

Governor's Poverty Reduction Work Group – 4/18/19 Minutes

Agenda, Materials, Posters, Resources and Handout's from Meeting 14, April 18th, 2019 can be found [here](#).

Morning session: Racial Equity Training

Racial equity training was provided by Noah Prince, who used materials from White Men as Full Diversity Partners (WMFDP). The goal was for each of us to make a personal commitment to shifting racial equity dynamics.

Four Paradoxes of Diversity Partnerships:

Individuals/Groups – we each have an individual identity and a group identity.

Sameness/Difference – we can both see sameness and see difference; we have to hold both.

Responsible/Not my fault – we can both take responsibility for change and know it's not our fault.

Support/Challenge – we can both support people on their path and challenge them to improve.

Not one of these has complete bearing on who each of us is.

The group caucused in racially-identified groups to learn more about culture and behavior.

Other Business

Spokane and Wenatchee Meetings

Lori Pfingst spoke about possibly holding the June PRWG meeting in Wenatchee. Some steering committee members will be there already, speaking at a forum on the 19th. We need to figure out how to support travel costs for community-based organizations, so PRWG discussed how to support travel financially.

Tim spoke about the possibility of holding a PRWG meeting in Spokane. Spokane has an integration approach in agencies and in their WorkSource, which would be good to observe and explore. There's a youth center that has incorporated trauma-induced care. Human services are going to be integrated soon as well.

TANF and other Means-Tested Benefits Policies/Programs (see attached PowerPoint presentation: Race Women Welfare – Meeting 14.pptx)

Julie Watts facilitated a discussion on the history and policies surrounding means-testing in the U.S.

Main Points:

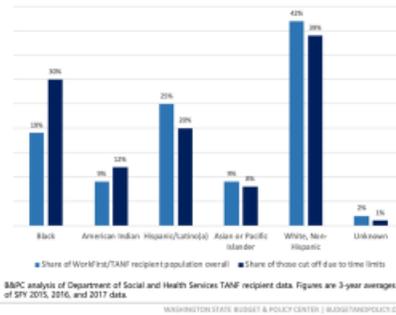
- 1900's - Industrial revolution first means-tested programs for families with children – called “mothers pensions” or widow's pensions”. Black mothers were barred from receiving benefits.
- 1935 – New Deal and “Aid to Dependent Children” (ADC) comes along. But states are allowed to bar Black women from aid.
- Not until the 1960's was the eligibility extended to Black women. However for the next 30 years some media, political leaders, academics begin pathologizing poverty and blackness. I.E. Ronald Regan – “Welfare Queen”
- Response is Washington's WorkFirst program in 1997. And the early 2000 recession brings harmful policy changes. Grant levels cut, shorter “cure periods” etc.

“These findings are consistent with research done in other states, which reveals that *racism* – in the form of caseworker bias and structural barriers to economic security – is to blame for the disparate rate at which recipients of color (especially those who are Black) are penalized under TANF.”

- Liz Olson, State Priorities Partnership Fellow, B&PC



Black and American Indian families are disproportionately penalized by harsh WorkFirst time limit policy
Individuals by race/ethnicity as a percentage of all WorkFirst recipients and as a percentage of those removed due to time limits, Washington state, 2015-17



- Raising new questions for consideration on addressing racial disparities – to create “race neutral” anti-poverty policies.

Laura Armstrong and Cecilia Gonzales, La Casa Hogar participated from Yakima via “Zoom”. Take away from their discussion.

- History of [La Casa Hogar](#) started as Yakima Interfaith Coalition. Faith leaders coordinated to help with emergency services in the community. Rental assistance, energy assistance, food, clothing.
- Then became a child care center based on what families needed.
- In 2010 their Citizen Program began and they focus on non-emergency issues such as Adult Education, Pre GED certification, English classes, Nutrition, Driving and Literacy, and childcare/parent education.
- They have a budget of \$700,000 and 16 full time employees.
- Primarily funded by foundations, corporations, fundraising and private donations.
- Small portion of revenue are from fees collected from clients for different classes they offer.
- We heard from both Laura and Cecilia on ideas on how the system can work better for their clients. Two main concepts were not enough flexibility in the deliverance of the programs around TANF and help with navigation of the TANF systems.
- Patty Lally will be incorporating all the recommendations discussed in the PRWG Work Plan document as part of the recommendations process.

Marcy Bowers, Steering Committee thoughts around TANF.

- Feels like all programs have a one size fits all approach
- Rural members feel frustration that everything is funneled through agencies. Perhaps consider a place that is not so agency-centric, i.e. a church.
- There is a sense of gate keeping and needing to know the secret ways
- A lack of transparency or clarity about what all the gatekeeping policies are. Example, what are the reasons for decisions or policies, or when exactly are these policies relevant.

