the right number to stay relevant and to feel like we're making a difference, but also to make sure that we're doing it with care. The goal is to change people's lives not just to produce homes. This all comes from the little bit of an open wound that we originally set 150 a year when we started this project and it's a little like wait, we were scared to say a number at the same time.

H: My follow up question to that then is what are the immediate barriers to achieve the kind of scaling do you imagine needs to happen to stay relevant to stay a leader in the conversation?

J: That's a really good question and I think our biggest barrier right now is more the sequencing than anything else. We're, I believe, the only organization company project that wraps in a bunch of different stuff. So we're wrapping in case management agencies were wrapping in lots of volunteers. We have, a bunch of kind of permitting stuff. We have the host matchmaking that all of those things. Trying to identify which one comes first, and making sure that each one doesn't hold up next one. Because in reality if we wanted to, if we said if we said this is a housing projects and that was our goal, we could turn around and just start permitting these like crazy and putting them in backyards and then saying, "oh we'll find people later or we'll figure out the community stuff later." We theoretically could do that and I would have no concern for scaling from that point of view. I think that's what a lot of people are doing is. The production is the one that can be figured out, right? Its got a pathway forward. You know, we, we know we can permit them. We know we can build it out. We know we can, you know, it's the fact that we feel like it's important to, in between those things, make sure that we take care of the hosts, make sure that we work closely with case management agencies. And so there's just a little bit of a hurry up to slow down. But on both ends it's because we have a lot of balls in the air that we're trying to keep in the air beautifully at the same time, hit each other or try. And that's our biggest barrier. And it's also a beautiful thing taking on a lot. And I think they're all important, but if we were like blockables and said production is our thing and we focused on the factory system and working with Lni and we just cranked them out. That's a clear pathway. Right now we have this meandering, putting out fires as needed and that's something that as we scale, I think we'll figure out a little. That's kind of this next year is figuring out how to, how to work through that. We're going down a path that no one else has.

Bernard Troyer – Block Architects, Project Manager

4/24/2019 at 2:11pm

H: How old are you?

B: 33

H: What gender do you identify as?

B: Male

H: How long have you lived in Seattle?

B: Does it include the greater area? 31 years. 30 years.

H: Where were you born then?

B: Seattle, Beacon Hill. I lived in Portland for two years. Oh, so 30 years isn't accurate. Minus four, 26 years. I did four years at Gonzaga.

H: Where have you lived in Seattle?

B: First four years of my life was spent in Beacon Hill and my parents moved to the east side on the Sammamish plateau. I lived there till I was 18, went to Gonzaga for four years, lived in Portland for the first two years out of college and then lived in Seattle from 2010 to 2015, back to Sammamish for two years. Then been here ever since 2017. October 2015 is when I bought my house.

H: Do you feel like more attached to that part of the city now that you own a home there?

B: Yeah, I do. In some senses just like my little neighborhood, but because of the Block Project it's opened me up to not really feel attached my neighborhood.

H: How did you first become aware of facing homelessness?

B: My folks have known Rex since grade school, my father. I didn't know rex at all until my mom invited me to join her for coffee and tea with the Rex in his office in Fremont in 2014, March. He shared his stories, and it lit my heart on fire and that's how I first got introduced to Rex. I always kept facing homelessness in the back of my mind, but I never did anything with them until one day Rex and Jen magically just showed up at Turner Construction in the beginning of 2017. That's when I got involved.

H: When you say live your heart on fire, what about the story spoke to?

B: Just serving those on the margins and through that it was clear that Rex was discovering himself in community in ways that was just like very self-generating and fulfilling. At that time I wasn't feeling fulfilled in my job and I'd always wanted to do something that had some deeper meaning. It really connected with me on an emotional a level.

H: Was there anything in particular that motivated you to seek employment with facing homelessness?

B: Yeah. I mean when I'm not to get political, but when President Trump got elected, I felt the urge to do something positive that could bring people together, but also just erase the negative feeling that I felt that society was going in the wrong direction. I wanted to do something that had the power to, perhaps unite people and also just feel good about the way I was living my life.

H: You officially work with Block Architects?

B: Yup. I'm, I'm a fulltime Block Architects employee. I'm a project manager and my role is to oversee all construction of the block project.

H: From your observations, how do you think the housed community has responded to the block project?

B: I think the responses very as widely as anything regarding homelessness, but when people get to know what's actually happening with the Block Project, and that it's private, and it's going in people's backyards where the residents are going to be integrated in the neighborhood and all the care and attention that we put forth in our program to make sure the neighborhood is informed and aware. I think it generates a more positive response then a negative one overall.

H: Do you think the block project has been effective? And what are the immediate challenges that the block project faces?

B: You're talking to the construction guy. So I see the construction challenges and part of it was that we had a problem with our model and that when we initially fundraised for this, we fundraised just the purchase of materials alone. The thing with construction in Seattle is, there's a giant labor shortage and labors coming at a premium, and in order to build these things efficiently, we need to pay people for their time. When you're working with people on a volunteer basis, it's challenging to maintain the proper sequence and act and challenging to have people complete tasks they started. It just draws the schedule out a lot. That's a really good, great or big challenge is just the lack of funding and the lack of available and willing volunteer skilled labor.

H: And then do you think the project as a whole has been effective?

B: We're getting, more awareness of what we're doing. I think our fundraiser from two weeks ago, three weeks ago stands for itself. We had a goal of raising 120k ran and we raised to 220k. When we deliver on what we were funding for, which is completing our goal for this year of building six homes and starting a warehouse to advance or pre fabrication facilities. When we deliver on that, I think it's really going to accelerate things. And, instead of raising \$220,000, we'll start raising like half a million, a million and we'll show that we can actually do what we've promised, and we've gathered all this momentum and all this steam with really only having one home occupied for a significant amount of time. We didn't get our second one completed until just Thanksgiving last year. We just got our third resident to move in just a couple of weeks ago. So, for the majority of the block project's, and the public's awareness, we've only had Bobby, Kim and Dan to talk about, now we have three people to talk about. And through the build process, you know, we have tons of different volunteers involved and I just think we're on a geometric

or exponential curve where someone talks to someone, the word it goes viral and the more homes we build, it's just going to move us further along at a sharp curve. And we're just at that kind of like gradual, slower beginning.

B: There was a question back there about how I got connected to facing homelessness, right? I'm not sure if I totally answered that other than I was just motivated to do something positive and Rex and Jen walked through the doors to Turner Construction. Part of the story is, that you're probably aware of, is that I built the first block home as a volunteer with Turner Construction, and when Rex and Jen came into our office to work with our estimating and preconstruction department, we are working with them to help advise them on how to design a home that was cost efficient. And I, awkwardly just sat in every meeting even though I wasn't invited because I was so excited that Rex and Jen were there to launch the block project and I was asked to become the project manager. I helped build the first one and it kicked my butt. I put in over 300 hours of volunteer time of my own free time to build it. That was my entire summer of 2017. 13 full weekends, Saturday and Sunday while I was already working 60 hours a week on other Turner things. It was exhausting, but it definitely had a transformational effect on me. When I went to go visit Bobby in Christmas, I heard he had this placard outside of his window that said, "I got my Christmas wish this year. I'm off the streets and have a beautiful home to live in." I visited with him for a little bit, hopped in a cab ride home, and I just started balling. That emotion just swept over me in a way that I'd never felt before. It was so clear to me that I need to really tap into these emotions and see what's happening. I continued to work for Turner, but there were things, there were moments, over the next eight months after completing that job or completing the first block home, that whenever I felt most human or whenever I saw something beautiful, I couldn't help but think about the block project. And it was just talking to me continuously. That just started the conversation around the time when Bene and Jennifer T got hired. I was like, Rex, "you posted project managers and stuff. That's something I'd love to do, but something I can't do right now because of the pay and those kinds of things". Being that block home to really took a long time and a lot of things weren't going well there. It became apparent that they needed someone with some construction knowledge to take over construction. That's where we worked out a professional opportunity to work full time at Block Architects for Facing Homelessness. And that was in August. I started full time.

H: Was Block Home 2 tested, just 100% with volunteer labor?

B: It was tested without having a GC overseeing the thing, Turner construction was there for oversight. And I was with Turner at the time.

Number two, never had a general contractor. No one was taking complete ownership, so a lot of things were slipping through the cracks.

H: Going off of whether or not it's been effective and what the challenges are, how do you imagine the block project scaling and the next five years?

B: We're still figuring that out. Definitely on the construction side. Having this covered warehouse facility is going to be very helpful because we'll be able to store materials and advance prefabricating components of the home and also just maintaining an inventory to support construction of our block homes. We're going to need more funding and right now the model is to have anywhere from, you know, 35 to \$65,000 to spend on these block homes. These homes are actually worth around \$100,000. So I think the model moving forward will be more fully fund them and as we build more I think the price of building will actually go down a bit. There's a lot of different possibilities where this could go. One on my mind a lot lately is a block architects becoming a design build firm and will have her own team of carpenters that just moved from one block home to the next. The other thought is we'll have general contractors take on a batch of homes and have dedicated teams building block homes. While we'll have more funding to pay for these homes will still be entertaining charitable contributions and offers from members of the construction community and still involve volunteers from the community to do landscaping and be as involved as possible to truly make it a community experience.

H: Does that answer change if you draw it out to 10 or 20 years

B: of how the block project hold might scale or where it might grow to? It's really hard to forecast that far out. I think the model, as long as it's successful, is going to stay the same. I only see the model evolving in that it gets replicated in other cities across the country, in the world. When we do get to that point of being successful in saying we have like 20 - 30 homes, we will have a pretty useful model that could be modeled by other cities. Like a template of like, this is how we launched the block project and through the permitting process to rallying community, having a manual for resident care, for having all the legal documentation for the property management aspects. I think we'll have useful templates for other cities to follow and modify it as they need to. Building like the framework that can be adopted.

H: From like the construction side, how does the organization interface with the city? Has it been an easy process?

B: All of our homes are permitted, and we've got a great relationship with the city. Most people are waiting like six months to get their permits. We're getting ours within two to three. It's just from their normal construction interactions we have to pass inspections throughout the stages of construction, so we coordinate with the inspectors and that's about it.

H: Is there anything else that you'd like to share or any questions that you have for me? I'm interested in understanding the importance of like compassion and the importance of privileging community over you, like leaving a more lucrative job at Turner construction to like seek out like purpose.

B: The feelings just kind of a self generative once you dive into it because I don't know, I feel like although I'm doing something positive and I made a sacrifice, I'm doing this for me. Every time that I meet a new host and I can see the generosity in their life, I feel like we immediately have a connection that's like super real and it's just really easy and motivating to get up to work for things like that because all we're doing is fostering goodness and just finding ways for people to get involved in a way that they're going to be efficient and good at it so that it just continues to come back around.

Barron Peper – Block Architects, Architect

4/26/2019 at 3:20pm

H: How old are you?

