



## MAYOR SCHELL'S ZERO HOMELESS FAMILY PLEDGE

On June 2nd, 1998, Mayor Paul Schell spoke to the press about the needs of homeless families, women and children. He asked for the City Council's support in providing "immediate emergency assistance to homeless families and single women, a critical step in providing lasting housing solutions for these families and individuals." He noted that "the problem continues to grow and we absolutely must find better ways to help people find and keep housing." He closed his remarks with a **firm pledge** that there will be no homeless families with children or homeless single women on the streets of Seattle by Christmas 1998. His pledge made headlines in both Seattle papers the next day.

Alan Painter, Director of the Community Services Division of the Department of Housing and Human Services, listened attentively to the new Mayor's remarks. Painter has dedicated his professional career to serving the needs of homeless people. He was proud and excited to hear Schell's passion and commitment to addressing homelessness in Seattle. At the same time, he viewed the pledge with some trepidation. Counting the number of homeless people on the street at any given time is notoriously tricky, influenced by many factors. Further, he wondered how this pledge would dovetail with City priorities and plans for dealing with homelessness. These plans emphasize services to homeless people rather than just providing beds and they stress the need for other jurisdictions to share in funding homeless services. The next six months promised to keep Alan Painter very busy.

### Homeless People in Seattle

*Homelessness in King County: A Background Report*, was published in February 1998 by the Seattle-King County Homelessness Advisory Group. The report begins with a profile of King County demographics and housing, and then describes the numbers and characteristics of the homeless population. Subsequent sections describe existing homelessness programs and their funding. Most of the data presented here comes from this report.

According to the Seattle-King County consolidated plan, there are at least 5,500 people who are homeless in King County on any given night. Of these, over 1,300 are on the streets, while almost 4,200 have temporary housing in shelters or transitional units. Thousands of people seeking shelter are turned away each year, primarily due to lack of

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space. In 1993, Operation Nightwatch assisted 16,615 people seeking shelter in Seattle. By 1997, the total climbed to 45,529.

The majority of homeless people range from 22 to 44 years old. Sixty-three percent (63%) of those receiving shelter are single males, 17% single females, with the remaining 20% spread among families and youth. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of people sheltered in King County in 1997, and 46% of youth sheltered in 1996 were people of color.

Of the approximately 1,300 people sleeping on the streets (not in shelters) on any given night in King County, 300 are families, 360 are youth and teen parents and 700 are single adults. Over 700 of these 1,300 homeless people are the "homeless families with children or homeless single women" Schell promised to get off the street in his June 2<sup>nd</sup> speech; the remainder are single men, or live in the county outside Seattle.

The shelter capacity in Seattle is higher for single males than for other groups. In 1997, 54% of homeless family units turned away from emergency shelter were single females, and 35% were families with children. Two-thirds of homeless families are single women with children. One quarter of all shelter clients is children. Over 2,000 youth living outside a family structure are estimated to be homeless in Seattle during a year.

Over 90% of the shelters in King County are located in Seattle, but the homeless people in Seattle shelters come from a broad geographic area (Figure One). Homeless youth apparently travel farther to reach the streets of Seattle.

**Figure One**  
**Previous Residence of King County Homeless**

<b>Last permanent residence of homeless person being served in King County</b>	<b>All homeless people (1997 survey)</b>	<b>Homeless youth (1996 survey)</b>
Seattle	53	28
King County, outside Seattle	16	35
Outside King County	31	37

The three major factors contributing to homelessness in King County are inadequate income, the high cost of housing, and personal or family problems, such as domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse or mental illness. Surveys of homeless people show rates of drug and alcohol addiction at about 65%. Research indicates that approximately 50% of homeless adults have a mental illness. Prominent reasons for homelessness among youth include emotional conflict in homes, drug or alcohol problems, physical abuse by a parent, and depression.

### **Seattle's response to homelessness, 1980-1997**

Under the leadership of Mayor Charles Royer (1978-1989), Seattle developed a national reputation for its comprehensive approach to homelessness. Seattle citizens approved two

significant property tax increases to support low income housing during the 1980s, raising \$50 million in 1981 and another \$50 million in 1986. Seattle received the National Alliance to End Homelessness Public Sector Achievement Award in 1990. The awardees noted Seattle's creative and coordinated approach as well as its financial commitment to fight the problem. Numerous individual housing and homeless projects in Seattle have received awards as well.

