

SAN JUAN TEENS IN NEED OF HOMES

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Part I: The Current Situation on Teen Homelessness in San Juan County

Executive Summary:

Most Islanders do not know there is a serious teen homelessness issue on San Juan Island and the county as a whole. A small number shelter in vehicles or tents, but most are better described as “unstably housed” without a stable, safe place to live. They couch surf, staying at the homes of friends or family members on sufferance, often moving from one place to another. Some may trade sex for a place to stay, or have a similarly exploitative relationship. There are roughly eighteen such children ages 13-18 on San Juan Island, with a similar number on Orcas.

The reasons vary. The least common is that the entire family is homeless. More often the child is separated from their nuclear family. They may have been kicked out due to conflict with family or other household members or left home for similar reasons, up to and including personal safety. Often substance abuse or mental health issues, their own or of family members, are a factor. Some are staying to finish high school here after their family moved away.

There is no single organization responsible for assisting children not living in their family home and without a formal alternate home or responsible adult in charge of their welfare. Most of these children fall outside the purview of CPS. A number of other organizations are aware of and provide services to unstably housed teens including the Friday Harbor School District, County Juvenile Court Services, the Family Resource Center, SAFE San Juans, County Social Services, and Compass Health. Churches and private individuals help specific people.

Given our close knit community, these organizations often work together to help these children, but currently there is no shelter, foster care, transitional housing, crisis center or other program in the county that offers temporary or medium-term safe housing for unhomed teenagers. Most do have a provisional place to sleep and informal help from community members, but often neither the child or the household are getting the services they need to provide a stable workable situation for everyone.

An emerging solution for rural areas without shelter for teens is Host Home Programs. Building on the fact that many teens uncoupled from their families find refuge with other community members, such programs seek to create a safe and stable alternate home by providing some support and structure for both the child and the host household. Part II of this report is a more detailed look at Host Home Programs and some thoughts about creating one in San Juan County.

Numbers, Situation

Most people in the San Juan Islands do not realize that there is a serious problem of teen homelessness on San Island and the county as a whole. The problem is more or less invisible unless someone either knows of a specific child or works in job that has regular contact with these children. Partly this is because few are homeless in the sense

of living on the street (usually in a car or perhaps a tent) though there are often one or two teens in this situation. Most are more accurately described as unstably housed without a stable, safe place to live.

These kids are usually couch surfing with family, friends, or acquaintances, some less savory than others, and often bouncing from one home to another. One person described it as common cycle: A child experiences trauma, acts out in some way, is kicked out or leaves home and hangs out a friend's house. The parents in the home accept whatever reason is given for the child not staying at home and lets the them stay there, until the child acts out, is told they can longer stay, and they move on to the next place, and so on until they run out of places to stay, leave school or move away. Many of the adults in these cases are either unaware of what is really going on with the child and often either unable or unwilling to learn more about the child's situation and help them access the services they need, Many people feel it is simply not their business. There are some kids who may not easily be taken in, often because their families are so dysfunctional that other families are reluctant to get involved.

Some kids, especially girls, may end up staying with a "boyfriend," an older guy who is happy to let them stay at their place, and sometimes provide drugs, in exchange for sex. There are houses in the county where men, often in their 20s-30, who are happy to allow teens to hang out or even stay. These are known as "party houses," "flop houses," or "trap houses" because once you start staying in one, it is hard to get out.

Most kids who are not living at home continue to attend school where they have access to meals, showers and other basic needs. Most such kids can make it through their senior year, but their chances of actually graduating drop dramatically as they start performing poorly in school. A few can keep up their performance despite the instability of their living situation, and some may find a place stable enough to allow them to refocus on their school work.

There is no single definition of a homeless teen or central organization tracking such cases, but the consensus is there are roughly eighteen such children ages 13-18 on San Juan Island, with a similar number on Orcas. Friday Harbor School District San Juan Schools counted 23 of their students of all ages that meet their definition. (see Appendix A) There may well be some such kids who remain entirely off the radar. Kids who are home-schooled, withdrawn or dropped out, and who do not otherwise come to the attention of the police or courts, could slip through the net entirely.