B: I'm 27

H: And the gender you identify as?

B: male

H: How long have you lived in Seattle?

B: Three and a half years.

H: And where?

B: I lived for 15 months in Capitol Hill, two years in Wallingford and most recently in Columbia City.

H: Is there a space in Seattle that you identify with most or a place that feels most comfortable to you?

B: It has shifted with each place that I've lived. The boundaries of that do feel contained to the house or to the unit or the apartment unit. I think Seattle has really special neighborhoods, like neighborhood culture. If you live in Beacon Hill, you love Beacon Hill. If you live in a CD, you love to CD. I feel like I've adopted some of that. Like Capitol Hill was an early place where I landed when I first got here, but by the time I went

to Wallingford, I was choosing a place based on my lifestyle preferences. With it being sleepier and not super active. There's not a lot to do in Wallingford. And that felt very much my style. And so like in that regard, I felt connected there and now you know, Columbia city is also that and more things that I feel connected to as well with a lot more diversity, proximity to other places that I want to have access to like Beacon Hill and some of the spaces CD.

H: How did you first become aware of facing homelessness?

B: I don't remember the exact instance, but when I started volunteering with Saw Horse revolution. I started volunteering with them, which is also a nonprofit, I started volunteering with them right when I moved to Seattle. It pretty much coincided with my job starting at Mithun. Right when I got here, the state of emergency was declared by Ed Murray and I had done some work around homelessness and design back in Texas. I should just keep doing that. It's an issue here as well. So I did some quick googling and Saw Horse became the organization that I was most interested in and I quickly made it Methuen aware of my work with Saw Horse. I was one asking them to support it at least in terms of my time being flexible but also I was trying to get people involved. I was trying to facilitate some sort of partnership there and just because people found out that I was an architect interested in homelessness and design people were like "you should talk to rex" because rex had architecture background, this new shift on homelessness and they said you should check out rex, you should, check out facing homelessness and talk to her rex. I heard that like I remember hearing that a lot and I'm facing homelessness at one point did an installation at Methuen when I first started and it was photos that Rex had taken. And so I remember like touching the organization in a couple of different ways, but I don't remember when I like went on Facebook and clicked like and started following. But at some point in there I did that and I've since been seeing the stories regularly.

H: Is there something about homelessness in particular that spoke to is something that you wanted to direct your time and energy towards?

B: That's a good question. Um, I've gone back and forth on this depending on like my emotional state as a bigger scale of like where I am in my life. I feel like in college I, I had basically just learned that architecture was this incredible thing that impacted our lives profoundly. I had been convinced of that. I like believe it with all my heart that it mattered. And yet when I was doing an internship, I was working on like data centers and things that just felt so removed from what I was so excited about with architecture. So when I got an email basically asking me, describing a tiny house design competition for a village of people who've been chronically homeless, I just thought, this is so aligning my values with a skill set. It's like people coming to architecture and wanting to intersect those two things and they're, they're so close. You know it doesn't take hard thinking to realize why they're related in that scenario. And it was meaningful. I feel like it was, it was one an exciting small design exercise that was tied to a really complex social issue with that I was excited to like offer some skills around. So in that regard I just kind of stumbled into it. It just felt like there was a need. We had a skillset. It was just like an easy thing to do and far more rewarding than picking up red lines on a data center. So I was just like really enjoying investing design time that way. And then I kept doing it and I feel like at some point it's like, you know, people live to you and they're like, "Oh, you've been working in homelessness for four years, this is your thing." And it's like I was having these moments of when did this become my thing? Is this actually what I want my thing to be? I just kind of found myself here. So I wouldn't say that homelessness was this issue that always spoke to me. But throughout my life I can go back to various times where my perception shifted dramatically around homelessness. I was part of a church group and in high school where we went out and we were basically voluntarily went and spent two days being homeless as a group. And then just trying to figure out like, all right, how do we get food? We need to ask someone for directions. How does that work? Like, do people respond to you? If so, who? If you're pan handling, what are the demographics and what are the cars like of the people who stopped and the people who ignore you. Like I quickly realized that like the people lower on the socioeconomic status were more willing to interface and more open to stopping and hearing someone's story and giving them a few bucks and the people driving by in their Mercedes just kept driving and that was like a high school experience. So I feel like there's been a slew of things like that that made me just cock my head a little bit.

H: Was there anything in particular that motivated you to seek employment with block architects?

B: Well, it's so many things. It's been such a journey and I'm still on the journey. I don't have my thoughts straight around what Methuen should or shouldn't be doing. And that's still up in the air for me. When I was at Methuen and I was diving deeper into issues of homelessness and every architect loved to get in a room together and talk about it. And every architect loves to put out ideas about what ought to be done. But then when we actually had tangible ways of plugging in, people are like, "Whoa, actually I'm really busy." All of a sudden everyone scurries away. I just find it really frustrating and then I didn't manage that frustration. Today it shows up differently, right? Like people love to like discuss a social issue, but when it comes to like putting rubber to the road and actually getting involved in doing something, people are like, "oh, I just wanted to have a conversation." For me there's tons of righteousness bound up in this and that's something that I'm really investigating today, but for me there was this clarity around like I care about this thing, there's opportunities to do something. I work at a place that has the capacity to support me doing those things and I'm willing to do it. My mindset was like make the time for it. If it matters, just make the time for it. And now I look back on I have an enormous amount of privilege that allows me to take that stance that allows me to, in some ways, put my job on the line in order to do something that I care about because I'm not worried about my job. I'm not worried about being discriminated against. I'm not worried about someone firing me over my extracurricular activities and I think I was expecting like that same like can do attitude from everybody, which denies a lot of things. It denies the different layers of privilege, it denies like I have no idea what's going on in people's lives or what they're like energy capacity is, I feel like I'm a lot more sensitive to that spectrum now. Your question though was about my transition of block. Basically I was really committed to the work I was doing for Saw Horse. It felt to me like my other job. And it was fulfilling so many things. It wasn't just that I was showing up and drafting, like I was building community with them. In my first two years in Seattle, it felt so much like I didn't know anybody. Like I only had acquaintances and I didn't have friends and I looked up one day and I was like, wait a second. The program director of Saw Horse has become a close friend of mine. We have a close friendship and now she's the executive director and that's like where I'd been plugging my time. It became my social network and now I look at that and like a big part of my social sphere came from Saw Horse. So it wasn't just something that I offered services too. It was fulfilling various community needs for me, through relationships. And so my volunteer activities there felt like a really important part of my life that I wasn't willing to back out on. I also have this mindset of like, I'm not going to drop the ball. I'm not going to drop the ball in my life. I'm not going to drop the ball when I've committed to something for someone else. I was going to see every commitment through and it was really rewarding and it felt like it was more emotionally challenging than my job. I felt like I was learning rapidly about how to put buildings together on these tiny little projects that I wasn't learning as quickly at my job. There wasn't very much like mindless drafting when it came to software. Everything's a problem to solve. It's not big enough to really have like tons of minutiae to do. I found myself just incredibly committed and in finding myself deeper and deeper into, it wasn't so much homelessness. It was just saying, homelessness offers this direct link, it's like we do buildings, they need houses. And I just felt like it's not like racism where it's like, "okay, what do architects do around racism?" That's a more windy path. It's a less clear directive. But homelessness is houses, like we need to support housing or organizations that are providing housing and for young architects I felt like it was so clear. I had just finished designing some houses for them and they ended up winning an award and I was like super excited and posting pictures on Instagram or Jen LaFrenier. It just felt like a Robin hood thing. I was designing them and I was super excited about them and everybody that I worked with at Methuen knew I was doing that in my free time because I was like really excited and outspoken. But I was doing in my free time, but as a result, I could go to the QAQC guy, the detail

expert, and I can be like, Ken I have no freaking idea what I'm doing? And he would like sit down and help me out just as like his free time. He was just supporting me as a friend also. Then at one point I got an email from the AIA and it was like home of distinction award and it wanted like Scandinavian Haiga, which means like cozy and it said adaptable uses or like current Seattle trends. And I was like, those are like some of the prompts. In current Seattle trends, pick a cozy like contemporary design. And I was like, this isn't what they're looking for, the houses that we designed. I told my mentors, this is not what they're looking for, but this house fits these criteria. And in terms of current Seattle trends, homelessness is a trend. It's trending up. And I was like, I'm just going to submit. And they ended up taking it and giving it its own editorial category. Yeah. It was just shot in the dark that actually landed and it got published in Seattle magazine. It was right around them that Jen reached out to me and she saw some photos that I posted and she was like, what are you doing? What are you doing? And I just said like, I'm volunteering for Saw Horse revolution and design some houses like having a good time. And then she didn't get back to me and I just, I didn't think much of it. It felt like a normal brief conversation. Then like a month later she hit me up and was like, "hey, um, you know, like as you know, my dad and I started block architects. We are, we're doing the block project and if we want to talk to you" and she said, "we're going to be hiring soon and we want to talk to you." And I replied and said, "I'm super flattered. That's amazing. And I'm really happy at my job right now." I said, I'd love to talk to you. I'm excited about what you're doing, but just fore warning, I'm happy at my job. Because my job at Methuen was just about to take on a project that I've been working on for years and I was so excited to finally get field experience and I could tell my experience level was about to skyrocket. Jen and Rex and I had an amazing conversation and I basically turned them down. I said, no, like I need a year to finish this project. And then maybe. They said, okay let's stay in contact. And two days later I flew home to Texas and I sat down with two good friends and I hadn't told anybody that's because I wanted to sit with friends who like objectively knew me and weren't in the mix of my life in Seattle. And I told them about the opportunity and they were like, "dude, what the hell are you doing? Like that sounds perfect for you." Both of them were like, yes, absolutely, why would you not take this? And I was like, you're fucking right. And so, um, I talked to my brother and like he told me the same thing and I was feeling that also, it's why right before my brother and went backpacking, I called rex and I just told him, we hadn't talked to pay or anything, we had no details. I just called, I just called and I said we have a lot of details to discuss, but I'm in. I think it was so much of like what I was wrestling with. What I was wrestling with is like throwing in the dumpster, the story of my life as an architect is that that was so clear. Mithun is the dream place. I love that firm. And the people there are incredible and they produce amazing work and I was doing well, I had mentors who wanted to foster me. It just felt like, oh my God why would I throw all that away? And yet some part of me was like, Barron, do you want that trajectory? Like do you, if you really search yourself is that the road that you feel like going down, like can you see yourself, let's just project 30 years out. Can you see yourself as a principal? My ego would say yes. My Ego would say I want all of that. Right? Like I want to be a successful architect doing big projects. Like knowing my shit, managing people, being an incredible mentor. Like it's not all negative, right? I saw beauty in the leaders at Methuen and I thought, I want to do that. And yet I was like, some part of that doesn't sound like me. There's something that's being sacrificed by having to take that path and it offers a lot of security, right? It's the comfortable route, even if I have to work my ass off, it's the comfortable route that puts me in a position of being like a high status architect at a professional firm. Block Architects, it was like a total mystery of where it would take me, but it felt very true to myself to take that path. And ultimately that's what I was like, fuck it. I'm good at listening to my intuition and this is like a moment where I was like, all right Baron, like we're going down the path of well known.

