

# Regional Houseless Forum Event Report

PREPARED FOR THE  
KANSAS CITY HOUSELESS TASK FORCE  
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## Executive Summary

The Kansas City metropolitan area has much at stake with regard to housing and quality of life for its residents. Housing is an issue that affects individuals, families, businesses, and the community at large. There are personal and economic consequences if we fail to create and maintain an effective system for ensuring safe, stable housing opportunities for people across a wide spectrum of demographic and personal circumstances.

### What did the Forum include?

The Kansas City Regional Houseless Forum, sponsored by the City of Kansas City's Houseless Task Force and the Greater Kansas City Coalition to End Homelessness, was held on April 24, 2021 to bring together government leaders, service provider organization professionals, neighborhood representatives, people currently experiencing a lack of housing, and the public at large to identify challenges, solutions, and ways of identifying success when it is achieved.

The Forum began with a welcome and informational presentations to help participants work from shared knowledge about houselessness in the metropolitan region. Eight breakout sessions were central to the event. These sessions were arranged by topic and facilitated to provide maximum opportunities for participants to share perspectives. Breakout sessions were followed by a plenary session where facilitators reported out on each group's discussion and findings. Breakout sessions included:

- Chronic/Non-Chronic Houselessness
- Domestic Violence and Houselessness
- Family Houselessness
- Houseless Outreach
- Houseless Prevention
- LGBTQ+ and Houselessness
- reStart Focus Group (Voices of Unhoused Persons)
- Youth Houselessness

Breakout session discussion provided an incredible array of perspectives and suggestions. Session results provide a well-informed foundation for moving towards effective, well-coordinated action in houseless prevention and intervention in the Kansas City metropolitan area.

### What common themes were identified by Forum participants?

Breakout session discussions were varied and resulted in the identification of both details and common themes. Common themes included the following:

1. There is a need for improved coordination and collaboration.

2. The system must continue to expand its focus on preventing trauma and reducing trauma when it occurs.
3. There is a need for greater resources in addressing houselessness throughout the metropolitan region.
4. Measuring success is important for implementing effective solutions and accountability.

### How will this information be used?

The Kansas City Houseless Task Force will use this *Event Report* as a guide for discussion and action. It is hoped that local governments, the region's Continuums of Care (CoCs), service provider organizations, philanthropic foundations, corporate donors and volunteers, neighborhood associations, and the public at large will make use of this report to facilitate discussion and action in the coming weeks and months as we all strive to address houselessness and make our region a place where all residents enjoy a good quality of life and economic opportunity.

## Introduction

### Purpose

The Kansas City Regional Forum on Houselessness (Forum) was held to bring together a wide array of stakeholders from throughout the metropolitan area to address the critical policy issue of houselessness. The Forum was hosted by the City of Kansas City, Missouri's Houseless Task Force (Task Force) in virtual format. The virtual format maximized opportunities for diverse participation while also respecting public health concerns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Welcome and Presentations

The Forum opened with a welcome from Councilwoman Ryana Parks-Shaw, Chair of the Task Force, and City Manager Brian Platt, City of Kansas City, Missouri. Informative presentations followed as a means of providing a common knowledge base from which participants could work during breakout sessions. Presentations included the following topics and presenters:

- **What do we know about houselessness in Kansas City?:** Presented by Marqueia, MSW, Executive Director, Greater Kansas City Coalition to End Homelessness and Becky Poitras, presenting on behalf of the Missouri Balance of State Continuum of Care
- **Voices of the unhoused:** Unhoused individuals shared their experiences through a video prepared by City of Kansas City, Missouri, staff with the assistance of reStart, Inc.
- **Focusing on solutions:** Dr. Anne Williamson of Community Analytics, LLC, and the Director of the School of Public Affairs at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock prepared participants for breakout group sessions.

### Breakout Sessions

Breakout sessions were central to the Forum and designed to provide opportunities for participants to provide perspective and suggestions on facets of houselessness. The breakout sessions (arranged in alphabetical order) included:

- Chronic Houselessness
- Domestic Violence and Houselessness
- Family Houselessness
- Houseless Outreach
- LGBTQ and Houselessness
- Prevention

- reStart Focus Group<sup>1</sup>
- Youth Houselessness

### How This Report Will Be Used

This event report will be used to inform the work of the Task Force. In addition, it will be used to foster regional dialogue and action in addressing houselessness on both sides of the Kansas-Missouri state line.

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<sup>1</sup> reStart facilitated a focus group to ensure participation by unhoused persons during the breakout sessions.

## Breakout Sessions

Breakout session facilitators used the following questions to engage participants in discussion:

1. What are the challenges you see with regard to our session topic?
2. What suggestions do you have for solutions?
3. How should we define success?

The results of breakout session discussions are reported below. Sessions are arranged in alphabetical order.

