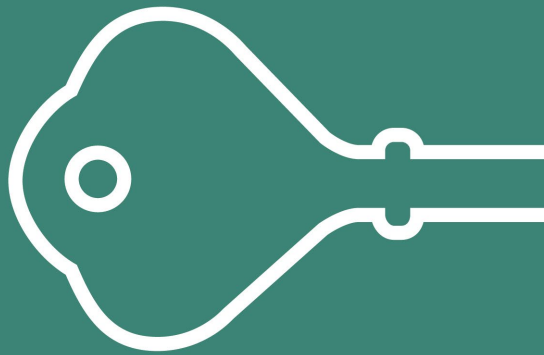


Reducing involvement in the criminal justice system for persons experiencing homelessness

King County
Regional Law Safety & Justice Committee

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Seattle



DESC

HOUSING AND HEALTH
TO END HOMELESSNESS

DESC Services

- Founded in 1979 as overnight emergency shelter
- Today, DESC provides a multitude of services that provide health and housing to vulnerable people experiencing homelessness:
 - Behavioral health services
 - Crisis intervention services
 - Outreach
 - Supported employment program
 - 508 shelter beds and survival services
 - Over 1200 permanent supportive housing units across multiple neighborhoods in Seattle.



DESC client population (n=~3000)

Common characteristics

- Long-term homelessness
- Highly vulnerable
- Serious mental illness
- Substance use disorder
- Other complex medical problems
- Criminal legal system involvement
- Heavy use of crisis services
- Repeated failed treatment attempts

Agenda

1. Prevalence of arrest and incarceration among people experiencing homelessness
2. Removal of barriers to housing access
3. Supportive housing outcomes
4. Other alternatives

Incarceration and homelessness

- About 50% of adults experiencing homelessness have been incarcerated at least once
- About 25% have been in prison for a serious offense (felony)
- Homelessness and incarceration are mutually reinforcing

- Burt et al., 1999. *Homelessness: Programs and the people they serve. Findings of the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients.* Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Kushel et al., 2005. Revolving doors: Imprisonment among the homeless and marginally housed population. *AJPH*, 95(10).

Criminal history as barrier to housing access

- For a long time, federal policy actively *promoted* the use of criminal records to deny access to subsidized housing. Some remnants of these policies remain
- Very common practices among housing operators, including subsidized housing, have been to screen out people with criminal records
- These policies and practices prolonged homelessness and led to more contact with criminal legal system

DESC policy shift

- Use of criminal records in housing admissions decisions led to some highly vulnerable people being excluded from housing
- Discontinuation of criminal records screening in admissions led to a natural experiment: do people with criminal records fare worse in housing than people without
- Study: review records and outcomes for all new tenants entering DESC housing between 1/1/2000 and 6/30/2004 (n = 347)

Table 2

Criminal history of homeless adults who were housed by Downtown Emergency Service Center

Variable	N ^a	%	Highest number of crimes by a single participant
→ All crime	178	51	65
Traffic, fish and game, and other violations	37	11	7
Sentence or supervision violations	11	3	12
Miscellaneous misdemeanors	74	21	32
Drug misdemeanors	32	9	5
Property misdemeanors	95	27	42
Assault or violent misdemeanors	81	23	12
Other felonies	13	4	2
Drug felonies	39	11	6
Property felonies	43	12	9
Assault or violent felonies	34	10	4
Felony rape or other sex offenses	3	1	1
Homicides	3	1	1
→ All misdemeanors	156	45	59
All felonies	98	28	9
All crimes against people	95	27	12
All crimes against property	112	32	44
All drug crimes	61	18	7
All public order crimes	91	26	44
Age at first offense			
<25	55	16	
25–37	84	24	
38–49	32	9	
≥50	7	2	
Months between recent crime and move-in			
0–6	13	4	
7–12	24	7	
13–24	17	5	
>24	124	36	
Criminal versatility score ^b			
1	65	19	
2	58	17	
3	42	12	
4	13	4	

^a A total of 332 unique individuals had 347 residencies (unit of analysis [N] is residency).^b The number of summary categories (person, property, drug, and other) in which a participant has at least one crime

DESC study on criminal history and housing

- No type of criminal background predicted housing failure (<2 years continuous housing retention)
- Older age (50+) at move-in increased odds of housing success

- Malone, 2009. Assessing criminal history as a predictor of future housing success for homeless adults with behavioral health disorders. *Psychiatric Svcs*, 60(2).

Similar findings

- Multi-site national study found criminal background not associated with subsequent supportive housing failure
- Second DESC study for “high utilizer” population:
 - Baseline: 84% with a criminal conviction; 44% with at least one felony.
 - Criminal background not associated with inability to retain supportive housing
 - After becoming housed, 57% decrease in jail bookings
- Indiana study: significant drop in arrest rates after placement into supportive housing

- Tsai and Rosenheck, 2012. Incarceration among chronically homeless adults: Clinical correlates and outcomes. *J Forensic Psychology. Practice*, 12(4).
- Clifasefi et al., 2013. Exposure to project-based housing first is associated with reduced jail time and bookings. *IJDP*, 24.
- Ellsworth, 2021. Housing and criminality: the effect of housing placement on arrests among chronically homeless adults, *J Soc. Distress and Homelessness*.

Mobile Crisis Team (MCT)



Crisis Solutions Center