H: Working with block architects, do you interface with the block project for regularly?

B: I think I probably spend half my time on block project.

H: What does that work look like on your end? Does the model of the house change?

B: The house is a prototype that doesn't really change right now. There's very small revisions that we're making and the specific products that we use are changing because we're also going through like LBC red list vetting right now. So we're getting rid of any materials that have red list ingredients in them. The design of the house hasn't changed from the original design. There's a vision to have a couple of different design iterations that I'm sure Jen spoke about, like a design that accommodates a couple or a small family. That hasn't happened yet. That's very much something that we want to do. But for my job, my interfacing with the block project is a lot more project management than architectural design. I've been heavily involved with LBC vetting. We're leaning on Miller Hull a lot to support us through that. Nexis is also doing a lot of the legwork, but I'm kind of in the middle of learning about what that process looks like. So trying to figure out how does one do an LBC project? I'm like in the middle of all that coordinating but also learning. I've been predominantly in charge of our site assessments and our partnership with Architects Without Borders. We have 88 hosts who are on our list. I know that that number is always jumping around. Sometimes we say a hundred, sometimes it's 130. We've had all of those. But right now on my spreadsheet, we have 88 hosts. So basically, onboarding volunteers and learning how to manage volunteers to do site assessments in a way that doesn't get any of us in trouble and actually like collects all the data that we need out on the site so that we can be permitting as we scale. Like when we get to the point that we're permitting 50 homes in a year, Jen and I can't have gone out and measured all of those. I don't know how to explain how much work it has been to like find fine tune that process and to like rally volunteers to get out and do those things. Then permitting, I'm doing a lot of that stuff. The block project surprises me and how much time it takes up because that design has been completed from beginning. It's miraculous to me how much work it takes just to keep this thing afloat. Nexis has jumped in and they're building one in Salt Lake City. And so being the architect to answer the phone and answer their questions takes up a decent amount of my time. Keeping them afloat, like we're processing their submittals when they go. The other part of the block project that I'm loving being involved with that I think is actually really unique to block architects is, is thinking through the social services side. Now clearly facing homelessness are the ones who manage that. And yet our two organizations carry the block project and, we seem to have pretty good collaboration with what's needed at a high programmatic level. And that's still advancing. We're still trying to figure out how, what is the program of the block project besides the basics. The basics which are let's put the block home in. Let's provide somebody with case management. We've got those essentials in place. What more can we do to build deep roots and deep community beyond the number of houses that we're building in a year? I love being in those conversations and doing that research. Having that kind of like collaborative brainstorming and eventually investigating what kind of partnerships that could look like. And I think that's something that we'd be leaning on mostly with facing homelessness, but those ideas can emerge from anyone at us.

H: From your perspective, how has the house community responded to the block project?

B: I feel like I could speak to a couple of different housed groups that I've interfaced with and how they responded. I think the general person that I encounter, you described the project and I feel like people are very supportive. They just say like, "that's incredible. That's so nice. That's so necessary." A certain amount of skepticism does come up. People have questions because people all have very personal stories of how they've experienced homelessness so far in their life. Those experiences are not always all good. So even recently there was a landscape architect who I told about the project and I wanted them to get involved and help design a landscape design for one of the houses. And they raised some concerns. They have concerns that worried me a little bit because their experience informed a decision around homelessness that made me nervous that they would actually be supportive of the project. And yet we got together and we talked about the project and I didn't even have to convince them. All I did was described the project and explain how we basically take care of our residents, how we take care of our hosts, how there are structures in place with case management to facilitate some of that. And by the end she said, "this is incredible. Of course we're going to

be involved.” I haven't talked to anybody who says “this isn't going to work. I don't know why you're doing this.” I've talked to nobody who has that perception.

H: Do you think that means the block project has been effective? Do you think it's been effective in achieving this community building mission?

B: Not yet. I don't think that it's failed at anything. I just don't think it's reached critical mass yet. I don't necessarily mean as number of houses but that is one variable. I feel like we'd be sitting here having a very different conversation about how much impact we've had if we had done a hundred houses by now in addition, like I said earlier, number of houses is one factor that's going to create impact but also deepening the program of the block project. In terms of somebody who has housed through this project, but what else, what other programs or services or opportunities come to them through this project or through partnerships that really create community experiences? I think we have all the infrastructure laid to set that up. But what that is hasn't yet been figured out.

H: What hurdles or challenges do you think the block project faces?

B: Nothing that I'm worried about. I think it's all just logistics. I think we've done a really good job of prioritizing scaling this year in terms of building block homes and figuring out systems that allow us to permit large numbers of homes that allow us to assess large numbers of sites with, the architects without Borders partnership. We've just really buckled down and prioritized figuring out that system and Berns has been just incredible in helping us map that. We haven't figured that all out, but we're on track to. We feel like there is a destination that we're going to there and we don't know exactly what it is, but I feel confident that we're heading that direction. The floor isn't gonna drop out from beneath us and we're not gonna be able to scale. Like, I think as long as we keep doing what we're doing and as long as Berns stays on the team we're going to get there. It gives us the breathing room to start asking. “Okay, what, what else can the block project offer besides the opportunity to connect, right?” So much of what architecture does is it creates opportunities for connection. We put a bench somewhere, two people can sit down and they might have a conversation that might transform their lives. And that wish is largely what I've hoped for as like the potential in architecture at all scales. You're setting up a stage of opportunities. With the block project though I think we might need more than a stage. I think we might need somebody directing. Somebody's saying, “hey, this is the play.” I think that comes through different programs that we will find through partnerships. You know, we're not at all experts in mental health or trauma related art or other types of services. But there's some work in town that people are experts in that. The people who are doing incredible work around reentry when folks come out of prison and, and want to integrate back into life and need something more than a roof over their head. I mean they're totally different issues, but the truth that people need support I think is an overlap. I think the support is more so than somebody just looking at them with dignity, right? Like that is like a bare human right that we're also trying to provide. That's this bold thing that we're trying to provide, but we can't stop there. Like once we achieve that, that's not yet really wrapping someone in the care that they would need in order to thrive. I don't know what those partnerships are yet, but I'm excited that I think we're getting to a place where we can start to look around and go, “okay, what do people need?” And I don't think we can answer that. I think this is also a really exciting time that we can go to future residents or people who've come out of homelessness and say what kind of programs do you need? Like tell us what you want besides a roof over your heads in order to thrive. I think we struggle with that because we don't want to be a top down organization, but you can't go to someone who's living outside and ask them to be an expert in building, design, construction, any of that. Not that people don't have that expertise, but it's much easier to say what, what kind of support do you want? And let somebody say I want art, or I want to learn how to cook. I don't know how to cook is such an important one. If somebody lived a life, you know, where they've grown up in a food desert or if their family didn't have enough resources to provide like delicious meals. Because people might be adults who don't know how to cook properly and that that would be such a gap. You know, we provide someone with a kitchen and a stove and a fridge and we just hope that it works. And somebody might be like, all right, where's the microwave? Like all I all I know how to cook is instant noodles. Right now, our program doesn't explicitly address that. It sets up relationships like with a host family that might allow them to fill that need. But I feel like we're really going to get there when we are able to talk to every person and have all these different services that are showing up for them.

H: I'm interested know, how imagine the block projects scaling in the immediate future. So maybe in a five year window and then a 20 year window.

B: I hope the last thing that we're struggling with in 2040 is housing. Housing should not be a problem in 2040. We should have sufficient housing for every single person. I don't think we're going to be scrambling to get people off the streets in 2040 not just because the block project has been successful, but we are a widely capable species that just needs to buckle down and prioritize. I hope that by that time and we are really workshoping and at a high level figuring out how do we support people individually, in their lives. How do we make that a case by case, individual program. I don't know where the block project would be at that point. Five years out from now. I think we're going to have a couple hundred houses built throughout the city. I think we will have partnered with a lot of other organizations that are in things outside of design and construction, potentially offering more support around people's trauma that have come from living outside. Which could look like so many things. It could be yoga, it could be art, it could be music, it could be cooking. In terms of the spiritual activities that make somebody feel connected, either to other people or to their heritage and their ancestry. I feel like that's something right now that I'm really excited about the project holding more of and I don't think we've dropped the ball. We're just now getting to a point where we can start to think about those things. I really want to think about 2040 though. I mean, where is architecture going to be in 2040? I feel like 10 years from now, the block project could be doing high sustainability, which is definitely in the future. No matter what we're doing, it's going to be on the leading edge of how we should foster stewardship as humans and how we should be building buildings. I think that's a deep priority. And I wonder, in the immediate future there's, there's going to be so much densification that that can happen in urban villages. I wonder if that's something that we start to prioritize. Right now the block project is this unique branded home and there's benefits to having it be recognizably the block project, but we can also blur those lines as we have multiple design iterations that can accommodate a number of different people. Once this project has really been rooted in Seattle, people are familiar with it, people have accepted it, it's happening all over. What happens when we start to offer up these houses for you, or me? People who aren't going to be able to buy a conventional single family home, but might be able to somehow come up with the money or the resources to live in a backyard cottage? If it became a market rate opportunity or if somehow that was getting folded into the programs of the block project. It's hard for me to think that 10 years from now we're going to have a bunch of designs that are exclusively for people who've been chronically homeless. I feel like at that point, who those homes serve, the next tier would be other vulnerable populations. Elderly people who are aging is the clear next demographic to us. Or also like recent immigrants. Those were places that we would want to serve. Beyond that, like once we have this model and housing is becoming less of an issue, I can't see why it wouldn't open up for just anybody. In which case we really blurred the lines with who gets to live in these houses. “Oh, I've, I've seen that house design before, therefore I know that you have been chronically homeless.” At some point it might be beneficial for us to blur those lines to where you don't know. And at that point, someone's coming outside dressed and shaven and there's no way to know what their background is. Maybe that's where we'll be at that time is reentry, reintegration without needing that story.

H: I think that's a great place to end. Do you have any final thoughts or any questions for me?

B: It's not so much a question, it's just a good wish that I hope you crack the nut on what community is. It's what were hunting around right now is what we're trying to pin down. I think it's a question that people need an answer to. Our world needs communities so badly, so much work is focused on building community and yet, I don't want to say nobody, I don't know in a measurable way what that looks like. I think there are some things out there that have ways of measuring that. But I'm interested in in terms of neighborhood and community building and the research you're doing and how that interfaces with the block project because we want to nail it. We really want to nail it and I feel like we need to be challenged in that because there's been a bit of an assumption, at least for me, that we had figured it out. You know I felt like we have a framework, we just need to figure it out. And now that we've progressed through some of that. I'm picking my head up and going, we can do more. We can, this can carry more. Every step is critical. What's happened up to this point, it was already bold and audacious. It's cool that there's enough traction to be trying to add more to the project.