Underlying Causes

Why are these kids without a safe, stable place to stay? There are many reasons. Perhaps the simplest is that their family is homeless and although still with their family unit, they share their parents unstable housing. On SJI. This usually accounts for only one or two teens. Most families either find housing eventually or leave the island, taking the children with them. In this, case, however, sometimes older teens may stay behind to finish high school. This also happens when the family leaves the island for work or

other reasons. While usually the parents will have made a formal arrangement for the child while they finish school, sometimes they leave this to the teen to arrange, or unexpected complications undo the arrangement, leaving the teen unstably housed.

In most cases, however, the child is separated from their nuclear family because of some kind of issue in their homes or personal lives. They may have been kicked out or left home because of conflict with household or family members. In the case of broken homes there may conflict with a new partner of the parent. Pretty much everyone familiar with the situation agrees the most frequent underlying cause of teen children being in this situation is addiction/substance abuse, either by adults in the household or the child, or both. Other mental health issues may similarly be the underlying source of conflict. The incarceration of a parent may leave the child in an unstable housing situation. It is more common for a child to be kicked out than to voluntarily leave home. Most children will remain in the family home even when parents are neglectful or abusive to the point that the home is neither stable nor safe.

Broader social issues also contribute to the complexity of the problem. The lack of programs to address teen issues is coupled with cultural blind spots regarding teenagers. Many people are fearful about teens and often do not realize how vulnerable they are or what their actual level of maturity is; often teens are perceived as more grown-up, knowledgeable and experienced than they actually are. Especially in our island community, which is seen as relatively safe, older kids are often granted a lot of freedom with little oversight, and they can all too easily get in over their heads. The high availability of part-time work, can grant kids additional independence, while putting them in the frequent company of young adults who work the same jobs but have lifestyles teens are not ready to handle.

Those under 18 face a number of challenges in accessing services. If they are under age, they cannot apply for state benefits in their own right; their family must apply for benefits, but most of the kids are estranged from their families. Getting necessary ID, like social security cards can take a month or more. Becoming emancipated can take months and has a high barrier of required financial self-sufficiency. Teens in this situation also are under a lot of stress, often are struggling with their own behavioral health issues and thus need a lot of support to jump through the hoops needed to access many services.

Given their lack of stable housing, children in this situation often don't get enough to eat, may have limited access to laundry services, and to showers or baths, lack of a secure place to store belongings, and lack of transportation to get to work, school, extracurricular activities, or to appointments with service providers.

Agencies Involved: Who Does What Now

There is no one organization responsible for assisting children not living in their family home and who do not have a formal alternate home or responsible adult in charge of their welfare. Because of this there is no body responsible for counting, tracking or

maintaining records of these children. Nor is there a single agreed upon definition for what constitutes a homeless teen or youth. (See Appendix A.) A number of agencies and organizations in the county are aware of and provide services to unstably housed teenagers.

CPS may have a role in such cases, but there are few resources for children who first come to their attention at an age older than 12. CPS first becomes involved when a case of abuse or neglect is reported to the agency. While CPS will act in the most serious cases, most situations reported to CPS do not result in any action. Most of these children fall outside the purview of CPS, for which homelessness per se does not constitute neglect or abuse. In a case where CPS does find abuse and neglect, two problems rise—there is an overall shortage of foster homes and available places are prioritized for younger children, and there are almost no foster homes in the county and none at all for teens, who often want to remain in the community.

All public school districts are mandated to identify students who are homeless according to the definition under the McKinney Vento Act. (See Appendix B). The federal government provides limited funds that can be used to provide the students with items and support they need to remain in school such as transport, food at school, showers, school supplies, books, clothing including winter clothes and gym clothes, and reduced fees. Although the schools usually will be aware of most cases of children no longer living at home, it may take time for this to become apparent. Due to confidentiality rules, aside from reporting suspected neglect or abuse to CPS, or truancy or other illegal behavior to the Juvenile Courts, the school cannot share information about children not living at home with social service agencies, but it can refer the kids to these agencies and encourage them to seek their assistance.

County Juvenile Court Services plays a leading role in identifying and supporting such children and the families of children who may come to their notice through truancy reporting, law enforcement, or other reporting that their child is homeless, locked out, out of control of the parents, sometimes by the parents themselves. A court may issue a finding either an At Risk Youth (ARY) or Child in Need of Services (CHINS) in cases where the child is persistently without the custody of a legal guardian. They have a case management system and can provide a number of types of support to families, some which are referrals to other service providers. Since there is no temporary or medium-term shelter or housing for teens, the Juvenile Court Services has identified this a significant gap in their ability to support unstably housed teens. As one staff member put it “there is no feeling worse than having 15-year-old in your office with nowhere to go for the night and no where you can take them.” Truancy is often a pre-cursor or early warning sign of the problems that cause teens to face unstable housing, and truancy reported to the courts is one way the family and its situation can come to the attention of those who can help the family access help. For teens though, once they are out their family home, they are less likely to be truant, as noted above.