Presentation and Recommendations from Service Providers

Presentations were provided by Asian Counselling and Referral Service (ACRS), Chief Seattle Club, DSHS/Community Services Division, Department of Commerce and Employment Security Department (ESD)

Victor Loo, Director Practice Innovation at ACRS-noted barriers included:

1. WA Healthcare Finder website: Too many choices of insurance; causes confusion for people with limited English language or limited digital literacy.
2. People of color, immigrants, and refugees cannot afford health care and choose not to have a qualified health plan and must pay the fee every year.
3. Staff members at ACRS mostly use English as a second language, and they have found it difficult to pass the test to become a 'healthcare navigator'.

ACRS-noted solutions:

1. Open Access: Same-day access
2. Funding allocation and support of community-based organizations to customize an application for Medicaid and other benefits using their own languages.

Chief Seattle Club (CSC) – Nawiishtunmi Conner and Colleen Chalmers presented, and began with an acknowledgment that we're on Duwamish land. CSC's mission is about taking care of each other and relatives in need. They assist 130 individuals per day (5 years ago they assisted approximately 80/day; there has been an increase – the crisis is worsening). In 2016, a Native individual in Seattle was 7 times more likely to be homeless than a white person. CSC helps clients enroll to receive benefits, and they provide culturally-relevant services and activities.

CSC-noted barriers:

1. They need to have the case manager tell their story, but clients often shut down when sharing their stories with the case manager.
2. Pride in contributing through work causes some clients to fail SSI or SSDI interviews.
3. Evaluation of Native individuals experiencing homelessness was inaccurate in 2017, 2018, and possibly 2019, and counting accurately is vital to providing equitable services.

Updates from DSHS, Commerce, and ESD

DSHS – Babs Roberts

They did facilitated focus groups and community forums regarding how CSD delivers services and how they are perceived. They wanted to do it in a way that was safe for clients, so they partnered with CBOs and Annie E. Casey to provide purchase cards to compensate individuals for participating. This outreach took place Dec. 2017 through April 2018, and reached 120 clients, in the Vancouver, Olympia, Seatac, Federal Way, Seattle, Omak, and Spokane. Some major themes that emerged were:

- a. Lack of affordable housing;
- b. Lack of job opportunities that could pay for housing and other expenses;
- c. Kinship care givers did not have enough resources to care for children;
- d. LatinX customers said seasonal employment was a barrier;
- e. Cash benefits, such as Basic Food Assistance and Child Care Assistance were the most important to people;
- f. The benefit levels were too low to meet basic needs;
- g. Cliff effect when they earned slightly more money and they did not have time to stabilize their household;
- h. They needed wrap-around services when moving off of benefits (with the same sort of support that a union gives to certain workers). They felt they got punished for doing what CSD was asking them to do;

- i. The number of processes was a significant burden (the amount and complexity of paperwork);
- j. They told stories about getting information;
- k. The CSO is scary, smelly and lacked confidentiality, and lacked a place for kids to be kids;
- l. Hours needed to be expanded to weekends and evenings, to provide other hours to interact with financial workers;
- m. They need a stronger referral process between agencies;
- n. Clients don't feel understood or valued, and sometimes feel devalued when dealing with CSD.

Dept. of Commerce – Dianne Klontz

Aberdeen, focus groups in 2019 with 200+ people to talk with people experiencing homelessness. They asked 10 questions that got at their homelessness situation and what Commerce can do differently to help. Commerce is working on its statewide strategic plan.

- o. The negative perception and bias in the community about what homelessness is;
- p. Lack of employment and job training;
- q. Lack of affordable housing;
- r. Lack of funding
- s. Lack of understanding about what the federal government can do about it.

Suggested Solutions:

- Increase affordable housing
- Increase temporary housing (good, functional tiny houses, communal living)
- Safe parking for people living in cars
- When the most vulnerable among us thrive, we all thrive;
- Renovate empty buildings for low-income housing.

ESD – Tim Probst

We want agencies to be jointly accountable for us to succeed. We don't want pilots, we want permanent system reforms. Career Connect WA put the onus on local teams to find solutions for youth – they got an adult mentor, a career plan, an internship or apprenticeship. They had 17 new businesses take part in providing internships. They provided GED education. The most important part for youth was the humanity of the adult mentor helping them. The EcSA initiative incorporates input from people experiencing poverty from the very beginning of designing EcSA projects.

There are federal and state complexities that have stopped us in the past from making changes. At some point, we are going to have to say to the federal government, we know this isn't consistent with the rules but we're going to do it anyway, so it'll take courage as we go to make changes.

Discussion of Recommendations

Patty touched on whether we are going to be looking at big, system-wide recommendations, or a number of smaller, discrete recommendations. The Steering Committee members provided recommendations to be populated by Patty Lally into the PRWG Work Plan.

4:00pm-4:45pm - Some PRWG members toured the Chief Seattle Club.