H: It's just, it's cool to see how everyone's strengths come together to work on the very same problem in very different ways. You're all like you're bought in and you're driven by the mission. You're coming back to the question.

B: You talk to the host though, like there's so up to speed, like Doe driver in particular was telling me things about the, about the project. Then I was just like, you need to go up on a stage and just talk because I write after meeting her, she said she was just like, Seattle homeowners hold more land and more wealth in the city than anybody else and we have the responsibility, we have the resources to address these problems. Everybody holds the wealth and the power to do something. People have everything they need to make a change. It's just a matter of doing it. Which was radically different. It's different from like row and there, there's, there's, there's no better or worse, but it's different from saying I'm just so sad by what I see on the streets. Collectively this city, not just corporations like corporations and do need to be taxed and like that should happen too, but we can't wait for that to happen to address these issues cause that's going to be a battle, right? Like that is going to be a long war of taxing, taxing the 1% or corporations or whatever. But we collectively, like each of us collectively holds some amount of wealth. And I think upon examination we would find that it's actually quite a bit of wealth that we have in order to like move to Seattle and pursue a life here. It's something that I've been discovering more recently that I have capacity to be more engaged than I thought I did. And sometimes that just means moving money to people who are doing incredible work. So people who have that mindset of, it's not just them, it's us. Not just in terms of saying the right thing, but like moving money. Like that inspires me a lot because I feel like if we could shift the, if you could shift the paradigm around that kind of involvement, we would also be sitting here having a very different conversation because the organizations led by people most affected would have the resources to be leading. You know, it wouldn't, it wouldn't take us to show up and do it. But this where we are right now.

Hosts

Kim and Dan - Block Home 1 Host

4/27/2019 at 8:12pm

H: Could you tell me your ages?

K: 49

D: 51

K: 49 years

D: I don't know exactly, but it's been since the mid-eighties.

H: Where in Seattle?

K: I grew up in West Seattle and then lived in Wallingford for 10 or 15 years and then did a short stint that back in West Seattle and then I've been here for nine years.

D: I've been all over. Capitol Hill, University District, South End. I've been in this house for 10 years. And before that I was in Beacon Hill for five years. Central district in your too somewhere.

H: Does this neighborhood feel like home?

K: Oh yeah, definitely. We see all this stuff going being built around us and it makes us really sad, but we really don't want to move because we love a lot of what used to be, but there's still stuff here that we love for sure. It definitely feels like home.

H: How did you first become aware of the block project?

K: I work for the mechanical engineering firm that did the engineering for the home. Rex came in to talk to our company about Facing Homelessness before there was a Block Project.

D: We were already following the Facebook page, but they hadn't announced the Block Project yet.

K: Our community service program lead at work hounded Rex until he came in to talk to us and presented on the block project and we were looking for some way to be involved, the company and he said, "well actually we're doing this new thing." It was a pretty compelling presentation as one might imagine, from Rex, and also because the topic is so timely. My boss was super inspired and he said we'll do the mechanical engineering for that pro bono. I had already been tipped off a little bit about the project. I volunteered in our meeting with Rex, our first meeting with Rex, I volunteered Dan's house. Because it's his house, not mine. But I've talked to him when I heard about the block project. I didn't know much about it, I just knew that facing homelessness was going to be building tiny houses in residential backyards. I thought, wow, "that's something Dan and I should do." And Dan and I are both pretty private and we're pretty introverted, but it was definitely the right thing to do and I wasn't sure that Dan would be into it. So I came up with my sales pitch and came home and I was like, "you know, I heard about this thing where facing homelessness is going to build tiny houses in peoples backyard for people who've been homeless." And I was just about to launch into my sales pitch and Dan said, "oh, we should do that." So that was the discussion.

H: How long was it from the time you heard the speech from Rex to when you decided to participate?

K: It was in that meeting that we volunteered, 10-15 minutes. I mean it was before we heard this speech from rex. It just was such a great idea. we've been wanting to do something because it's painful seeing so many people suffering so much. It feels so disempowering to see something so wrong and not know what to do about it.

D: There's plenty of other things, we realized later, that there were plenty of other things you can do. This is a huge thing and you know it changes your life. There were other things we could've done it. But at the time that was the way to start, just to dive in.

H: Is there anything more about the circumstances that led you to committing to the project? What was that conversation like inviting somebody to live on your property with you and be your more immediate neighbor?

D: Well, we talked to rex and all the other folks at Facing Homelessness and Blog Project. We definitely brought that up because that was a concern. And you know, they were like, "well, you know, you have some control over who is going to be your neighbor and you can find

somebody who has common interests and maybe find someone who's also kind of a private person” We don't want to be completely private and never see the personal or have interactions. So, they kind of reassured us about that. And then, then we started the process of meeting.

H: How did they reassure you?

D: Well at the time the process wasn't super defined. There's definitely going to be, room for your input and your thoughts and were not going to force anybody on you.

K: At the time there were 11,500 homeless folks and we figured there was somebody in that group. It's a pretty large pool. There'd have to be somebody who was a good fit. And I think one thing that appealed to me about it was it felt like it was something to do that met the magnitude of the problem.

D: In a sense it does in a sense doesn't because there's still 11,499 people, but one of them is living here now.

K: But it felt like something we could do that fit the magnitude of the problem. We're not out there passing policy or funding any low-income housing units, but it felt like something that was concrete and big enough that it does make a difference. It was two citizens worth of effort to make a dent in the problem.

D: It's the kind of thing that if you scale, it could be great. All we can do is something here with this house.

H: Did you have any other concerns before participating in the project?

K: we the neighbors might not like it

D: Neighbors and also just like people in general.

K: The folks at facing homelessness are so amazing. It felt like we would have tons of support. It didn't feel like it was that risky. We've got a lot of privilege. If we were unhappy, we could make the house go away. We were definitely committed to doing it, but if we were totally miserable we know that the folks at facing homelessness would not want us to be hosts if we hated it. That wouldn't be good for the program or the resident. Did it feel like a risk to you?

D: I mean, we were a little bit nervous about it. But I don't think we were terrified.

H: What was your role during construction?

K: Early on I was told that I did not know how to use a hammer properly. So we tried to plug in where unskilled labor was needed. We made drinks and snacks and bought tamales. We were the food and drink committee.

D: Which was actually a lot of work because we have lots of people, dozens of people.

K: We also provided a bathroom.

D: Believe me, there were things we did, we worked on. We volunteered as much as we could when they let us. We did clear coating and things like that. We did what we could.

H: Was it important to be involved in that process?

D: Yeah. I really enjoyed it. But im glad I didn't have to do everything right.

K: We don't know how to do anything building wise. We would have still done it if there were contractors coming out here to put the house in. But it was nicer having volunteers and I just felt so much gratitude to everybody who was here. We wanted everybody to be happy.

D: That was something that was really one of the most positive things was just meeting all the people. Out of the goodness of their hearts would come and spend weekends here and build just because, it was the right thing to do. And also I think it was a community building thing. People were doing it just to meet other folks and to be part of something that's this important.

K: It was also right after the election when we were not quite used to the new level of hate and ugliness. It was really reassuring to see that there were so many people who would come. People would come every weekend and then there were some people who just, this was their summer, like Berns.

D: Berns did not work for block project. He was working for Turner and he was already working 50 or 60 hours a week. They were not giving him hours to work on this, he did it on his own time. He was here every weekend and some evenings.

K: And then there was a guy who used to live, well, you've probably met Lav.

D: I don't know how he even found out about it. But he's just started showing up and he's extremely skilled and he provided like mentoring and a lot of useful stuff for Berns. And I think he influenced the design too

K: I think he's started off, he showed up like the third or fourth week and then was here almost every weekend, all weekend for the summer.

H: What is your relationship with Bobby now that the block home is finished?

K: We love him.

D: I was going to say he's like a neighbor, but most people don't really know their neighbors. So he's like a neighbor that, you know, and you see and interact with and you really enjoy seeing. But you know, I think we really care about how he's doing his wellbeing and vice versa. What's going on with him. We check in with him pretty much every day.

H: And he's checking in on you guys?

K: Whenever I go out and do yard work, he's always trying to get me to stop and drink tea. He's a sweet guy. He's so interesting. You know, just somebody knowing somebody who has had such a different life experience is really. I like things and people that challenge my perception of what is normal, because I've only had my experience. His experience is not generally what I read about in books or, what my coworkers have had. It's really cool to know him.

H: And how do you interact?

D: It's a little bit on like Facebook Messenger. We see him every couple of days and we try and do stuff deliberately. Well, it was once a week for a while and then we got really busy. So now its very few weeks. And he insists on buying us dinner a lot. We try and buy him dinner every once in a while, but were not always successful.

K: But he has no income and he still insists on it. Basically, his panhandling is this whole income. So when he gets up to \$100 or so in accumulated cash, then he's ready to take us out for dinner somewhere. Dinner for three people is ends up being more than, even at a cheap place, it ends up being more than half of his total net worth.

H: Now that you've participated as a host, do you have any second thoughts or regrets?

D: No.

K: No. Its amazing.

H: And has anything from your experience surprised to you?

D: I think it all has in the sense that we didn't know what to expect. So everything was a surprise. It's just been this learning experience. We just dive deeper into it as we go along.

K: I can't remember how much stuff we were doing before this, but it sort of feels like the little bit of empowerment we needed to dive deeper into being more involved.

D: We were doing I think, some minimal activism and things like that, but we've gotten involved in more stuff since then.

K: I should know better, but I sort of expected that Bobby's life would really radically change. That he would, he has, what are those little pendant things? The Samaritan? It's sort of like facing homelessness, but without interacting with people. There's these beacon things that people wear that have some sort of a chip in them. It could blue tooth and if you download this app to your phone and if you're in the proximity of somebody who's got one of these, you get a little story about them and you can donate money to them. So, where was I going with this? On his profile, this Samaritan profile. He said something about, it was after he knew he was going to have a house. He said something about, "you know, now that I'm, I'm going to have a house I can volunteer instead of whatever." I kind of had this idea that there would be this switch that flipped and suddenly he's got a house and that's going to undo all of the childhood trauma and give him this like totally firm grounding on which you could absolutely change everything else in his life. And that was not what happened. You know, he still panhandles, he still doesn't have any other source of income.

D: Those were his friends, you know, that's his social scene? Chief Seattle Club is a big part of what he does where he goes every day. So his routine has kind of stayed the same. I think I wouldn't underestimate. The change in his life has been profound. He can control what he eats now, which is a big deal. His blood sugars better. His health overall is better. He used to have arthritis and now he doesn't seem to. He does, but he doesn't have trouble getting around anymore. Things have definitely changed for him, but differently than I thought they would, I guess. He's not like, it's not like the Dickens novel where you pick up the poor person and plunk them down in the wealthy family and suddenly they're just changed. It's definitely more subtle things that are maybe more life changing than what I was expecting. Just being able to have some control over your health. And he still tells us every time we see him, how well he slept. When he was in the shelter, he said he always kind of slept with one eye open because things would get stolen and you can't sleep in.