The Family Resource Center assists people in the county to access available social services, and the juvenile court refers many of the kids experiencing homelessness to the FRC. The FRC estimates that they assist youths in a given year in the age range of 15-21. About 80% have been referred by the court or school and the remaining 20% show up on their own seeking help. Most of them are in contact with Juvenile Court Services, most of them are attached to the school in some way, and most of them have part-time employment giving them some access to cash resources. The FRC can help them get food, transport, health services, and counseling, and some time can help them access other material help. A place to stay, though, is a major gap.

SAFE San Juans provides a broad range of services for anyone who has experienced sexual assault or domestic violence including legal advocacy, therapy, medical services, support groups, and help accessing others services and temporary (three days) emergency lodging. However, the temporary lodging is not suitable for unaccompanied minors and currently there are no teen-specific support groups operating.

County Social Services through its social worker mainly works with families in need to access services for mental, health, addiction, maternal health, accessing Medicaid, and accessing family courts

Given the prominence of addiction/substance abuse, and mental health issues in driving teen homelessness, access to mental and behavioral health services is key. Compass Health is the main provider of mental health services and addiction services in the county. In general, mental health services are reasonably well available, including to teens in the county—through the schools, through SAFE San Juans, and through the courts. Compass Health offers Wraparound with Intensive Services (WISE) which provide comprehensive behavioral health services to Medicaid eligible individuals, up to 21 years of age, with complex behavioral health needs and their families. The program is very good, but there are not enough slots to meet demand, with a considerable waiting list. Compass Health has a counselor embedded in the schools. Other therapy offerings are often limited to a set number of sessions, less than needed to resolve complex issues. Teens often have a lack of trust and fear a lack of anonymity in this small community, which leads to an unwillingness to seek help. For addiction and substance abuse, services are very limited and this county has some of the worst availability in the state.

Given our close knit community, these organizations often work together to help these children. There is a Community Network -that meets quarterly, with representatives from government and non-profit social service agencies who share information about the services each offers and how to access them, so they can refer clients among them and share information with client's permission. They will each be using their own case management system, and there are a number of barriers to providing integrated case management.

Currently there is no shelter, foster care, transitional housing, crisis center or other program in the county that offers temporary or medium-term safe housing for unhomed

teenagers. Agencies that are working with these children usually first attempt to reconcile the child with the family, failing that they seek to find a relation or friend that can take them in, and finally look at any potential option. Given that there is no place for the kids to stay, even temporarily while these solutions are worked out, many involved in directly assisting the kids are tempted to put them up themselves; a highly problematic action, given their professional involvement in assisting the child. Most kids do have a provisional place to sleep and informal support from community members, mostly as private individuals or personal community connections such as school or church. Too often though in this situation, neither the child nor the household taking them in are getting the support and services needed to create a stable housing and living situation for all involved.

The County Homeless Task Force is working on a state-mandated Five Year Plan to address homelessness in the county and youth and teen homelessness is one area the plan is required to address.

Solutions?

An emerging solution for rural areas without shelter for teens is Host Home Programs. Building on the fact that many teens uncoupled from their families find refuge with other community members, such programs seek to create a safe and stable alternate home by providing some support and structure for both the child and the host household. State law regarding such programs have very basic bureaucratic requirements allowing local programs a fair amount of flexibility in designing such programs. The flip side of the low level of state direction is also the low level of allowed government funding including county funds, that can be used to support such programs. The SJI Family Resource in collaboration with Juvenile Court Services applied for a state grant for a pilot project to start a Host Home program in the county, (see Appendix D) but only two grants were given in the state and our county is too small to be a priority. The proposal provided for the three Resource Centers to have part-time social workers to recruit and support host homes and children matched with them, while the Juvenile Court Services would do background checks for host homes and provide trauma informed training to host home volunteers. Agencies are also looking at ways to provide basic needs such as showers, laundry, and transport for unstably housed kids. Washington State Department of Commerce recently put out a Request for Proposals for grants for Youth Homelessness Demonstration projects, but the requirements for the proposal were too onerous for San Juan County to develop a viable proposal. (see appendix C for link)

Part II of this report is a more detailed look at Host Home Programs and some thoughts about creating one in San Juan County.

