

Hello, my name is Heather Post, and I'm speaking in support of the Best Starts for Kids Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative implementation plan.

I have experience working with youth and families on both sides of the homelessness spectrum. As a case manager on YouthCare's homelessness prevention team and as a housing specialist working with homeless youth and families.

I have seen youth and families become homeless for a multitude of reasons that many people might not necessarily equate with homelessness. I have seen many families have to make a choice between paying to fix a vehicle (so they can keep their job) and paying their rent. I have seen youth and families who got sick, and even missing a few days of work was enough for them not to be able to make their rent. I have seen youth and families who were over drawn just *a few* dollars, but by the time all the overdraft fees were added up, found themselves several hundred dollars in the negative and unable to come up with all of their rent. I have seen youth, who were stably housed with family members get kicked out because the utilities were too high and the family member could no longer afford it

Each and every one of these cases I mentioned could have been prevented with a little financial assistance and swift action. This is precisely the reason I feel that case management and flexible client assistance is a huge piece to preventing homelessness in King County. When you are poor, it is extremely difficult to save up for the unexpected, and the "unexpected" is the exact reason that many of our youth and families are facing homelessness. With a case manager that is able to act quickly, who knows the client and their situation, and has the ability to use their best judgement, we can prevent homelessness. There is no cookie cutter approach because the issue is so complex, which is why case manager discretion and flexibility is so important.

Comments from Heather Post
at the HHS meeting on
April 27, 2016

Too often, we wait until someone is literally on the streets before providing help. This is inhumane and inefficient. A stay in a transitional living program costs about \$4000 per month. Arresting a youth for "survival crimes" and putting them into juvenile detention costs over \$240 *per day*. (\$7,200)

Besides the financial costs, I don't think I need to explain the types of traumatic experiences being homeless leaves you vulnerable to, but they are very much real, and effects are long-lasting, and they are things that no family or young person should ever have to experience.

Thank you, and once again, I urge you to pass the implementation plan as written.