H: What is your future commitment to the project, and how long do you envision yourself participating?

D: Definitely for as long as Bobby wants to stay there. He's welcoming. I think we want to be involved and know what's going on. Probably have someone else to live there after that.

K: With all this godawful development going on around us, we sometimes talk about moving, but it's always, you know, like is there space for Bobby's there? Is there space for a block house? As long as there's a need, it would be nice if there wasn't a need anymore.

H: That's the end of the questions I have prepared. Do you guys have any questions for me or anything else you want to share?

K: This kind of feels to me like the best thing I've ever done. So being part of this has been pretty amazing and life changing and kind of in those subtle ways, like Bobby's life changing, just seeing the love and compassion of people in this community has restored my faith in humanity at a time when it was suffering.

D: This was our way to get deeper and closer to the issues and the people, to do more. I feel like we'll always have that too. Even if we are less involved with the block project I think we will still be involved in the community.

Visala Hohlbein – Block Home 2 Host

4/27/2019 at 8:34am

H: Could you tell me your age?

V: I'm 54.

H: And the gender that you identify as?

V: female

H: How long have you lived in Seattle?

V: My whole life, but I just moved.

H: where are you living?

V: I'm living in Maltby now.

H: How did you first become aware of the block project?

V: because my brother is Rex.

H: Was it a long conversation before you decided to participate in the project? What did the process look like for you?

V: As soon as he told me about it, I said, well, we would love to do that. That sounds cool.

H: What in particular about it, what were those circumstances?

V: To make a long story short, I have an Indian Guru and we follow her. We have for 20 years. Her whole thing is about service. So we do a lot of service with downtown, homeless and people living outdoors. And I've been serving them some meals downtown for like 20 years. And, you know, you just never always feel like you're doing anything. You just feel, how can I be so privileged to live in this home? And then other people are living outside. It's just totally random that I managed to be in a home and someone else is outdoors. We had a backyard, so it just made sense.

H: Did you initially have any concerns about participating in the project?

V: My only concern was that we were moving and we said yes when he (Rex) first started three years ago and it has changed a lot. When it first started it was for six months, someone's going to move then and, and then they'll probably after six months get more stable and moving on and then maybe a new person would come in. I knew we were moving because we wanted to move to the Ashram. And I was like, okay, I think we can do this for a couple of years. And then when we move then whatever's happening with the house, maybe it can continue. It just took a really long time because of a lot of problems with our property. We have that giant maple tree and just dragged it out. I feel bad that it was so much for them to do. I truly honestly hope C'zar is happy there and I hope he's able to integrate into the community. I just feel bad that we're not there to help him do that.

H: Did you all move during construction or after the house was finished?

V: We moved last July. The house was done I think in October.

H: What was your role during the construction, if any?

V: We came to a couple of work parties, but mainly I think it was built by groups like Google coming for a day or you know, this, this group is coming for a day. So our role in the construction was not anything.

H: what's your relationship with Caesar now that the block home is finished?

V: That is what I wish was more. I don't go into the city much, but my son lives there and he might also be somebody to interview because he doesn't live there, but he has his business there. And also there is a couple living upstairs. So they could be somebody also like, not sure how much they interact with Caesar. I don't really know how much they have been introduced and what's going on. I mean, I'm sure they know each other because they're sharing that space. I think in the end he said Caesar's a very private person and he's not that social or he kind of really likes to have his own space and be kind of independent. So he said actually it was a good match for him. It's a little tricky with the model of homelessness at facing homelessness. I know they want to really integrate people into the community. Then maybe to the best of him, you can't force somebody to integrate. Some people are just more private people and that's also an important difference for us to respect.

H: Did you have a very close relationship with Cesar before, during the matchmaking process? What did that look?

V: We met him a few times and we hit it off very well. I was really confident and happy with Caesar and I think he was confident and happy with us as well. It seemed like we all sort of hit it off, my husband and Caesar and the men that run the store. It's kind of a different setting with the store there, but that's just how it is. I was really looking forward to becoming friends with Caesar. The other day I was thinking I should call Cesar and just see how he is and I think I definitely will call him and the next day or two and to see how he's doing it because I really haven't talked to him. My husband goes over there every Tuesday because he plays bridge he says he never sees Caesar. So I don't know if he just isn't around much, or if he's out and about, or if he's in his house. He says he looks for him to interact with him, but just says he hasn't really seen him.

H: Now that you've participated in this capacity in the program, do you have any second thoughts or regrets about participating?

V: Not at all. Not at all. The only one would be I wish I had more space for more people. It's a great, no regrets. I feel a little bad just the one about having to move. I mean, if you guys could take someone in Maltby but then they'd be isolated because we're out here in the farmland. No regrets. It's a great thing. Okay. It was a great learning experience for me and I hope for everybody involved,

H: Has anything from your experience with the block project surprise you?

V: I was just blown away by the love and compassion that so many people showed. I don't know if I was surprised, but I was just so happy to see that, it made me feel so wonderful. See so many people coming forward to help and just the joy of it. I guess one surprise was how Dan and Kim took Caesar into their home six months before he transitioned into the Block house. I was like, wow, you guys are really amazing people. That was a surprise. But as far as the project itself, no, I don't think so.

H: What do you think your future commitment to the block project is? How long do you envision yourself participating?

V: If it's an appropriate spot for somebody, if it can work for somebody, even though it's a store and no one's really there except for the people living upstairs. Then if it works for block protect then it works for me for as long as I can see into the future. I don't have any plans to sell the house, so as long as they can use it, I think that's great.

H: I'd love to know more about the influence of your Indian guru and your service commitment. Was that important in your family growing up?

V: My Dad was a criminal attorney. He never condemned somebody for their actions. He just loved them. And he would frequently bring them, people, some of his client's home for dinner. We would just have, you know, you never would know who was sitting there at the dinner table and it was a good influence.

H: That's my last question for you. Um, if you have anything else you'd like to share.

V: I think probably mainly, you know, being involved with Amah and you could check it out on embracingtheworld.org. Im very involved in that group and we do a lot of work trying to make a difference. I know a lot of people are, everybody is. There's more people trying to help than not and people have such good golden hearts.

Lex and Marjon – Block Home 3 Host

4/27/2019 at 11:37am

H: How old are you?

M: 85 and almost 83

H: Lex is 85?

M: Yes

H: How long have you lived in Seattle?

M: I have lived in Seattle since 1959. That's what 60 years ago? And Lex has lived here 23 years.

H: Where in Seattle have you lived, have you always lived here?

M: I lived in MontLake. I lived in Normandy beach and Ravenna. When we got married, we bought this.

H: How did you first become aware of the block project?

M: I'd heard about little houses in Portland. And I said I wish they did that in Seattle and she says they're just starting it. So we went and knocked on the door at Facing Homelessness to interview. They looked at our yard and said, absolutely, yes.

H: How long before you decided to participate in the project?

M: We had some homeless youth living with us from the YMCA so we sort of researched a little situation. Yes.

H: Could you tell me more about the circumstances that led you to committing to the block project? You have a property that fit and it was going to fulfill a need?

M: That's pretty much it, and that was it about homelessness.

H: Did you have any concerns about participating?

M: A very slight concern about an abusive husband. Since we knew we were going to get a woman because we're going to get somebody more or less temporary since we are more or less temporarily because we're in our eighties and so little concern about that for the neighborhood.

Otherwise not really

L: I actually never gave that a thought. The concern was that we realized that the first two block houses, the people who moved in there, they moved into it to stay. For their future life so to say. We realized that our future life is statistically limited. I mean what's the average age of an older gentlemen? Something like 87 or so. So we went to facing homelessness and you said, you know, we can't make a long time commitment because we just won't be there a long time. Then they had just opened a conversation with Mary's Place. Mary's place said, you know, it would be great if we would have a temporary place where we could place somebody who is expecting. Because then that is also by definition limited because people got the child and they get on priority list as far as housing is concerned. So it just fits perfectly.

H: What roles did you play during the construction? Did you participate a lot in the build site? Did you want to be involved in the process?

M: We supervise. I mean they had to dig two long ditches from our house to where the block home is. So it was a royal miss. We participated in helping them.

L: Well, we had an important impact in that basic idea of Facing Homelessness wash being off the grid. No electricity, no water, they will use rainwater. No sewer, they would have septic field. When we realize what they were wanting to do. We said, you know, the soil here is glacial till which means it has been compacted by hundreds of meters of ice a few years ago. And so this is not an alluvial soil where you can just have water sink in. So this is not the place for septic field said, ah, it doesn't work better connected it to the sewer. And the same thing with water. Because if you want to collect rainwater in winter enough to survive in a dry summer because the last few couple of years there is a draught here of at least three months. So how much water do you need to use per day? One hundred says? You know that whole idea of you won't have rain in the winter in the summer, but to collect debt you need a huge tank.

H: So could I ask you, what is your relationship with the resident now that the block home is finished?

L: That is still in development. I mean she's is here now for 10 days or so. So there isn't much of a relationship yet because she's just moved in of course.

H: Do you interact with Jennifer and if so, to what capacity or how do you hope that relationship grows?

L: Well, first of all, we are very much aware of the fact that it will be temporary. Because she will get a baby and this place inside, at one point it will drive you crazy if you're having no place to put your baby and sleep. They told us that Jenny can stay for a year. But will she survive with a young child of off just months old in that little cubby hole? So we'll see. And then one of the aspects of the whole project is you don't know how it will develop. I feel it will change with every new person. So we don't have really expectations of establishing a long term relationship. It could be, but it's not the goal.

H: What do you think the goal is?

L: The goal is to give her a good start.

H: Now that you've participated as a host in this program, do you have any second thoughts or regrets?

L: No. Not for a moment.

H: Has anything from this experience surprised you? Has anything made you feel something you didn't expect?

L: This whole project has been a huge learning experience for Facing Homelessness. They didn't know anything here. Every new block house is an accumulation of the experiences of the previous ones and we are only number three. So they are still in the middle of learning. As I said, one of the things they were too optimistic about sewer and it forced them, and that was part of their learning experience. To talk with the city about sewer. How do we do that? Because if you connect the side sewer to a home, you pay \$10,000. That's amazing. So that was a bit unsettling until day found out that if you connect an extra sewer to the sewer off the house within two feet of the outside wall, then it doesn't cost anything. Which meant that they had to dig a ditch from the house. Through the garden to the block home. Count your blessings it is only from the house to block home. If you would have to connect to something on the street that will be twice as long. So again, that was for them and experience where they had to look into that. Same thing with electricity. They realized that, with the solar panels on the roof, in winter that's not enough. So then they can, we tie off with this house and then summer it produce electricity and decrease my bill. And in winter, we will provide the electricity. And then I said, you know what, if you put a few more panels on the roof then that probably will produce an extra amount of electricity, which will be our benefit, which then kind of balances the use of water. They need to have water. If we nicks this idea of having a 20,000 gallon tank there. So we said, okay, we provide the water, we get electricity. So you asked if I was involved with construction. The answer was yes, we were involved in keep them on their honest, reasonable line of thing. And not all too idealistic. They still want to build one of those little houses, which is entirely off the grid. But I think that then the biggest problem will be the dry summer. And how do your stock water? That's the whole problem. It definitely make them think, Rex and his daughter, made them think about, oh yeah, this is more complicated than it looks like.