### Chronic/Non-Chronic Houselessness

#### Challenges

1. *Federal funding for housing is inflexible.* For instance, funding is set up so that chronically unhoused individuals are given priority. This leaves programs unable to help people who are newly without housing. The wait to access federal funding is often 12 months, and this creates trauma. Some of this trauma may be irreparable. Mental health and substance abuse issues may be caused by houselessness rather than the cause of houselessness. Further, some funding may address only one type of substance abuse.
2. *A lack of public awareness about houselessness is also a challenge.* A lack of awareness is also a regional issue.
3. *Participants reported a lack of collaboration in addressing houselessness.* There is a disconnect between north and south of the Missouri River and a lack of coordination between the two areas. There is also an overall lack of effective collaboration for addressing houselessness throughout the region. Participants also noted that there is “too much work in silos.”
4. *There is a lack of access to consistent, consolidated data about houselessness.* Participants reported a lack of access to comprehensive data that shows what resources are needed in They also noted a lack of access to data tracking houselessness.
5. *There is a need to help people learn to be housed again.* Often, there is no staffing or insufficient staffing to help people who have been unhoused for some period of time to learn to be housed again. Some participants expressed the feeling that some people did not want to become housed due to requirements to be clean and sober.

#### Suggestions

1. *Identify resources across council districts.* Participants suggested that there was a need to identify resources across council districts as a means of making the most effective use of those resources.

2. *Create a cross-regional coordinated strategy to address houselessness.* This would include on both sides of the state line and the areas above and below the Missouri River.
3. *Focus on prevention.* Participants mentioned that it is less expensive to engage in prevention than it is to intervene once houselessness has taken place. They also mentioned that COVID-19 relief funding has been helpful with prevention because it can be used more flexibly than other federal funds. Further, they noted that private funds are helpful for prevention purposes, once again because they can be used flexibly.
4. *Focus on Housing First.* Participants stated that it is best to get a roof over the heads of unhoused persons first. Address health or addiction issues after persons are housed.
5. *Make greater collaboration happen.* For instance, participants suggested greater collaboration between mental health organizations and houseless service providers. The group also highlighted the need for more funding for the staffing necessary to make this happen. The goal is to get people housed and to help them remain housed.

## Measuring Success

1. *The number of newly unhoused people should trend downward over time.* The idea is to work towards functional zero.
2. *Begin with benchmarks.* The use of benchmarks will make it possible to set attainable goals and then measure progress each year.

## Domestic Violence and Houselessness

### Challenges

1. *Leaving domestic violence often means leaving financial security.* As one participant put it, “Once you are out on the street and stripped of so much stuff, it is really hard to get back into housing.” Further, participants mentioned that it is hard enough to get housing for one adult in this situation, but adding the need to house children makes it more difficult. In addition, it is difficult to navigate the system when all of your resources have been taken away.
2. *The trauma of domestic violence makes engaging with the system more difficult.* As one participant put it, “Homelessness in itself is bad, but when the trauma of domestic violence is factored in, it’s extra hard.” It is tough to find the time to navigate the system when exiting domestic violence.
3. *The experience of domestic violence makes it tough to trust people.* Therefore, it’s even more difficult to navigate the system and get the assistance needed.



## Suggestions

1. *Ask people what they need.* One participant expressed that no one seems to ask people what they need (rather than making that decision for them). People leaving domestic violence have different situations and may need different things.
2. *Determine what may be missing at the intake phase.* A participant noted that it is helpful to know what someone **does not** need so that those resources can serve someone else. Then the intake worker can work on the things that are needed by that individual. Those doing intake need to know what organizations will help with child care, transportation, and the whole array of services/resources that may be needed.
3. *Make intake a one-application process for all needed services and resources.* A single application at intake will help domestic violence survivors get the assistance they need with as little stress. This would also help to avoid increasing trauma by having a survivor tell their story over and over to different organizations as they seek help with all the services/resources they need.
4. *Identify tools that will facilitate effective collaboration.* For instance, the five largest houseless service providers are connected to the HMIS data system. These large organizations tend to get most of the funding but are not getting the job done by themselves. Improve the ability of all organizations seeking to serve unhoused individuals to collaborate. To quote one participant, “So many resources are siloed. There needs to be ease of access to other agencies.”
5. *Give new agencies opportunities to serve and have all agencies be more flexible.* New agencies can bring more services and resources to this critical issue and also be a source of greater flexibility in the system. There should also be greater flexibility within agencies in terms of how people are served. This means treating the person as an individual with their own unique set of needs.

## Measuring Success

1. *Measure the success of individuals.* One participant expressed the need to measure the success of each individual served. Success may be measured differently for each individual. Track individual progress from intake onward and determine how well the individual’s needs are being met by the service/resource providers.
2. *Take a look at other organizations and how they are evaluating themselves.* It will be useful to get inspiration for measurement from how other organizations are measuring their success.

3. *Broaden the definition of success.* Some individuals may prefer to have a safe community outdoors with other unhoused people rather than being in traditional housing. They may prefer to have a safe outdoor community but also want access to resources as needed.