Mayor Norm Rice (1990-1997) continued this commitment to fight homelessness. Although King County voters rejected a countywide property tax increase to support low income housing in 1992, Seattle voters renewed their commitment to low income housing by passing a third levy in 1995. Reflecting the City's thoughtful approach and willingness to dedicate local funding to address the problem, Seattle receives one of the largest McKinney awards each year (federal money to support programs for homeless people). In 1998 Seattle received the eighth largest award in the nation.

Each year in King County, many millions of dollars are devoted to addressing homelessness. Major funders include the federal, state, city and county governments as well as United Way, public housing authorities and private foundations. The annual funding to operate and support homeless shelters in King County from all sources exceeds \$6 million. In addition, \$8 million is allocated each year to operate transitional housing units. Figure Two presents the distribution of the 4,073 units of housing for homeless people in King County by type and location. Ninety-one percent (91%) of all units are in Seattle, although Seattle represents less than one-third of King County's total population.

**Figure Two**  
**Housing Capacity for Homeless People in King County**

<b>Type of Shelter/Housing</b>	<b>Total Number in King County</b>	<b>% of County total in Seattle</b>
Emergency shelter and vouchers	2,236	92
Transitional housing	923	81
Permanent housing targeted for homeless people	914	98
<b>Total number of units for homeless people</b>	<b>4073</b>	<b>91</b>

In 1998, the City of Seattle spent approximately \$7.8 million on **services** for homeless people, nearly twice as much as it did in 1989. This includes over \$4 million for emergency shelter and transitional housing, \$1.3 million for emergency food services and \$1.4 million for housing-related social services. In addition, since 1987 the City has helped fund the development of more than **4,000 units of permanent low-income housing**. The 1995 housing levy approved by the voters is expected to create 1,360 additional units of affordable housing.

Over the years, City of Seattle staff have developed a comprehensive approach to the problem of homelessness, going far beyond the provision of shelter beds. In December 1995, the King County Community Homelessness Advisory Committee articulated the preferred strategies for approaching homelessness, including:

- The community needs to build a more **regional**, client-focused, coordinated network of homeless services.
- The strategies call for **maintaining but not increasing** the existing shelter capacity at this time, even though the shelters regularly turn away people due to lack of space. This will allow additional resources to flow to other needed services and housing.
- It is vital that the community place attention on those housing and services that **help people regain long-term stability** and address the underlying causes of homelessness, such as transitional housing and related services, employment services, and assistance in making a successful transition into permanent housing.
- [B]e more **proactive in preventing homelessness**...
- [E]mphasize approaches that **follow clients as they progress throughout the continuum of care**, including assistance to people once they enter permanent housing.
- [D]irect resources toward **sub-groups of the homeless who are underserved** relative to others, including children in homeless families, single men, and both youth and adults who are leaving institutional settings.

### **Mayor Paul Schell**

Paul Schell is an attorney who first entered the public eye in Seattle in the 1970s as Director of the Department of Community Development under Seattle Mayor Wes Uhlman. When Uhlman did not seek a third term, Schell ran for Mayor in 1977, losing in the general election to television commentator Charles Royer. After his defeat, Schell dropped out of public life and worked as a developer. Many of his successful developments were small, high-end hotels scattered across the Pacific Northwest. In the mid-1980s, Schell was elected to the part-time Port Commission. As a Commissioner, he spearheaded the redevelopment of the Seattle waterfront, adding a new headquarters for the Port, a trade center, office buildings and residential units. Although his primary occupation was real estate development, Schell also served as interim Dean of the University of Washington School of Architecture for two years in the early 1990s.

In 1997 Norm Rice did not seek a third term as Mayor and Schell decided to run, twenty years after his mayoral defeat. Schell attracted support from Republicans and Democrats alike. The press liked the concept of a developer with a heart and a soul. Portrayed as a no-nonsense visionary, Schell swept to victory by wide margins in both the primary and general elections. After the cautious reign of Norm Rice, there was enthusiasm for Schell's willingness to take risks. In his first months in office, Schell demonstrated a penchant for publicly testing partially developed ideas.

A high priority during Schell's mayoral campaign was his commitment to housing. The economic boom in greater Seattle in the 1990s drove up housing prices at double-digit annual rates. Many middle-class Seattleites were priced out of the market. Schell promised to convene a housing summit immediately after his inauguration to develop strategies to address the unmet demand for affordable housing. While he talked about housing affordability often during the campaign, homelessness was rarely mentioned.