Part II: Thinking About a Youth Host Home Program

Executive Summary: Washington state law lets organizations run host home programs with very limited government funding in which teenagers stay in unlicensed host homes. The programs are usually in rural communities, like San Juan County, that lack shelters, crisis centers or other programs to support homeless teens. The programs are local solutions that work with existing efforts to help teens not living in their own homes. They recruit host homes and match teens with a place to stay. They support host households with training, 24/7 crisis support, respite care, and perhaps financial or material aid. The programs provide case management to the kids living in host homes and help them plan for independence when they turn 18 and/or graduate.

The prospects for a host home program in San Juan County are good, given the local organizations committed to helping homeless teens and a community with a history of stepping up. To start, a host home program could develop and support volunteer hosts and support teams, and offer case management to teens living away from their family. In time, the program might also create small group homes, one style with structured support for teens dealing with addiction or issues needing more intensive support, and another with a less structured, boarding house-style environment for more self-directed teens who won't fit easily into a family home. Eventually, an ideal goal might be a public boarding facility/facilities for teens attending high school but not living at home.

A host home program here should be a close collaboration by the non-profit resource centers on San Juan Lopez, and Orcas and county juvenile courts and social services. Each could handle a different part of the program. In the pilot proposal by the SJI FRC, juvenile court services would do the background checks and a significant part of the training for host families, while the resource centers would do case management for the teens and some of the support for host families. SAFE San Juans could potentially support some services. A coordinator to do public outreach, recruit host homes and support families, and raise funds could work for the county or a resource centers. Juvenile Court Services and possibly public schools would be a key source of referrals to the program.

One challenge to recruiting host home will be overcoming the barriers to people agreeing to host a teen: space, cost, uncertainty about the responsibility; liability, and length of commitment, available support, and lack of trust. A team approach in which community support would include not just households that host a teen, but other who so volunteer to support a host family by offering practical help and moral support, back-up or respite care, and/or financial support or services to help cover costs of hosting a teen. Since most kids now are informally couch-surfing, one challenge will be figuring out how to take those informal, unstable situations and convert them into more formal, and service-supported host homes. Community groups could pledge an ongoing commitment to cover a month's worth of rent or mortgage costs for small group homes, and/or financial support for utilities/food/running costs of such homes.

Background on Host Home Programs in Washington State

LAW

Under Washington State Law (SHB 2440) (see appendix C for link) host home programs and host homes are not required to be licensed through the Division of Licensed Resources. A host home is defined as: a private home that volunteers to host youth in need of temporary placement and is associated with a host home program. For the purposes of host homes, a homeless youth is defined as: any youth, aged 12-17, who is homeless while not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian and is also not in the care and custody of DSHS. Generally, hosts provide family-like environments to youth and provide shelter, food, light transportation (if needed), day-to-day support, and mentoring, and to coordinate with the host home program to help the youth access additional services.

A Host Home Program is a nonprofit, tax exempt entity that recruits and trains host homes/families to provide temporary homes to youth. Host home programs match youth with a host, provide case management to youth, and support to hosts. The Programs recruit and screen potential host homes and perform background checks on individuals over age 18 residing in the homes and physically inspect host homes. They screen and provide case management services to youth in the program. They get written, notarized permission or limited power of attorney from the parent or legal guardian authorizing the youth to participate in the program, and update the authorization every six months as needed. If a host home program receives any government funding it must report each year to the state the number of children served, why each child was placed with a host home and where the child went after leaving the host home, including but not limited to returning to the parents, running away, reaching the age of majority, or becoming a dependent of the state. Host home programs may not receive more than \$100,000 per year of public funding and a host home/family may not receive any public funds.

Host home programs are usually in rural or low-density communities that lack shelter or other housing options for youth and where there are potential volunteer host families. Host home programs work best when community-driven and developed at the grassroots level in response to an identified need, though often this requires public education or outreach since rural teen homeless is often invisible. Host home programs and host families may not have the capacity or expertise to meet the needs of all homeless youth with significant mental health or substance abuse issues.