## Family Houselessness

### Challenges

1. *Lack of sufficient capacity to appropriately shelter families.* Overall, there is a lack of enough shelter beds to appropriately shelter families.
2. *Lack of sufficient shelter space for male-headed single-parent families.* Families headed by a single father have difficulty finding shelter space.
3. *Lack of sufficient number of transitional housing opportunities.* There is not enough availability among transitional housing providers.
4. *Unemployment among parents and guardians.* Most transitional housing requires full-time employment or there is a deadline by which the adults must be employed. This is a challenge for parents who are unemployed.
5. *Short length of time that transitional housing is provided without charge.* One participant reported that families can typically stay in transitional housing without charge for 90 days. They indicated that this is not long enough for these families to develop the ability to pay for their housing.
6. *It is very difficult to save for an apartment.* It is very difficult for a low-income or unemployed family to find a way to save for a deposit and the first month's rent for an apartment or rental house.
7. *Insufficient number of hotel/motel vouchers.* Participants discussed the insufficient number of hotel/motel vouchers available. These vouchers provide a critical temporary resource for unhoused families.
8. *Youth aging out of foster care.* Youth aging out of foster care are particularly vulnerable to houselessness.
9. *Prior evictions and other credit history issues make it difficult for people to get housing.* It can be nearly impossible to get a rental unit with a prior eviction and/or other credit history issues.
10. *Private organizations require clients to pay a portions of their bills.* This is described as “buy in,” but there is no further indication of what the participant meant.

## Suggestions

1. *The City of Kansas City's Housing and Neighborhood Services should build on its relationship with both CoCs.* The participant is referring to Greater Kansas City Coalition to End Homelessness and United Community Services of Johnson County but may also be referring to the Missouri Balance of State CoC, which serves part of the Kansas City Metropolitan Statistical Area. Another participant mentioned the need for “a better relationship with the Balance of State CoC.”
2. *Rental assistance should be made available to cover the full amount of rent.* This would help low-income families obtain housing and remain stably housed.
3. *Create a clear and accessible path forward for families to exit homelessness.* Participants stated that the “barriers to entry” into housing should be removed.
4. *Facilitate community conversations about family homelessness.* The participant who suggested this as a way to persuade private organizations to modify their requirements such as having a job, being drug/alcohol free, etc.
5. *Make a faster and easier way for families to get documentation.* The participant who made this suggestion noted that it typically takes 30 days (and can have some costs involved) to get documentation. Further, they stated that if there is only 90 days’ eligibility for the housing there are in before getting a job, then they only have 60 days to get a job once the adults receive documentation.
6. *More equitable distribution of resources.* One participant reported issues with some organizations not being notified of funds availability for addressing the needs of unhoused individuals and families. Another stated that small organizations are not competitive in the grant process and that “all the money goes to the big nonprofits.” This participant suggested that some funds be set aside for smaller organizations.
7. *Develop better relationships with transitional living providers.* A participant identified the need to develop “better partnerships” with transitional living providers.
8. *Improved collaboration.* Participants discussed the need for a system showing available beds to all service providers so that families can be referred. Further, one participant stated the need for United Way to be “plugged into the system” so that they know about available beds. [A participant stated that HMIS does not have a feature showing a live bed count.]
9. *Improved communication.* There was a call for improved communication on multiple levels. For instance, participants spoke of the need for better communication between executive directors/CoC and frontline case managers. In

addition, participants also noted the need for better communication across organizations.

10. *Direct bill payment by Jackson County Division of Children's Services.* One participant reported that the Jackson County Division of Children's Services does not do direct payment of bills, the Platte County Division does.

## Measuring Success

1. *Measure progress in making safe and affordable housing available.* This is likely to mean the development of new housing units as well as the acquisition and rehabilitation of existing units that will be made available at rents affordable to low-income families.

## Houseless Outreach

### Challenges

1. *Difficult to reach ex-offenders.* Ex-offenders, particularly sex offenders and those who have committed murder, can be difficult to reach. This group finds it difficult to find a home, and it is important to know where they are so they can be reached.
2. *There is a need for programs that are led by people of color to reach people of all races and ethnicities.* For instance, a participant suggested the need for a black-led, black-oriented organization to reach black unhoused individuals.
3. *Lack of stability among the unhoused.* Unhoused individuals are often forced to move from place to place, so they can be difficult to reach.
4. *There is a trust issue between the Kansas City Police Department and unhoused persons.* The KCPD Crisis Intervention team may be part of the solution to this trust issue.
5. *There is a need for space.* Shelters have a 90-day stay rule, and this creates a need for reaching people who need help in getting other shelter or a hotel.
6. *Service provider organizations are siloed.* There are often issues with organizations not knowing who an individual is working with, because service provider organizations are siloed.
7. *Lack of comprehensive planning.* There is a lack of comprehensive planning that would support effective solutions for houselessness.