### **Alan Painter**

Alan Painter grew up in Southeast Seattle with a passion for politics, hydroplane racing and baseball games at Sick's Stadium. After Franklin High School, Alan went on to graduate from Yale University in 1976. While his love of hydros and baseball remain, the demise of the Seattle Pilots and the death of several leading hydro racers during the 1960s soured Painter on careers in both fields. He focused his professional energies instead on supporting liberal Democratic causes, especially the provision of housing and services to homeless people. In the 1980s, he served as District Manager for Seattle Democratic Congressman Mike Lowry, one of the most liberal members of Congress. During his Lowry years, Painter assisted in building coalitions, including the Washington State Coalition for Homeless and the Fair Budget Action Campaign. Lowry was one of the primary authors of the 1987 McKinney Act, which continues to be the most significant federal legislation aimed at homelessness prevention.

In 1990 Painter began working on homeless issues for the City of Seattle in the Office of Management and Budget as the City's Homeless Coordinator. He later shifted to the Department of Housing and Human Services, where he is now the Director of the Community Services Division. He has worked on the design and implementation of services and programs to assist homeless people for over a decade.

Alan Painter is not flashy or a headline grabber. He thinks and plans long-term, and has the patience to build coalitions. Very detail-oriented, Painter keeps score of every baseball game he attends, and then saves the scorecard. He places great emphasis on coordinated, integrated, comprehensive policy development. The consummate bureaucrat, Painter is probably not enough of a risk-taker to have been a particularly effective hydroplane pilot. Steady and effective, Painter consistently delivers on his promises.

In *The Seattle Times* dated December 13, 1990, staff reporter Barbara Serrano wrote an article commending Painter: "Bureaucrat lauded for Tent City solution: Mild-mannered style works for homeless coordinator." She describes him as follows:

Honest. Straightforward. Sensitive. Politically gutsy. All are among the most common ways people describe Painter.

Scott Morrow, as staff member for SHARE – the group that built Tent City- lauds Painter as "a good bureaucrat" who knows how to make government work effectively.

It was the homeless coordinator's mild-mannered style, Morrow said, that helped defuse tensions between determined men and women at Tent City and the buttoned-down types in City Hall.

“He never promised anything he couldn't deliver,” Morrow said...  
To no surprise of those who know him, Painter bristles at public attention.

During an interview in his house earlier this week, he gave credit to everyone else for addressing homelessness in Seattle: to the city officials he works with, to Mayor Norm Rice and his staff, and mostly to the nonprofit social providers on the front lines of service...

“Because Seattle has been so responsive in the past, there's a tendency to let the city provide all the resources,” Painter said. “The challenge next year is to get others to put as much of an increase and emphasis on housing and homelessness as we have.”...

“Seattle's been extraordinarily successful in leveraging state and federal money for initiatives,” Painter said. “Unfortunately, what we've all learned is that it takes a long time to get things done.”

The recognition Seattle has received for high-quality, well-coordinated, strategically-linked programs for homeless people is attributable to a strong network of community non-profit organizations working in close collaboration with a core group of outstanding City staff, Painter chief among them.

### **June 2, 1998: The Mayor's Pledge**

Alan Painter listened to Mayor Schell's June 2<sup>nd</sup> public pledge that there will be no homeless families with children or homeless single women on the streets by Christmas. Walking back to his office following the speech, Painter is thrilled by Schell's commitment to homelessness. At the same time, Painter recognizes the tension between Schell's pledge and several of the Advisory Committee's guiding strategies (as described in the section on Seattle's response to homelessness).

Increasing shelter capacity is quite expensive. The most recent new shelter in Seattle, housing 20-40 women, costs over \$300,000 per year to staff, even though it is only open at night. This figure does not include rent or other associated capital costs.

Painter understands the political power of counting and publicly emphasizing the size of the homeless population in Seattle. Even so, the practice makes him uncomfortable. Schell's pledge raised the stakes and the scrutiny of the homeless street count. He wonders what effect the pledge will have on the supply and demand of shelter space. Even if additional shelter space is developed, Painter fears that some of the target population still might choose the streets. Furthermore, factors beyond the City's control have a significant impact on the number of homeless people.

## Mayor Schell's Zero Homeless Family Pledge

According to the best estimates, of the 1,300 homeless people living on the streets without shelter on a given night, over 700 are homeless families with children or single women in Seattle, the categories described in Schell's pledge. Painter wonders what it will take to bring that number down to zero. He also wonders who will be counting and how they will do so.