H: What do you imagine your future commitment being to the block project? How long do you envision yourself participating with your property?

L: As long as we can. You just don't know what happens tomorrow. And it could be that we still live here for five years. It could be that by the end of the year one of us is so dependent that we need to go to assisted living or something. Our personal commitment is as long as we can do it. We didn't say, okay, we'll do this for three years or so. Then what happens after entirely depends on who's going to live here. If one of the family starts living here and takes care of the lease. If one of the family takes over and continues that commitment then it can last another 10 years. If the housing needs to be sold, then it depends on the buyer. If he wants to take over that commitment or that he says no way.

H: If the buyer doesn't want to take the commitment, then the block project takes the house back?

M: Well, there's two possibilities. They take the house back, or they basically sell it to us.

L: Well again, they didn't in the original of set up of the project. They said, okay, we'll take away the house and return the property back in its original form. Then I said, "you know, if the new owner wants to buy it for the price that they can put up another one somewhere else, then why not?" And for them that was, they never thought about that. This is a fabulous DADU. You could rent this out for \$800 a month to a student at the university or something like that. So an owner who buys it in a few years, he has to earn back the money. Somewhere, the other thing, you know how it works in Portland? Portland has the same idea, put little houses in backyards, but after five years, the land owner becomes the owner which basically means that they will throw out the homeless person and rent out the place as a bed and breakfast. So Facing Homeless says, yeah, you know, we do not want to go that way. So that was the idea behind that said no, we will just pick up the block house and put it somewhere else. If you see how absolutely solid this house is, to take it to pieces, take it down will cost thousands of dollars. Just dismantling it and bringing it somewhere else. So it's not yet decided, but it's on their agenda. They have a board and it's one of the things they have to discuss internally in the organization as an option. But if they said then you won't get it for a used price, because it is so sturdy and so well insulated and so well thought through. This is in house, I think it's 220 square feet. At \$300 per square foot. At least \$66,000 dollars.

H: That's the last question that I have for you, but do you have any questions for me?

L: They made a big step forward by going into the direction of prefab. Because if you see how this works, then you'll realize that there is so much walking backward and forward for a nail and a screw. It's much better if they have those things in a work box and set it up and then break it down somewhere in a construction hall. They have no shortage of requests for block houses. People are willing to have a block house in their yard. That is amazing, it says something about the society. There is a demand for block houses, from the homeless side.

Residents

C'zar – Block Home Resident 2

5/1/2019 at 10:42am

H: Can you tell me your age?

C: I'm going to go ahead and say 50, because I'm two months away from my 50th birthday.

H: The gender you identify as?

C: Male

H: How long have you lived in Seattle?

C: I moved to Seattle on November 30th, 1991. I have, what, 28 years now? 29 years, I guess?

H: Where did you move from?

C: I moved here from Riverdale, New York.

H: Where have you lived in Seattle?

C: I moved to Seattle, First, I lived in the Admiral district of west Seattle, and then I moved up to Capitol Hill. I've lived in Burien. I've lived in Wallingford, that's where I became homeless, was in Wallingford. And now in Greenwood.

H: Is there one of those neighborhoods that feels like home?

C: My two favorite neighborhoods have to be the Admiral District because of the location, the view of downtown, Elliot Bay and Wallingford because of its location to everything downtown. If I had to choose one between the two, I would probably choose. That's a tough one because I liked both those neighborhoods so much and you know, both now so dreadfully out of my financial reach. But I think if I could live in either one. I actually, at this point, I think I would choose to go back to the Admiral District in West Seattle.

H: How did you first become aware of the block project?

C: I actually became aware of the block project through a man named Matthew Shay. He told me about the block project. Matt was a mutual friend of mine and Rex Hohlbein. What happened was, Rex brought the project to Matt's attention and Max said he do it and Matt told me about it. Uh, at this point Matt and I were still were both homeless, living together in Wallingford. Matt got his housing through Plymouth housing of rather through Pioneer Housing. And I asked Rex if I could have Matt's spot on the program. So I knew about it, ideally from Matt and then secondarily from Rex.

H: Did you have other housing options available?

C: I was working on two different housing options, which I started because of the Ted talks, I sort of like got fudged up. I've been, one of the more interesting situations I found myself in was when I was talking to Mary Beth over at Reach. She was saying that they could no longer help me because they understood that I was with Block Project and that if I was already seeking permanent housing through this program, that I would have to do one or the other. And so I actually chose to do this program because I thought it would be faster and I'm just going to drop that. Leave it at that.

H: Are you comfortable sharing and what led you to experience with homelessness?

C: Yeah. But I want to point out from a personal perspective, that I think what a lot of people forget is that everyone wants to know how you became homelessness. Homelessness is a very traumatic and victimizing situation. And one of the things that like myself and Jennifer Adams and the other people who have experienced homelessness who advocate for social justice change, we tried to get people who have not been homeless to understand is that when you ask someone to share that story, basically you're asking them to revictimize themselves. So I do this, but I don't do it very often. It was a circumstance of love is blind. Let's just start with that. Sometimes we don't always think with our heads when we were using our heart. And I found myself in the position with an individual who not only did not have his own best interests at heart, but mine either. And he took us down a path that led to basically my financial ruin, my mental breakdown and then my substance abuse. It was a situation of, because what I discovered with myself over many other people is that, you know, most people think that homeless people are drug addicts or they're drunks and stuff like that. But in the truth of that, the truth of that is that actually doesn't happen till after we become homeless. That happens because of the situation of where we're at. Where you just, you just can't get a break. You can't sit down anywhere. You can't lay down anywhere. There's nowhere to sleep. They say go to the shelters, you go to the shelters and you get robbed, you get assaulted. You catch parasites and diseases. They're very unsafe and unclean. I saw one that looked fairly decent, but it was like so overlooked and they had a waiting list because it was really nice. You're almost forced to be up and alert around the clock. And so people oftentimes will, as I did, turn to substances to accommodate that because the minute you close your eyes, I ran into a friend of mine who I've known for many years. Who's also homeless, who on the bus just not even a week ago, who explained to me that he found a secure spot where nobody knew he would be, where he laid down. He went to sleep and when he woke up everything he had was gone. And this is what happens when you're homeless and you're outside, as you close your eyes or you turn your back. And I call them parasites and because I can't imagine why someone who has nothing but chooses to feed off of and take from someone who also has nothing. It's like just to continue their own personnel destruction. Then of course there's the city ordinances. The city and has become extremely hostile towards homeless people. But also a lot of people, the explosion of homelessness in this city, has come because word got out, I guess that we had a good safety network up here and people from California and Oregon and Idaho, places where they don't have the services that are available here to the homeless population in Seattle. Began coming here. Um, and I overheard a gentleman on the bus who was ranting just a few days ago about how he come here 23 years ago for all the free shit. And now he's stuck here. So the idea that people were coming here to be homeless because of all the social services and the benefits that were being given to the homeless population basically eroded that service system for those people who were here who was just here to begin with. And when you stack, my father always said, you can only spend a dollar once, you know? And once all of those services began to be like pilfered by. I hate to call people outsiders because I don't think that anybody is really an outsider because you know, we're all human being. No person is illegal. No person is an outsider. We're all humans. I don't think of us as different races. I know that we were multiple ethnicities because the human race is all one race. We're the genius, Homo sapiens sapiens at this point, so you know, made up of multiple ethnicities. Words are very powerful, especially when you use them incorrectly. And I don't like to use to try and race because the race is a competition, and I'm not really competing with anybody. We are all supposed to be here together, coexisting. So I like to use the term ethnicity. They called it Freeattle, believe it or not is what they called the place, it was called Freeattle. Because everything was free. It really wasn't the case, but that's where a lot of people coming in from other states thought and they all use the same excuse, they'd come here to go fishing. And everybody knows that the fishing industry in Seattle hasn't been popping off since the mid nineties, and it just hasn't. You could see where a lack of research and stuff like that. I moved here to get a job with the TV, with WNET. That's what I was doing up until the time that I met Brad and everything's just went to hell in a hand basket from there.

H: And that was in Wallingford?

C: Uh, no, this was when I was still living a, actually I met Brad when I was living in Burien. My path was West Seattle, Burien, Wallingford, Greenwood. When I met Brad and I didn't realize his own self destructive nature and just got sweet talked into going down this path, which led me to where I am today.

H: How has or hasn't the block project helped you address that trauma?

C: It has been a growing experience for me. I'm not one who has a great deal of patience. I had to develop an extreme amount of patients for this project. I was just high maintenance all the way around, but not high maintenance. I am all maintenance. Lets tell the truth about it. I am not high maintenance, I am all maintenance. You're looking at the full maintenance package here. It's like it's not high maintenance is all maintenance 24/7 365. Growing up the way that I did though a solid upper middle class African American family in Riverdale New York,. You know, both of my parents were college educated. I have a college education. I'm a liberal arts major and my focus is on television and broadcast programming. And the idea is that I'm the guy who sits in the programming department who decides what you see, when you see it, or if you see it at all, you know, based on the revenue that it generates from my network. And I did my internship at WPBS which was one of the public broadcasting stations in New York. Also, ADT, I came out here to do CCS, which was also a public broadcast network. I was living my dream when I met my nightmare. I had my dream job, everything was going just right. It just shows that if you're not really diligent, to really be careful about who you align yourself with. Other residual effects of that involvement can sometimes be just as detrimental to you as if you were doing it yourself, sort of thing. So that's how it happened.

H: How long were you homeless?

C: Wow. I had become homeless about six months before I met Rex. Okay. And I met Rex through, a mutual friend of ours named, Donald Alderman, I think back in 2008. I think it was about 2008 and then we had our first actual sit down conversation with another mutual friend of his an mine Garlin Rogers, I think six months after that. And then it came about that in 2012, I took a job with Goodwill. I was working, actually, I was over at one of the donation stations that. What I was doing was opening donation stations for them. And I had gotten from their main hub out of Dearborn, I'd gone out to a West Seattle, to Fauntleroy. And then they asked me to open up another spot over at University Village. And I was at university village. It was around Christmas of 2012. I was in a checkout stand buying lunch at the Safeway over there at the University Village. And saw one of those little women's journal magazines as they have at the checkout stand, about the average income for part time voice actors. Which at that time was 50 - \$80,000 a year. And I thought, wait a minute. I said, im in the communications field. I do television and radio broadcast programming and people were always telling me, what a good voice I had. So I decided to start looking at that. And it was from December of 2012 until about June or July of 2013. I was looking at different ways of getting into the voiceover industry and that's when I can across the program. And I really got involved with facing homelessness at that point because I went to Rex to say, "Hey, can you help me raise money to do this?" And he said, yes and he did. And you know, so that was the beginning of the end of my homeless cycle. Slowly but surely chipping away from it a little bit here and a little bit there at a time.