8. *There is a limited number of staff members available for street outreach.* A participant indicated that there are not enough staff members to perform the level of street outreach necessary.
9. *There is no centralized hub of information or service.* One participant stated that this is a challenge in serving unhoused persons.

## Suggestions

1. *Continue to build trust and make a safe space for people.* A participant noted that trust seems to be building through the KCPD Crisis Intervention team (which includes social workers). In addition, “People need a safe place to go.”
2. *Make a move towards the City getting container homes.* One participant suggested that the City (KCMO) continue with its plans to get container homes.
3. *Help unhoused individuals get on the path to transitional housing.* Unhoused people need help in getting into transitional housing.
4. *Perform outreach to unhoused individuals that helps them get into hotels or other sheltered space after 90 days.* One participant suggested specific outreach to help those who have gone beyond 90 days in shelter get into a hotel or other shelter space.
5. *Figure out a way to overcome the siloed nature of service provider organizations.* This participant suggested that it will be necessary to increase collaboration as a way to overcome the siloed nature of addressing houselessness.
6. *Create a comprehensive plan.* One participant described the creation of a comprehensive plan as “very smart.”
7. *Continue the Street Sheet.* The Kansas City Public Library created the “Street Sheet” that lists resources for unhoused persons.
8. *Create a centralized hub.* The hub would provide information and resources.
9. *Get the word out to neighborhood associations.* Make sure neighborhood associations also have access to the Street Sheet.
10. *Provide peer support.* People who are in hotels or housing need peer support to be successful in maintaining their housed status. This might be provided through volunteers, including volunteers from faith-based groups.
11. *More case managers.* There is a need for more case management to help people make a successful transition to being housed.

12. *Have coordination across organizations and among case managers.* A participant suggested bringing case managers from different organizations together so that cases can be divided up and individual needs addressed.

## Measuring Success

1. *Use the results of the Vulnerability Index form.* One participant suggested the use of a Vulnerability Index form to measure how things are going.
2. *Have a meeting with all case managers.* This participant offered this suggestion as part of the discussion of measuring success. Their intent seems to be to have case managers identify measures of success.
3. *Identify steps to permanent housing.* Participants discussed identifying specific steps to permanent housing, particularly for those reaching the 90-day mark in shelter space.

## Houseless Prevention

### Challenges

1. *Agencies do not work together and unhoused individuals miss opportunities as a result.* Participants noted that agencies do not work together, and this translates into unhoused individuals missing opportunities to become housed.
2. *Lack of communication among independent agencies.* Participants also discussed a lack of communication among independent agencies as a major challenge to addressing houselessness.
3. *Increasing evictions.* A participant mentioned that evictions were continuing despite the pandemic and will be likely to increase once the eviction moratorium ends.
4. *There is a need for food and behavioral emergency assistance.* A participant described the need for food and behavioral assistance among the unhoused.
5. *Emergency Rental Assistance program is only addressing the needs of renters, not homeowners.* A participant expressed concern that the Emergency Rental Assistance program was only available to help renters, not homeowners.
6. *Last-minute shelter needs.* One participant raised the issue of “last-minute” shelter requests “being sprung” on shelters.
7. *Having programs or agencies closed off when there are last-minute needs for housing.* A participant described the challenge of having programs or agencies closed off when last-minute needs for housing are presented.

8. *Lack of time or limited time to assist other agencies.* There is a lack of time—or at best, limited time—available to work with other agencies in serving unhoused individuals.
9. *Lack of discharge planning for people exiting prisons or hospitals.* The lack of discharge planning for people exiting prisons or hospitals adds to the unhoused population.
10. *Lack of a resource list provided to those in need.* A participant reported that there is no resource list provided to those in need of houseless prevention services.
11. *The need to obtain legal documentation to find work, get transportation, or enter housing programs.* Obtaining legal documentation was discussed as a barrier to helping those in need of houseless prevention services.

## Suggestions

1. *Provide a system with easier access for those who are in need of last-minute housing prevention services.* Participants discussed creating a system with easier access for those in last-minute (or even “last-second”) need of housing prevention services.
2. *Provide transportation services for people leaving hospitals or jails.* Suggestions also included a “driving service” for people leaving hospitals or jails.
3. *Provide resources for the newly housed to stay in housing.* Suggestions included:
  - a. Shelter Plus Care
  - b. Hillcrest Transitional Housing
  - c. Financial and budgeting lessons taught to unhoused citizens in housing programs
  - d. Help from Truman Behavioral Health
  - e. Case management assistance made available in all housing agencies and independent programs
4. *Housing agencies sharing and admitting burdens.* The suggestion was made that housing agencies “share and admit their burdens” to other housing agencies and independent programs.
5. *Independent programs and housing agencies sharing their availability with other programs and agencies.* Participants discussed sharing their availability with one another as a way of better serving unhoused persons.



