

DONATE YOUR SMALL TALK:

A Toolkit for Effective Conversations on Homelessness

In our daily interactions with baristas, rideshare drivers, family, friends, and colleagues, we can raise awareness and spread empathy around the challenge of addressing homelessness in our region. We know this might sound silly or awkward, but it's easier than it sounds. This toolkit will guide you through best practices for **donating your small talk**.



HOMELESSNESS IS A SERIOUS CHALLENGE. LET'S TALK ABOUT IT.

When homelessness comes up in small talk, it's important to acknowledge the feelings you're hearing and find common ground where you can. Check out some examples:

If you hear someone complaining about the need to clean up the streets...

➔ **You might say:** You're right, there are a lot of areas where folks need to be brought inside. Tents on sidewalks or an underpass aren't safe places for anyone to live. But **when encampments are cleared, the people there often aren't connected to alternative housing or services.** We can't just continue pushing them to a different spot on the street. Keeping our public spaces safe and clean for all means working to bring our unsheltered neighbors inside into stable, permanent situations and connecting them to the services they need.

When someone perpetuates harmful stereotypes about substance use and mental illness...

➔ **You might say:** I hear your concern, and **you're right that an effective approach to homelessness must involve connecting individuals in need to treatment and services.** But it's important to remember that less than half of the population experiencing homelessness is affected by these conditions and that these conditions are more often the result of homelessness, rather than the cause.

If someone falsely blames homelessness for rising crime...

➔ **You might say:** Safety is a big concern for me too. But it's important to remember that **homelessness and crime are mostly separate issues** that are often incorrectly correlated. **Individuals who experience homelessness are actually more likely to be the targets of crime.** Nearly half of people experiencing homelessness report being the victim of a violent attack, which is something we don't often hear.

If someone complains about RVs or says individuals shouldn't be allowed to live in them...

➔ **You might say:** You know how **unaffordable housing and living costs are here — many people have no choice but to turn to their vehicles.** In fact, many who live in their RV or car have full-time jobs. Our goal should be to have enough permanent, affordable housing so everyone in our community has a safe, stable place to call home.



See the next page for more small talk examples and key facts.

If someone says that people prefer to live on the streets...

→ **You might say: Too many residents are just one emergency expense or job loss away from being unable to pay rent.** And our systems don't make it easy for people to get back on their feet. But that's why our region is focused on better outreach, more services, and increasing our supply of emergency and permanent housing. None of our neighbors should have to live outside — **stable housing is a basic human need.**

If someone suggests that everyone's experience with homelessness is the same...

→ **You might say: A lot of homelessness isn't visible to us — it's not just the folks permanently on the street.** Others fall in and out of homelessness; some people live in vehicles or temporary shelters; others stay with friends and family; many families and young people experience homelessness, too. Often, we just see the people who are struggling with mental health or substance use, but there are so many more who are struggling in different ways.



FAST FACTS



Nearly a quarter of people experiencing homelessness in Seattle/King County **have a full- or part-time job.**



There is essentially **no housing on the private market that a minimum-wage earner can afford** in our region with a 40-hour work week.



Of those accessing homelessness services in Seattle/King County, **nearly 90% became homeless here.**



When we provide people with shelter or housing, it **increases their participation in job training programs and raises school attendance**, while also **reducing substance use, domestic violence, and hospitalization.**



It costs taxpayers **\$31,065 a year to incarcerate a single person** experiencing homelessness; the cost of providing them with **housing that includes supportive services is \$10,051 per year.**

LEARN MORE AND GET INVOLVED

This toolkit is only a starting point. If you or whoever you're talking to is interested in diving deeper, the best thing to do is join We Are In. We share informative content, host community events, direct you to service and advocacy opportunities, and more.