Relationships between the host home programs and the local CPS office vary. Some programs work closely with CPS case workers when a family needs services and does not screen in for CPS services. All the programs work closely with local schools, school staff, and/or the school district McKinney-Vento liaison. In many cases, teachers, school counselors, or the school district McKinney-Vento liaison will refer a youth to a host home program, as these people often know about a youth's housing instability or risk of homelessness long before community providers will have worked with a youth.

Best Practices in Existing Programs

Community: Host programs work best when small and community-driven, and involve local schools, faith communities, civic organizations and service providers. They work with community partners to refer youth they are already working with and provide case management to youth in their program. Host families need to be connected to and supported by the community around them, often by micro-communities or support groups that provide crisis and respite support and embed the young people in a community, rather than just a single host home. More eyes are on the youth support safety and well-being. Caring people in community step up to do a job that government either cannot or will not do. With limited state oversight, programs must be open book with their data and their practices since they work with vulnerable youth.

Matching: Youth should choose to be in the program and “matched” with rather than “placed” in host homes. The youth should be the driving force in the matching process. It is best if the youth and hosts have a shared identity in terms of race, class, queer identity. In some programs most youth are matched with someone they already know. For youth who do not have a pre-existing relationship with the match, they may get profiles of potential host families and select one that best matches the youth’s interests and identity. The profile should include the background check for the host, with host’s consent. Often the match process starts with an initial meeting to see whether the match is promising. The youth, not the program or the host, decides whether they would like to move forward. Thereafter, the host home program facilitates a “business meeting” where the youth and prospective host discuss what it might look like to live together, create a living agreement – addressing culture, communication, boundaries, hygiene expectations, quiet hours, contribution to household chores, guests, etc. – and develop a move-in plan. It is important that both youth and hosts have shared expectations. Having a written contract/agreement between the two sides can help create a shared understanding around what the living arrangement will look like.

Support to hosts: For volunteer host homes programs typically offer pre-match training covering topics like: Mandated reporter duties of the host home program, as required by SHB 2440; cultural competency; communication and conflict resolution; parenting versus mentoring; trauma-informed and de-escalation training; supporting someone with complex needs; homeless youth education rights. After a youth is matched host homes should get on-going training--often monthly, 24/7 crisis support, mediation when conflicts arise, and coordinated respite. Compensation to host homes is complex. State law prohibits host families from receiving any government funds, so financial support to host families must be privately raised. Host who are volunteers, rather than paid, gives young people the confidence that the host is interested in supporting young people for the “right” reasons, rather than for money. That said, often willing people who have existing relationships with youth cannot step up due to financial constraints, but maintaining relationships is critical for youth. Some programs offer small monthly stipends to help with increased costs, such as groceries. Others pay a portion of utility or cable bills directly to the company or provide gift cards for groceries, while still others

provide in-kind support like clothing, toiletries, school supplies, and phones and phone minutes to the host family. Recruiting volunteers to host homeless youth in their home is a lengthy and intensive process. To retain host families, it helps to have events or social gatherings such as holiday parties, potluck and, peer support groups.

Support to Youth: Programs provide ongoing oversight of host homes. Host home programs should provide youth with continued case management that supports access to: medical care; educational support; identification; and food, and hygiene and other basic needs, and set clear expectations, including frequency of staff visits with youth matched with a host home. They should have clear guidelines for parent/guardian family engagement practices. They help youths plan and set goals and establish ways to measure, reward and reinforce positive behaviors, motivate youth to do their best and commemorate all accomplishments large and small. Youth in host homes should receive a small stipend every month for incidentals, tied to maintaining school attendance and showing progress towards their goals. They should provide transition-to-adulthood planning including an exit plan for when the youth turns 18 and ensure they are not cut off from services by the transition.

Challenges: The legal requirement to get re-authorization from parents/guardians every six months can be difficult because many parents/guardians “disappear” after they have found a safe place for the youth to live. Some programs require parents or guardians to sign a form assuring that they will not receive any monetary benefit on the child’s behalf while the child is living out of the home, but this can discourage a parent from agreeing to their child’s participation in the program. Youth who have experienced trauma may liken host homes to foster care and resist being placed in a home environment. Host home programs may not have clinical expertise to serve vulnerable youth who have experienced trauma: some agencies partner with clinical agencies to provide case management for such cases., State funding restrictions limit government support to youth host programs and prohibit government financial support to host home families.