6. *Reaching out to resources with payment plans.* A suggestion was made that organizations could reach out to resources with payment plans as a way of helping unhoused individuals avoid debt.
7. *Sharing mental health and medical care resources.* Another suggestion was that organizations share mental health and medical care resources to better serve those in need.
8. *Assistance and support for landlords.* A participant suggested that assistance and support be provided to landlords so that they could afford to serve those in need of houseless prevention.
9. *Reach out and educate.* Participants identified a list of organizations for the purpose of reaching out and educating about houselessness and prevention. The list included:
  - a. Hospitals
  - b. Housing agencies
  - c. Prison industrial complex
  - d. Public agencies
  - e. Landlords
  - f. Independent housing and shelters

## Measuring Success

1. *No one going from the hospital or prison to the streets.* Participants shared a vision where no one would be forced to go from the hospital or prison to being unhoused.
2. *People getting the medication they need to be physically and mentally well.* Participants stated this as another measure of success in houseless prevention.
3. *Identification of a method to get the results needed.* Participants stated that success would include the identification of a method to get the results needed in addressing houselessness.

## LGBTQ+ and Houselessness

### Challenges

1. This group experiences more violence than others.
2. Lack of domestic violence shelter space for individuals who do not identify as female.
3. LGBTQ+ youth are vulnerable.



4. Challenges for those living with HIV.
5. Transgender youth and other transgender individuals face large challenges navigating the system and in general.
6. There is a need for understanding of the different nuances of the groups who make up the LGBTQ+ community.
7. Lack of understanding of the various streams of funding available to serve LGBTQ+.

## Suggestions

1. *Use open-ended questions when working with unhoused individuals.* A participant noted that we miss much about the LGBTQ+ community because we do not ask questions where the individual would feel comfortable revealing sexual orientation or gender identity. If we ask open-ended questions we are more likely to gain more demographic information and learn more about how to help members of the LGBTQ+ community.
2. *Bring everyone (organizations) together.* One participant observed that while the Greater Kansas City Coalition to End Homelessness (GKCCEH) does a good job of bringing people together around the issue of homelessness, “an even bigger umbrella” is needed. This participant highlighted the need for this larger umbrella organization or network to provide “across the board” training and education about the very nuanced needs of the LGBTQ+ population.
3. *Establish a readily accessible communication system.* Such a communication system would allow both service providers and people in need to “talk and collaborate in real time.” This will address the presence of “a lot of lag time” because the communication system is not centralized.
4. *More education about human trafficking.* Service providers need more education about identifying human trafficking.
5. *Create a “set aside” for the growing number of LGBTQ+ youth.* Participants noted that LGBTQ+ youth are especially vulnerable. One participant suggested a “set aside” (funding) for these youth. A system for quality control and accountability would be necessary.
6. *Involve more healthcare specialists.* Participants discussed the need for more healthcare specialists to be involved with addressing the needs of unhoused LGBTQ+ persons.

7. *Access available funding.* A coordinated effort to access available funding from all potential sources (including HUD) is necessary.
8. *Create a toolkit for those serving the LGBTQ+ community.* One participant suggested the creation of a toolkit with information to guide those serving the LGBTQ+ community. Such a toolkit would include best practices and other critical information.
9. *Centralize LGBTQ+ resources.* One participant suggested centralizing the availability of LGBTQ+ resources as a way to boost effectiveness in serving this group.
10. *Funding that follows a strategy.* A participant advocated for having funding follow a specific strategy.
11. *Engage with philanthropic and corporate communities.* Another participant stated the need to engage with philanthropic and corporate entities to increase attention and funding for the LGBTQ+ community's housing and social service needs.
12. *Be mindful of intersectionality.* Participants discussed the need to be mindful of intersectionality when serving the LGBTQ+ population. By intersectionality, the group was referring to the fact that LGBTQ+ persons of color, persons living with HIV, transgender persons, and others face special challenges that cannot be identified with the single term LGBTQ+. Further, these nuances require specific approaches and services for effectively addressing needs.
13. *Create awareness, training, and continuity.* Participants also discussed the need to create awareness of LGBTQ+ issues, challenges, and needs. They also discussed the need for training to help housing programs and other service providers effectively address the challenges facing this group. Finally, the group also highlighted the need for continuity in programming and coordination in serving the LGBTQ+ community.

## Measuring Success

1. *Be sure to have reasonable expectations.* One participant noted that it is important not to go into this expecting a magic bullet or with the mindset that if someone's houseless situation isn't resolved within six months that the work has failed.
2. *We need a measurable baseline.* The group discussed the need for a measurable baseline although they were not specific about it.
3. *Measure whether people are getting housed.* A participant suggested that once we have a baseline we then measure whether people are getting housed.

