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January 4th, 2019

Dear friends on the Thurston County Commission and the Olympia, Lacey, and Tumwater City Councils,

I am writing to ask for help. Without a radical change in funding, SideWalk will be forced to close our coordinated entry program and lay off staff effective February 1st, 2019. Our current cash flow forecast shows that (at the current operating level) we will end the month of February with a bank balance of about -\$37,888. We are at risk of losing our entire organization.

Coordinated entry is mandated by the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Washington State Department of Commerce. The closure of our coordinated entry program jeopardizes hundreds of thousands of dollars in State and Federal funding for many other local organizations.

SideWalk's coordinated entry program costs \$179,000 annually to operate and - though the program is a public mandate - we receive just \$30,000 in public funding for the program. We have done our best to carry the responsibility for the mandates on behalf of our community by subsidizing the program with private funding. We increased fundraising 34% over the previous year and gained 317 new donors. However, the growth in regulations and requirements for coordinated entry has outpaced our growth in fundraising and we can no longer sustain the program with private funding. We are also concerned about continuing to ask private donors to carry so much of the financial burden of a public mandate.

In order to keep this vital program open, we need about \$40,000 by February and a commitment from local governments to **fully fund** its operating cost moving forward into the future.

What is coordinated entry?

At the surface, coordinated entry is a central point of access for people experiencing homelessness. Coordinated entry reduces runaround for our participants and creates a unified pathway to services and housing. It does this by networking housing and services together to accept referrals through a single point, using a single process.

This means that access to all the housing and shelter programs for homeless adults in Thurston County comes through SideWalk. People experiencing homelessness in Thurston County visited our program at the Community Care Center and the Lacey Veterans Hub about 5,200 times in the last year. Over the last few years, we have seen



an average of 1,168 *first-time visitors* each year. In light of all this, the \$30,000 in public funding we receive is inadequate to maintain a program of this volume.

A networked system

The purpose of coordinated entry is to:

- Reduce runaround and confusion for people experiencing homelessness
- Eliminate duplication of effort among service providers
- Enhance data collection for system planning
- Prioritize homeless households who are the most vulnerable or have the most severe service needs

Coordinated Entry is one component of a larger system change effort that includes:

1. Diversion services to rapidly move people back to housing before they enter the system.
2. A standardized, uniform assessment aimed at providing consistent, effective and swift access to needed services.
3. Rapid access to housing (including rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing) aimed at helping homeless households quickly exit homelessness and stabilize in permanent housing.
4. Tailored services to specific sub-populations (families, youth, adults, veterans, & DV survivors) at the appropriate level and time to meet households' needs.
5. Data and evaluation enhancements to inform planning and decision-making.

In order to meet growing State and Federal requirements, we have worked with local providers to create an adaptive service delivery system. There are approximately 187 pages of regulations and guidance from HUD and Commerce for coordinated entry - and these are only for the *current* regulatory regime. The regulations change and grow every year or two.

SideWalk works tirelessly to assist the county and the service community in maintaining compliance with these extensive regulations as best as we can. Unfortunately, without a local system of accountability, this means countless hours spent navigating complex interagency and intergovernmental relationships while shepherding the local service system along the way. We work with a multitude of planning and research committees to accomplish this and through these efforts our program has become the manager of a metaphorical supply chain of homeless services.





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Accomplishments

In spite of these complex challenges, we have been tremendously successful at keeping Thurston County at the cutting edge of service delivery. Our accomplishments include:

- Opening our coordinated entry program in 2011, when SideWalk was a brand-new organization
- Introducing rapid rehousing to the local system in 2012
- Establishing a “front-door” diversion program in 2014
- Launching, in partnership with Interfaith Works, the Vulnerability Index and the interdisciplinary VI Team in 2015. Establishing and managing a by-name list for improved service delivery, care coordination, and case management.
- Launching our veterans services in 2015, and integrating those services with other veterans providers at the Lacey Veterans Hub in 2016
- Establishing universal vulnerability-based referrals in partnership with the Family Support Center and Community Youth Services in 2017
- Integrating our services with healthcare systems through the Community Care Center in 2017

We are continuing to refine our Vulnerability Index and by-name master list, a comprehensive list of people seeking services, anticipating upcoming HUD requirements for local by-name lists and in keeping with best practices developed by communities on the forefront of homeless service delivery nationwide.

Moving forward

For SideWalk to continue building solutions for complex and ever-changing public homeless service requirements, we need increased assistance from our partners in both the county and city governments. We cannot continue to serve the volume of homeless adults in the community at our current level of funding. As previously stated, SideWalk will be forced to close our coordinated entry program and lay off our dedicated staff in the coming months without a significant change in our public funding structure. Please help us to continue this critical work.

Sincerely,

Phil Owen
Executive Director