H: Do you have any other thoughts about how the block project has helped you grow?

C: So I've been homeless, I guess what, seven, eight years. I was homeless for seven, eight years. Right. Um, which I would average. It's like anywhere from a three to five years of most people who I know who are homeless. It's usually three to five years is about how long it takes to right that course. While being homeless and cause you see like I was that guy who was like, this could never happen to me. Because I just didn't think it could. I was like, "oh, those people, they just need to try harder. They should stop doing drugs or eat up. They should get their shit together." So that was me. That's the person that I was. And then I became one of those people. And so I saw it from a different lens at that point from, I went from being the, "Oh, how could this have possibly happened to me" to "why did this happen to me", to "who's to blame for this happening to me?" And you know, it always keeps coming back to me. Yeah. So I think the first thing I had to do was just realize that I created my own problems by my associations and affiliations. And in the process of doing that, I started acting a lot on social justice issues. The neat thing about the block project is that it addressed the growing concern of how to help a population that's at need without putting them at risk. Which is by in large what happens when they go into the shelter system.

H: Why did you trust that the block project was best option for you?

C: Because of Rex, I knew where it was coming from and I knew that the man's heart was good and I knew that, this was something that he was doing that he didn't have to do. The idea that, his community collateral, and his leveraged in the community or being known through the Jusy Say Hello Facebook page. I thought if he could pull this off to, that this is the probably the most viable alternative to going into a shelter. Shelters are oddly enough, much better than tent cities. But if it had been anyone else, but rex, I don't know that I would have looked at the project with as much enthusiasm or giving it as much honest consideration as I did. So a lot of it was who was doing it and because I knew of his community involvement and his community connections. I had a gut feeling that it was going to be a successful program. At the same time I had started, like I said, getting involved in social justice issues. Even when I went back to work, I found it very hard to get into an apartment because the rents have skyrocketed and, uh, reps have gone up 25% over a three year time span. And that just made it impossible for anyone who wasn't earning something like, I think it was a several years ago, they said that in order to live in Seattle, you have to have an income of \$72,000. And I thought that's \$6,000 a month they're charging! I looked at studio apartments that were like \$1,000 a month, one year that were \$1,500 a month two or three years later, which didn't make any sense to me. The lack of rent control. It was very hard, you know, small, private, land lords, to get them to understand that just because you can get \$2,000 a month for a 50 year old apartment, doesn't mean its worth \$2,000 a month?

H: What was your role during the construction of the block home?

C: Because I wasn't sure what I was going to be getting into. So I didn't really know what it all was all going to really look like. I had never really seen even the idea of a block home or seen what it was going to look like until April of 2018 when I was at Emanuel House Winter Shelter run by the Union Gospel Mission in Phinney Ridge, because I don't really like downtown, all of that match. And it was one of the cleaner, safer saner places to be, small population. I got invited to an open house for a block home over at Beacon Hill and then wound up being invited to stay in the basement of that house while my Block Home was being constructed here in Greenwood. So the first time I actually saw a block home, actually when I went to Beacon Hill and I thought, "wow!" I didn't really have anything to do with the planning or the construction of it. I did help out a couple of times over here in Greenwood as far as showing up. I got meeting people just getting no good. These are my neighbors. Uh, and what have you during the construction of my blog called, but at that point I was already working. I was fake voter's registration. I had just gotten a new cat and stuff like that. Well, you know, just a lot of things started happening rather quickly. Very. The, uh, the spring of last year, spring or summer of last year allow thanks. How'd it happen? Maybe really quickly. And because I was so busy running around and to do my voters registration stuff, it was almost like, wow, this is amazing that this is happening and it's happening and it's happening. Is it going to happen? But its happening. Never having participated in the construction of a home before. I was not really aware of some of the nature of the unforeseen setbacks that could come from building a structure. You know, usually every place I've ever lived was already, you know, done, been done. Building this block house, that was truly an exercise in me developing patience, which I don't know that I perform and exercise all that well. It was a very trying and very frustrating thing because I just wanted in. I really just wanted in, and it seemed like every time, it was always a, for one step forward, two step back sort of situation. It seems like every time I thought, okay, we got it done, something else would come up that knocked it back like two weeks or a month. And I just thought at one point I just threw my hands up in the air and I just said, you know, "I'll probably be a senior citizen by the time this thing gets complete. Its never going to happen."

H: What's your relationship with the host?

C: So I met David and Visala in May of 2017. We thought that my house would be finished by the end of the summer of 2017. Ideally I thought I would have a year. I knew that my homeowners, we're building another house out in Maltby when I met them, but their house was a year away from construction. We figured that I would be in this house at least six to nine months before their house was finished. Uh, as it turned out, there was actually some 15 months or so, so their house was completed and they had moved before I even moved into mine. So my relationship with the homeowners is that they're absent. We know of each other. We agreed to live together and stuff like that. Uh, but we didn't have the chance to be on the property together because of all of the setbacks that came from building my home. Uh, and process they house was completed and they had moved. So what by the time I finally moved into my place, they had relocated. That to me was really disappointing because I was really counting on having my homeowners there to introduce me to my neighbors. Because at this point, and it still to this day, I mean, I met like a dozen or so people who, I don't really remember their names. I'm not all that sure about what they even look like. I just don't have that bridge with the community. Now don't get wrong. My neighbors are very nice. They're cordial, we speak to each other as they go by and stuff like that. They tell me how nice to place looks and how they are to have me there. But, I couldn't tell you what their names are or where they live on the street. I remember one person's name only because I remember the bald headed guy. I would have liked to have gotten in there while the homeowners are

still occupying the house full time. But at this point in time I was just sort of like, I guess getting to know my neighbors like anybody else would. I mean, you move into a neighborhood, you just meet your neighbors over time individually. And so that's how I'm doing it. I mean there's one gentleman and his children that come by and then there was a lady up the street and her husband and two children who will stop by from time to time. There's a woman from across the street, what have you. So I'm slowly getting to meet my neighbors. I guess the way anybody, when you just move into a neighborhood, you know, over time, slowly but surely.

H: Now that you've participated as a resident, do you have any second thoughts or regrets?

C: No, I don't. My only regret is that I don't have my homeowners there to navigate me through the who's who on the block sort of thing. You know. They have a nice young man who's living in the house now who works at their sons store that is run out of the house. I see more of the airbnb people. Everybody loves the cat. That's my cat. My cat is now my entree to the neighborhood. We love your cat. That's a beautiful cat. And I was like, well thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Oh your place its nice. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We're in good standings, I believe. I just, I just thought I thought it would be easier, you know. I wasn't really sure how, the neighborhood would perceive or react to my moving in.

H: Has anything from your experience surprised you?

C: Surprises? Not really no. People are nice. I think in the beginning because, like you, two of my neighbors who have children in school who decided to do a report on the block project as well. And then a neighbor of Rex's had their daughter come by who's also was doing a report on the block project. I feel that a way of paying it forward, or way of paying it back, is to be there to explain to people what the project is, how the project works. To show that, you know, this is, this is not like I'll fly by night type of situation. This is a situation where, you know, if it really takes a village to raise a child and it takes a community to resolve the homelessness issue. This is a good example of how a community can come together and help those members of the community that are struggling with the whole housing issue. And I liked the idea that there is, a level of notoriety and the idea that ultimately they would like to have one of these on every block and Seattle, which I think there's a lofty goal, but I think it's a very doable goal and maybe two or three decades we could probably be to that. There are a lot of blocks in this City. There are 27 neighborhoods that's make up the city of Seattle. I though I don't know that they're going to get on in Broadmoor, or places like that.

H: Would you consider a future participation in the project?

C: Yeah, I think that, you know, cause what I'm doing, you know my social justice or repertoire, now I'm working with Jay Inslee back in January of last year. 2018 put together the poverty reduction work group where members of social services and business communities are getting together to discuss how to alleviate poverty with Washington state residents in nontraditional formats. So we're thinking outside of the box of the things that we can do to help people. And we were looking at poverty through a specific lens of both ethnic and socioeconomic standpoints. So we're not trying to do the, oh, go to welfare and get a job, blah, blah, blah. And then we had things like what they're doing without people who are on disability. If we paid you to go to school to go to skill, that would give you a family wage. Would you be interested in getting an education to get out of poverty? If we put together housing options, like the block project, a similar type project, along with the education component to get you out of poverty, is that something you would do? Were looking at the systemic views of racism, gender bias, ability phobia stuff. So we're looking at it from the perspective of our single parents, blacks, Latinos, people who are emotionally in need, you know, who have a special needs. We're not looking at it from the traditional, is that, okay, we're going to put \$1 million into that pot and you guys are just gonna like bill, like tiny houses. We're not looking at it from that perspective. We're looking at it from the way of how do we get people out of poverty, out of homelessness and help them retain that lifestyle. Retention to me is a very big key to anything that I, that I do from this point going forward. Because it's one thing to say, okay, here's a, here's a block house, here's a job. But what underlying, I call it the, CNS community network services, what sort of community network services are needed locally for the individual because some people are disabled, so they're not going to be able to travel to get the goods and services that they need. Other people may be in a situation where they have to. The Beacon Hill house, when I was there one thing I noticed was that services were remote. You had to travel to do your banking to do you do your shopping, if you wanted to go to the post office, if you needed to get to the dentist or anything like that. What I like about the Greenwood house is that everything that I would need is, if not right outside my front door, like the dentist across the street, the vet right next door, the bus right outside on the corner, is within walking distance. I can walk three blocks and I've got groceries, I've got a pharmacy, I've got a bank, a barbershop, stuff like that.

H: Where do you see yourself in five years?