4. *Reduction in mental health problems.* One participant indicated they would like to see the outcomes associated with support, education, awareness and housing.
5. *Possible increase in the number of persons of color who identify as LGBTQ+.* One participant hypothesized that as persons of color felt more comfortable with service providers, they would be more likely to identify as LGBTQ+.
6. *A survey might be used to measure success.* For instance, in the past there was a health survey known as Pulse that was specifically for the LGBTQ+ community.
7. *Benchmarking based on sensitivity and responsiveness to LGBTQ+ experiences.* One participant suggested benchmarking to see how we are doing as a community in understanding and responsiveness to LGBTQ+ issues.
8. *Measure how being housed affects people's mental health and/or substance abuse.* A participant suggested that we look at how being housed affects people's mental health and/or substance abuse, as well as their ability to be independent.

## reStart Focus Group

### Challenges

1. *Veterans face different challenges.* There are issues with not being connected with the Veterans Administration (VA) and the amount of red tape unhoused veterans face. Further, the VA changes the rules from time to time as to what is required to get housed. Navigating the system is a problem.
2. *Being rushed while navigating the system.* Some expressed frustration with being rushed when navigating the system to get housing and needed services.
3. *Frustration with some being housed in hotels while those who are in shelters haven't been provided that kind of direct assistance.* Comments included a statement about case managers with shelters being "over loaded" an unable to help unhoused persons in shelters access the same level of services as those in the hotels.
4. *Some people choose to be unhoused.* One participant indicated that some people choose to be unhoused. They did not expand on this comment.
5. *Lack of services in the Northland and Lee's Summit.* A participant brought up the issue of the lack of services for unhoused persons in the Northland and Lee's Summit.
6. *High level of drug usage.* Drugs and mental health issues are tied to stress. Being unhoused is an extremely stressful situation. One participant noted that,

“You can have all the therapists in the world, but some people are still making a decision.”

7. *Youth and women are not protected.* This concern was raised during the discussion.
8. *Victimization by others in encampments.* Property and documents are often stolen in encampments.
9. *Profit motivation and organizations keeping people houseless “to keep themselves in business.”* In the words of one participant, “Agencies keep folks homeless to keep themselves in business.” Other participants echoed this observation. For instance, one person stated, “We are ignored, and everything that is supposed to be a solution is a business.” Other statements included, “Profit motivation of serving agencies [is a problem]. Services are bare minimum at best, and folks are not [being helped with what they need].”
10. *Difficulty of keeping IDs.* Having an ID is the key to receiving assistance, but it is hard to keep track of IDs.
11. *Exhaustion.* Being exhausted all the time is a problem. There is chronic fatigue. As one participant put it, “Being homeless is it tiring and taxing on your health.”
12. *Travel constraints.* Access to buses and bus routes constrain travel.
13. *Aid worker burnout.* A participant observed that working with unhoused persons “takes a mental toll” on aid workers.
14. *The variety of aid causes a degree of scarcity.* The participant who made this comment was referring to fragmentation among how services are provided for various groups such as veterans, youth, domestic violence survivors, etc. They observed that this can lead to too many beds in one place and not enough beds in another. Beds might also be in the wrong place for some people.
15. *Situational acceptance.* As one participant put it, “If you don’t get housed quickly, then you begin to accept being homeless as the new normal. You start to give up with looking and become okay with not looking for a new place until it becomes too cold.”
16. *Drug criminalization.* This comment was shared by a participant who self-identified as a functioning addict. This individual indicated that drug use “needs to be treated as a disease and not a crime.”
17. *Hopelessness.* Here a participant noted that, “Finding help is a dead end, particularly for street homeless.” They also mentioned the issue of losing face

and if injured, the struggle to get a wheelchair, then struggling to get around in the wheelchair.

18. Time-limited services. Time-limited services can be difficult for many unhoused persons. As one participant stated, “Some people can get in and out in 90 days, especially if they’ve been on a waiting list and their voucher comes through. If they are just now getting into the system, then it can take much longer [than 90 days].”
19. *No connection between the job market and the housing market.* In the words of one participant, “If you tell someone to get an apartment and a job, they start out in the hole because it takes so long to get the first check and you already owe a deposit and the first month’s rent.”
20. *Senior citizens are suffering the most.* This participant did not offer further comment on this issue.
21. *Being stuck in survival mode.* This participant did not offer further comment on being in survival mode.
22. *Lack of accountability on all sides.* There was no further comment on this issue.
23. *Self-sufficient people losing out on resources.* In the words of one participant, “Self-sufficient people who are trying to improve themselves get left behind because more resources are given to folks who need assistance dealing with drugs or other issues.”
24. *High crime in areas with affordable housing.* One participant stated that, “People don’t want to go to affordable/income-based housing in high crime areas.”
25. *Money needs to go to the right place.* This participant indicated that, “Fifteen million dollars (\$15 million) to Bartle Hall was a waste of money. Where did that money go? The facility was barely staffed.”
26. *Sanitary issues.* One participant indicated the challenge imposed by sanitary issues.
27. *Mental health and dementia issues.* The time it takes to get mental health and dementia issues identified and addressed is a problem.