Variations: A few programs offer some additions or variations to the standard host home model. One has a drop-in center that provides food, clothing, shoes, hygiene products, and additional items – from community donations – to young people experiencing homelessness. Another program provides respite to families in stress by providing temporary host homes as part of a diversion program for youth when they come into contact with law enforcement. A similar but broader Safe Families for Children program allows families to request for their children ages 0-17 to stay with Safe Families volunteer hosts for one day to three months while a family addresses family instability, including short-term emergencies, hospitalization, or drug and alcohol rehabilitation.

See Appendix C for a link to full report on Host Home Programs in Washington

Creating a Host Home Program in San Juan County

As a small, close-knit rural community that cares deeply about taking care of our children and stepping up to protect the most vulnerable, San Juan County is in a good position to create a successful community-supported Host Home Program on the larger islands. Given the lack of any shelters, crisis centers or transitional housing, we need to offer both long term matches and short-term stays, so that all youth have a safe place to stay while a more permanent resolution is developed. Some family situations can be improved and the child can return, or find a stable place with a family member. Other will need an interim place to stay while a long term match is sought.

To start, a host home program could develop and support volunteer hosts and support teams, and offer case management to teens living away from their family. The first step in starting a host home program would be to designate which organizations would handle the key tasks: public outreach, recruiting host home volunteers, recruiting support volunteers, raising funds for the program, background checks, inspecting potential host homes, training host households, getting parent and guardian permission for teens to reside with a host, matching teens to host homes, providing 24/7 crisis support, case management for teens matched to host homes, organizing support groups, managing material and financial assistance to host homes and teens in host homes.

A host home program here should be a close collaboration by the non-profit agencies involved in helping teens, especially the resource centers on San Juan, Lopez, and Orcas, and county services. In line with the proposal put together by the SJI Family Resource Center a breakdown might be: on each of the three islands a person to do public outreach, host family recruitment, support family recruitment and fundraising- this position might be homed in one of the non-profits or with the county. The resource centers on each of the islands would provide case management to the teens needing placement and agencies that can provide training and support to host home households and case management to teens needing a place to stay and once matched. The matching process itself would be joint effort between the host home coordinator and the case manager. County Juvenile Court Services could do background checks and provide host home family training, possibly along with resource centers, SAFE San Juans, and Compass Health. The Resource Centers The schools and the courts could refer teens in a need of a place to stay to the host home program. program.

When the responsibilities are clear, the next step would be to undertake a public outreach campaign to inform the community about the need, to recruit potential host homes and community support for host homes, and to raise funds to support a host home program in the county. The campaign should seek to raise broad community awareness and concrete support. It should offer concrete ways that people can help and ask for both commitments and expressions of interest in being a host home, being part of a team to support a host home, and financial contributions to support the Host

Home Program. The Host Home Coordinator could create and maintain a database of people willing to help, and what kind of help they can offer.

One challenge to recruiting host homes will be overcoming the barriers to people agreeing to host a teen. Many people will be wary about accepting a teen into their home. They may not have the space, be concerned about the cost, worry about liability, feel unsure about support they can expect, or how long the commitment will be. Potential volunteers need to clearly understand the support that the host home program will provide including training, 24/7 crisis support, respite care, and to what extent financial or material assistance will be available. They need to understand the process, including how matching will work and about the written agreement with any teen they host. Finally, they should not be taking on the job alone. Each host family should have at least one and preferably two other households as part their team, to offer practical and moral support, to get to know teen, and to be available to ease the burden. Among other things non-host team members could offer respite care, contribute financially, run errands and help out the teen with transport, host meals, and just be a sympathetic ear.

Since most kids now are informally couch-surfing, the families acting as informal hosts are clearly potential host families. The challenge will be figuring out how to take those informal, unstable situations and converting them into more formal, and service-supported host homes. As noted, in some programs over half of host homes are recruited from families identified by the teens themselves.

A volunteer host home may not be an ideal solution for some unstably housed teens. Such teens fall into two broad categories. The first will be those with addiction issues or more serious mental or behavioral health issues who need more intensive services, a more structured environment, and supervision from adults with more training than will typical in a family home. The second group will be those who have often more or less fended for themselves much of their childhood, are more self-directed, but often with challenges in personal relationships, who will chafe at trying to fit in to an existing household structure and be answerable to host adults. Teens from these groups will often do better in a group home designed for their needs.