C: Five years from now, five years from now. I do not expect to be in the block home I expect to be in the block I said to rex probably two to three years at most. I would like to move to Shoreline. At this point I'm going to finish up the Poverty Reduction Work Group, which is due to wrap up. Well, ideally we would have to be going for two years, but we get a lot of support from DSHS and she wants us to continue after the initial two year period. To just keep working on it because we realize that, okay, we have two years to come up with a proposal and we've already sent it out, preliminary report to the governor and we'll be meeting again next week I said, matter of fact, Wednesday and Thursday. We're going to be doing a meet and greet. So we've got to have all of the different state agencies along with all of the committee members and steering committee members meeting up. Ideally going forward I want to continue that work. I don't know how that will impact my work on the northwest harvest advisory committee because I also nutrition, I just did an article for the northwest harvest newsletter where I outlined my work with poverty reduction work group. Like I say, we looking at poverty from a systemic point of view because we know that racism and bias plays a part in it. We know that gender plays a part in it. We know that a person's ability or lack thereof plays a part of it and that we know that education plays a part in it. So going forward I want to continue that work, but I also want other people to have the benefit of having a block home in their community like this. So I don't see myself trying to like, you know, sit on that property and bogard it, you know. I want to get in there, do what I have to do to get back on my feet and put myself in a good situation. I know that I'll be ready to move on, to move forward when I have six months of income in the bank. Then once I get to that point where I have six months savings in the bank and I still have a solid stream of income coming in on top of that, that's when I know I'm ready to go for it. And I think within two to three years that is very doable. That's why everything that I want to do while in the Block Home, I take a lot of time thinking about, well, how do I get this done without violating the lease agreement? So that I leave the place exactly the same way that it was given to me, for the next person.

J – Block Resident 3

4/28/2019 at 2:08pm

H: Can you tell me your age?

J: 38

H: How long have you lived in Seattle

J: Four months.

H: Where have you been living?

J: What do you mean, before that? Mary's place in North Seattle.

H: How did you first become aware of the block project?

J: My housing specialist at Mary's place was aware of it before I came to Seattle because the first block house resident was through the Chief Seattle Club, and she works with both Chief Seattle Club and Mary's Place.

H: Were there other housing options available to you? If so what were they?

J: Rapid Rehousing, but it was not a feasible solution.

H: For what reasons?

J: Because it would have taken 60% of my income and my income is already very low.

H: Are you comfortable sharing the circumstances that led to you being homeless?

J: Domestic violence is how it's classified, but abusive relationships. Abuse in short.

H: How has or hasn't the block project help you heal through or address that trauma?

J: Well, it's been such a short period of time. I'm not sure it has yet.

H: Is there anything about it that feels different? How have you initially felt about it in the first couple of weeks you've been there?

J: The people that work for the block projects are looking out for me and it's a safe space, not just that house, but the block project itself and the people like my host family. Everyone is aware of the fact that I came from a situation that was abusive and they're working to keep me safe.

H: Why did you trust that this was the best option for you? How did you decide finally to choose the block project?

J: Because it's free. That was the best solution at the time. It gives me a real chance to get on my feet again.

H: At what point during the construction of the house were you contacted or was the house already completed when the option was made available to you?

J: The house was completed except for a few finishing touches. And that was early March, we got to tour it and I had some trim stuff and it needed a rain gunner was all that was left.

H: What's your relationship with Lexan Marjon now that the home is finished?

J: They are so so sweet. They offered me friendship and a beautiful yard to live in. They're trading flower starts with my mom. And they were so welcoming, my first night I had dinner with them. That was so fun. And when I stayed with my mom over Easter, all they wanted to know was when I would be back and then they went in and they turned the heat up for me because they suggested I turn it down when I leave, which made sense. And I came home to a nice warm home.

H: Having them now be your most immediate neighbor, how do you imagine that relationship progressing?

J: Mom was a little jealous yesterday because she said that they're going to have more contact with me than she will.

H: So far do you have any second thoughts or regrets about participating in the block project?

J: No, the only thing that frustrated me was the limit of hours on guests. I wish I could burn candles, or incense, but seriously, just minor stuff and not stuff I've had access to in a while. Anyways, so it's not bad. And I totally understand the need for keeping this structure safe from possible damage.

B: So I want to say I'm very unbiased here. I don't care what you say. You don't have to be nice or anything like that. I'm very neutral, I should have said that before. I kept thinking, I don't want to interrupt, but I just want to make that clear. This is not going to hurt you in any way. I'm not taking this back to the office.

H: Has anything from your experience with the block project surprised you?

J: How kind everyone is. How generous everyone is. How much everyone is interested in helping me, and getting my needs met.

H: Would you consider future participation in the project?

J: Oh, definitely. When I first went and I thought that I was going to get a different apartment and then learned that my interpretation or whatever. The other housing option was not going to work, before I learned it wasn't gonna work. I learned about the Block Project and toured the house and I was like, I definitely want to be volunteering with this later when I'm up on my feet again.

H: Where do you see yourself in five years?

J: Hopefully in Port Orchard with a welding job and a vehicle. I'm going to be enrolling in a welding project. I have to find out all the details still. It's welding for the Navy and they provide the education. I've already had a welding internship, but a month after I started it moved from Arizona to California and I wasn't invited to follow. But I'm good at it, which is rare for aluminum welding and I really enjoy it. The funny thing is I had this dream of living the Port Orchard years ago, because it's within driving distance of my mom, but at the time she was still driving and I was like, "oh, well then it's not so close that she'll just feel free to hop over." But it's also close to my sister and her family. There's lots of land that's undeveloped and I can build a house on.

H: Do you mind if I go back and ask you a couple of questions about how long you were homeless?

J: About a year. My ex said something to me. I was on my way home from a friend's after losing track of time and I called him and I said, "I'm on my way home." And he says, "oh, well," and that was the instance that the home that we had together, it was no longer home, and that was last April.

H: And then how long till you found Mary's Place?

J: I found Mary's place in December, but I didn't come up to Washington until November. My mom has been here since 2008 I think. I'm not sure, but I was in Arizona from 2002 to 2018 minus about a year in Iowa.

H: Was the impetus to come up here to be closer to family?

J: I also knew that with the situation with my ex that there were a lot more resources here than there. I mean, I spent from April until September trying to get out of his house. And having no resources in the area with which to do that, because I was in his house, I couldn't get any benefits because of his income. The only thing I could have done was go to a shelter. But down there, the shelters wouldn't have offered me much help at all because with my food allergies and my environmental allergies, it would have been a dangerous environment for me. So it was like either be uncomfortable here or be possibly exposed to allergens that can kill me here. So neither were great. But thankfully my ex was never physically violent.

H: Now you feel comfortable in the block home and you feel like that's going to give you a place to get on your feet?

J: Yeah. In fact, things are already looking up. My mom, she's disabled, and she was just given more hours of assistance. The person that she has helping her can't fill all those hours. So I mean there's a process and everything, but it looks like I'm going to be filling in those hours, which means a couple times a month I'll go down for the weekend and spend time with her, work for her, spend the night and then come back up. And then I get compensated for the time that I spend working for her and also the travel. So it'll affect my income with the state, but it won't affect my mom's income. But I'll also be earning money instead of just getting state aid.

H: What do you think this next month looks like for you as you move in?

J: Lots of appointments. Lots of things that have been put off. Some more family events. This month has been pretty crazy. And I think there were three different times that I was moving stuff and because I had stuff with me at the shelter. My sister was holding stuff in her storage. My

sister was holding stuff at her house, plus the rest of the stuff at my mom's house. And on last Tuesday, I finally got the last of it. Plus Easter and my sister's birthday.

H: Where does your sister live?

J: Auburn. Not far from my mom. But still lots, lots and lots of appointments and missed phone calls. Still lots to do.

H: I'm interested to know what kind of ongoing social services support you receive while being in the block home?

J: Because of coming from Mary's Place and with this, being part of Mary's place and is still considered homeless but housed. Its intermediary. I'm still technically under Mary's place and I've still got, because this is temporary housing. I'll be there six to 12 months depending on how long I need to be there. I still got a housing, well two housing specialists that are helping me there, and I've got an advocate with a domestic violence survivor advocacy group. I'm getting mental health care.

H: Do you think you're getting all the right support that you need?

J: I think so. I think sometimes it's not the right amount. My counseling, like clinicians calendar is super full, so I think I'm going to be switching to another one even though I love her. She's great. She's also really far away. She's down in Auburn. I started that process while I was in Auburn at my sister's in November. I've learned that there's a place that's closer and I can go to more often more frequently. So that'll be helpful. It's good.

H: Is there anything else you'd like to share or any questions you have for me?

J: Not that I can think of on the sharing part. I'm curious, what you plan to do with all this information and what do you plan to do after graduating?

H: I hope that this product can have people reflect on the stereotype of the perceived homeless person in Seattle, and humanize the experience. I hope it can motivate the individual to take more action and communicate that it does take collective action.

J: I know Mary's place helped me. Well, I don't think I ever really fit the stereotype of homeless because I was never on the streets. But then, I think it was in late February, I was in downtown and I got this bag and my shoes because of Christmas gifts from Mary's place, gift cards to Payless shoes. And I happen to be carrying this person and wearing my new shoes and I was in downtown going from someplace to someplace, and somebody was asking me for donations and I'm like, "I'm in a shelter." And they're like, "wow, you don't look like it." So it's like, well thanks. But you know, it looks can be deceiving.

H: What role has family support played in this process?

J: I haven't had a huge amount of support just because of proximity, but there has been support. Although when I had the option of going from Bellevue versus North Seattle or downtown, because that was another option that was presented to me at one point. My mom was like "Bellevue." So I went that route and found out that the information I was presented with was not accurate, which is how I ended up coming back to the block project. Because Bellevue is a lot closer to my family has also, I grew up in that area. I never was a Seattleite until I came to Mary's Place. So I always felt like a Seattleite but never lived here until now. The support was great for getting out of Mary's Place. And when we learned the truth about the Bellevue option and learning more about this, it was obviously a great option. And my mom and my sister were supportive of that. My sisters supportive, but her health and the fact that she has three teenagers makes it harder and she's also still in an abusive relationship. And that complicates it.



DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

February 6, 2019

Dear Hayden Campbell:

On 2/6/2019, the University of Washington Human Subjects Division (HSD) reviewed the following application:

Table with 2 columns: Field Name and Value. Fields include Type of Review (Initial Study), Title of Study (Exploring the Disruptive Potential of Community Based Planning Practices at the Neighborhood Level: An Ethnographic Case Study), Investigator (Hayden Campbell), IRB ID (STUDY00006644), and Funding (None).

Exempt Status

HSD determined that your proposed activity is human subjects research that qualifies for exempt status (Category 2).

- This determination is valid for the duration of your research.
• This means that your research is exempt from the federal human subjects regulations, including the requirement for IRB approval and continuing review.
• Depending on the nature of your study, you may need to obtain other approvals or permissions to conduct your research. For example, you might need to apply for access to data or specimens (e.g., to obtain UW student data). Or, you might need to obtain permission from facilities managers to approach possible subjects or conduct research procedures in the facilities (e.g., Seattle School District; the Harborview Emergency Department).

If you consider changes to the activities in the future and know that the changes will require IRB review (or you are not certain), you may request a review or new determination by submitting a Modification to this application. For information about what changes require a Modification, refer to the GUIDANCE: Exempt Research.

Thank you for your commitment to ethical and responsible research. We wish you great success!

Sincerely,

Dana Gold, MA
IRB Administrator, Committee D
Email: deg4@uw.edu
Phone: 206.543.5602