## Suggestions

1. *Having service providers be closer to the issue of being unhoused.* A participant shared that, “To be closer to the problem is to be closer to the solution.” And, “Service providers need to be in our shoes.”

2. *Support once an individual is housed.* A participant noted that, “You’re on your own once you get a house.” They indicated a need for support to maintain the home and to exit survival mode. Financial classes and other long-term supports are needed.
3. *Greater willingness to step in and help.* This participant suggested KC Street Medicine as a model for helping. They indicated, “Don’t be afraid of stepping on toes and getting your hands dirty. Case workers need to push.”
4. *More support for case workers and more case workers.* This suggestion was that more support for case workers and adding more case workers would prevent burnout and empower case workers to do more.
5. *Reduce or eliminate fees for documents.* This suggestion relates to essential documents such as IDs.
6. *Create shared housing opportunities.* This participant suggested that, “People don’t always want a lot, maybe just their own room and bathroom.” They went on to suggest that this could be accomplished by creating roommate housing opportunities by rehabilitating old schools, boarding house, and abandoned properties.
7. *Consolidate multiple systems.* This suggestion focused on the benefit of consolidating the many different systems for addressing housing need. The participant indicated that this would increase efficiency and effectiveness.

## Measuring Success

1. *Long-term stability.* One participant expressed that “10 years in the same apartment” was a measure of long-term stability.
2. *Security about housing.* One participant expressed that success means “Knowing that I’ll always have somewhere to lay my head, and I won’t get rained on when I sleep.”
3. *Success is being independent of the system.* This participant indicated a strong desire to be independent of the system and felt that this would be a measure of success.
4. *Income-based housing units in all developments.* A participant indicated that a measure of success would be when all developments have some income-based housing units (e.g., mixed-income housing).
5. *Truly affordable housing.* The participant did not expand on this, but truly affordable housing may be seen as having housing opportunities available within the financial means of even the lowest-income person.

## Youth Houselessness

### Challenges

1. *Couch surfing*. Couch surfing happens because of a lack of permanent housing.
2. Need more advocates and advocacy.
3. Lack of late night and weekend child care.
4. *Lack of transitional programs*. This challenge applies to all youth with special mention of pregnant youth.
5. Dysfunctional or abusive situations at home.
6. Lack of youth homelessness outreach in schools.
7. Concerns about vulnerable youth aging out of foster care.
8. Scarcity of units to house the unhoused.
9. Solutions (or lack of solutions) for youth have long-term impact.

### Suggestions

1. *Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)*. CASA advocates for children and youth.
2. *School districts and McKinney-Vento liaisons*. School districts and their McKinney-Vento liaisons (who serve unhoused students) are a resource for addressing youth homelessness.
3. *Partnerships with day care centers*. Partnership with day care centers was suggested as a way to help unhoused youth with children.
4. *Create a regional housing database*. This suggestion indicates a need for a centralized, real-time database with information about available and affordable housing units.
5. *Host homes*. The group discussed the need for host homes to help address lack of housing among youth.



6. *Locate homeless youth and communicate with them.* This suggestion indicates a need to determine where unhoused youth are so that communication can happen.
7. *Jackson County Children Services Trust.* The suggest was to make greater use of this Trust.
8. *Make use of the Serving Homeless Students in Kansas City: Barriers and Best Practices report.* <https://bloch.umkc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Serving-Homeless-Students-in-the-Kansas-City-Region-Barriers-and-Best-Practices.pdf>.

## Measuring Success

1. *Evidence that we are working “across the board” with other agencies.* This suggestion was that success could be measured with evidence of greater coordination and effective collaboration across agencies.
2. *Evidence of communication between agencies.* Greater communication between agencies was seen as a need, and evidence of increased communication between agencies was seen as one measure of success.
3. *Evidence that support services are readily available for youth.* Another measure of success suggested by the group was evidence that support services are readily available for youth.
4. *Evidence of stable housing.* Evidence that formerly unhoused youth are stably housed is another suggested measure of success.
5. *Evidence of youth-to-youth networking.* Participants discussed the benefits of youth-to-youth networking. Evidence of this networking is another suggested measure of success.
6. *Evidence of communication with youth via social media.* The group discussed the importance of communicating with youth via social media. Thus, evidence that communication with youth is happening in an effective way via social media is another measure of success.



## Common Themes

The eight breakout sessions offer a wealth of insight into challenges, solutions, and how to measure success in addressing houselessness in the Kansas City region. This section of the *Event Report* provides a brief summary of common themes. Reviewing common themes will help the Kansas City Houseless Task Force and stakeholders throughout the metropolitan area identify priorities for moving forward in addressing houselessness. More details are found in sections covering individual breakout sessions in this report.