In time, to meet these needs, the program might create small groups homes, one style with structured support for teens dealing with addiction or issues needing more intensive support, and another with a less structured, boarding house-style environment for more self-directed teens who won't fit easily into a family home. The Host Home Program could rent or buy suitable homes, preferably in or near town with at least four bedrooms and recruit and train host adults parents or advisors. Ideally at least one person and maybe both people would have outside employment for a boarding style group home. For the more structured home one adult should probably be at least paid, employee with more intense training/experience. They get free housing/utilities and monthly stipend to cover food and incidentals for each teen in residence. Community groups could pledge an ongoing commitment to cover a month's worth of rent or mortgage costs for small group homes, and/or financial support for utilities/food/running

costs of such homes. Building budgets for such homes would be the first step toward setting this in motion.

In the meantime, providing for unstably housed teens with addiction and serious mental issues will be a challenge. As noted in Part I, addiction services are very limited in the county, and that is especially the case for teens. Mental health services are more broadly available, but still face many limits. In the recent past, there has been some debate in homeless advocacy about whether people should meet mental and behavioral health benchmarks before accessing stable housing, but now that debate has been strongly resolved in favor of “Housing First”, which is the philosophy guiding Washington State homelessness policy. Research has shown that it is nearly impossible for people to address mental and behavioral health issues without stable housing and so that has to be the first priority. Given this, we will need to work together to find a way to create stable housing for all our teens

Dreaming big and looking long-term, an ideal goal might be a public boarding facility/facilities for teens attending high school but not living at home, which could also serve teens from Shaw or other islands.

Appendix A: Definitions

1. Under the McKinney Vento Act:

The term “homeless children and youth”—

(A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and

(B) includes—

(i) children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals;

(ii) children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;

(iii) children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and

(iv) migratory children who qualify as homeless because the children are living in circumstances described above. [42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2)]

The term “unaccompanied youth” includes a homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

2. In the draft County Five-Year Homeless Plan:

Homeless individuals are defined as: People who are living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter, in transitional housing, or are exiting an institution where they temporarily resided if they were in shelter or a place not meant for human habitation before entering the institution.

People who are losing their primary nighttime residence, which may include a motel or hotel or a doubled up situation, within 14 days and lack resources or support networks to remain in housing.

Families with children or unaccompanied youth who are unstably housed and likely to continue in that state. This applies to families who have not had a lease or ownership interest in a housing unit in the last 60 or more days, have had two or more moves in the last 60 days, and who are likely to continue to be unstably housed because of disability or multiple barriers to employment.

People who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening situations related to violence; have no other residence; and lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.

Youth: Any person under the age of 18.

Definitions adapted from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to fit the needs and specifications of San Juan County.

Appendix B: People Interviewed for this Report

Kathy Hagn, San Juan County Social Worker

Linnea Anderson, Juvenile Court Administrator, San Juan County

Kim Bryan, Executive Director, Courtney Smith Program Manager, SAFE San Juans

Gordy Waite, Counselor, Friday Harbor High School

Jennifer Armstrong, Director, SJI Family Resource Center

Ashley Strutz, Caseworker, SJI Family Resource Center

Kari McVeigh, Superintendent, Friday Harbor School District

Melanie Kaegi, Juvenile Probation Counselor, San Juan County

Katie Forrest, Social Services Specialist Supervisor, Children and Family Services, DSHS

Appendix C: Links and Resources

Washington State MckInney-Vento Education for Homeless Student Guide:

<http://www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/pubdocs/School-Staff-Resource.pdf>

Washington State DOC Recommendations on Host Home Programs:

<http://www.commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Commerce-Host-Homes-Report-2017.pdf>

This includes the manual and all the forms used by a host Home Program in Island County. The forms include youth intake, youth application, host family application, host home safety checklist, parent responsibility and childcare authorization, host home and youth living contract, mandated reporter forms, and many others.

Washington State Department of Commerce Presentation on Youth Homelessness

<http://www.commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Commerce-Host-Homes-Report-2017.pdf>

State Law 2440 (2016) on Youth Host Home Programs

<http://lawfilesexxt.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2015-16/Pdf/Bills/House%20Passed%20Legislature/2440-S.PL.pdf>

Department of Commerce Request for Proposal for Youth Homeless Demonstration Projects:

<http://www.commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/YHDP-WA-BoS-Rural-Final-RFP.pdf>