### Improved Coordination and Collaboration

The need to effectively coordinate services through improved collaboration was a critical part of breakout discussions. Improved coordination and collaboration through an effective service-provider network was called for time and time again. Improved communication was often noted as necessary to making improved coordination and collaboration happen. Some participants called for a strategic plan to guide coordination and collaboration. Others noted that more accountability was necessary; this would be facilitated by improved coordination and collaboration.

### Trauma

Most breakout session participants recognized the trauma imposed by houselessness. They also support trauma-informed programs and services. Further, participants recognize that houseless prevention and swift action to help those who are newly unhoused will be valuable means for reducing the trauma associated with houselessness.

### Resource Issues

Every breakout session included a discussion of resources. Participants highlighted resource deficits among unhoused persons as well as resource deficits in service provider organizations.

Participants highlighted the need for more financial resources, more information resources, and more case managers/aid workers. More financial resources were seen as necessary to meet emergency and longer-term needs. Further, a number of groups discussed the need to provide information such as the Street Sheet to unhoused persons, service-provider organization staff, and neighborhood associations. Another information resource noted by more than one group is a housing database that would help case managers and individuals identify available affordable housing opportunities.

In terms of staffing, participants expressed concern about burnout among those serving unhoused persons. This reduces the number of workers available. Further, many participants felt that more case managers/aid workers will be necessary to effectively

address houselessness in the region. In addition, many felt that more mental health services should be made available; this would require additional staffing.

### Long-Term Solutions

The temporary nature of most assistance is also a theme that was discussed by most breakout groups. Many participants expressed concern about what happens with unhoused persons once the 90-day temporary shelter period has ended. Some expressed that 90 days was not a sufficient time period for an unhoused person to get the necessary documentation, begin a job, and begin getting paid so that they could afford a security deposit and first month's rent.

Participants stated an awareness of the lack of sufficient affordable units that are not just within the financial means of those seeking to leave the unhoused status or who are at risk of losing housing due to lack of affordability, but also the availability of such housing. Further, there was concern about the location of available units, particularly with regard to crime and public transportation access.

Many participants recognized that emergency and short-term assistance alone will not eliminate or even substantially reduce houselessness. Forum participants understand that there needs to be an effective, seamless connection between temporary assistance and longer-term solutions. Longer-term solutions will include helping unhoused persons and formerly unhoused persons make connections between employment and housing.

### Measuring Success

Each breakout group expressed the need to measure success. Measures of success ranged from the need to broaden the definition of success for individuals to measures of system effectiveness. Developing meaningful performance measures and reaching milestones in addressing houselessness will require planning and improved coordination and collaboration in a committed network of service and resource providers.

## Conclusion

The Kansas City Regional Houseless Forum was a unique event designed to build the metropolitan area's capacity to identify, implement, and evaluate effective solutions. Forum participants support trauma-informed services and efforts to reduce or eliminate potential trauma through prevention services and early intervention when houselessness does occur.

The Forum resulted in a universal call for improved coordination and collaboration made possible by an effective network of service providers with adequate resources to address houselessness throughout the metropolitan area. Results also include calls for greater participation by the philanthropic and corporate communities and the incorporation of smaller service provider organizations into the network through funding opportunities.

Kansas City has long been known as a "can do" region with people willing to work hard to get things done. The Regional Houseless Forum provides a strong foundation for building and implementing an improved houseless prevention and intervention system that will improve the quality of life throughout the metropolitan area.

## Appendix: Kansas City Regional Houseless Forum Program

### **KANSAS CITY REGIONAL FORUM ON HOUSELESSNESS**

Saturday, April 24, 2021  
9:00 am – 12:00 pm

#### **Welcome 9:00-9:20 am**

Councilwoman Ryana Parks-Shaw  
City of Kansas City, Missouri

City Manager Brian Platt  
City of Kansas, Missouri

#### **What do we know about houselessness in Kansas City? 9:20-9:50 am**

Marqueia Watson, MSW, Executive Director  
Greater Kansas City Coalition to End Homelessness

Amber Bauer, Program Director  
Greater Kansas City Coalition to End Homelessness

#### **Voices of the Unhoused 9:50-10:00 am**

#### **Comfort Break 5 minutes**

#### **Focusing on Solutions 10:20-10:30 am**

Dr. Anne Williamson

#### **Facilitated Breakout Sessions 10:30-11:15 am**

- Houseless Outreach
- Prevention (Marqueia Watson, MSW)
- Chronic Houselessness (Dr. Anne Williamson)
- Family Houselessness (Amber Bauer)
- Youth Houselessness (Robbie Phillips, MA, LPC)
- Domestic Violence and Houselessness
- LGBTQ and Houselessness
- reStart Focus Group

**Breakout Session Reports 11:15-11:45**

Dr. Williamson and breakout session representatives

**Next Steps 11:45 am-12:00 pm**

Councilwoman Ryana Parks-Shaw  
Dr. Anne Williamson

**Adjourn 12:00 pm**

Councilwoman Ryana Parks-Shaw