



Eastside Human Services Forum 2008 Legislative Agenda

The Eastside Human Services Forum (EHSF) is a nonprofit coalition that builds strong public and private partnerships to assure stable health and human services for East King County residents. EHSF has the following overall objectives:

- advocate for funds to help people in need
- bring people, groups, and services together to maximize resources
- educate and influence decision makers
- proactively impact regional issues

Each year, EHSF develops a work plan with specific objectives based on the most pressing health and human services needs in East King County. Our Legislative Agenda reflects these priorities and is created by reviewing the policy statements developed by partner organizations and assessing them based on our criteria. In addition to being consistent with our mission and policies, the EHSF legislative agenda items must provide an opportunity to advocate for Eastside-specific concerns.

For 2008, the Eastside Human Services Forum has prioritized the following areas in which to advocate for policy changes: Affordable, High Quality Child care, Affordable Housing & Preventing Homelessness, and Increased Accessibility to Resources. 2008 is a short session and a non-budget year; our focus areas have been selected accordingly to continue supporting issues we supported in 2007.

Goal 1: Affordable, High Quality Child Care Options

In East King County, there are 185 child care centers, yet only 18 (10%) are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. And, of the 245 child care homes, none are accredited. The Eastside Human Services Forum continues to support the implementation of the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), which is a voluntary system offering help and rewards to providers to increase the quality of care for children in child care centers, school-age programs, and family child care homes. Head Start, ECEAP and certified tribal programs can also participate.

The Federal Reserve estimates there is as much as a \$17 return for every \$1 invested in quality early learning opportunities in terms of higher graduation rates, better job skills, reduced welfare and reduced criminal justice costs. Investing in the quality of child care and early learning opportunities lays the foundation for a strong workforce and a healthy economy.

QRIS involves:

- self-assessment and external assessment of early learning programs;
- plans developed by providers to improve quality;
- incentives and resources to help achieve planned improvements;
- subsidy payments that increase as the level of quality increases to help ensure that low-income families have equal access to quality care

Results from the Early Development Instrument (EDI) survey show that 26.3% of kindergarten children in the Bellevue School District were considered vulnerable in at least one category of school readiness and 11.7% had problems in at least two. The five areas of readiness measured were: 1) physical health and well-being; 2) emotional maturity; 3) social competence, 4) language and cognitive skill, and 5) communication and general knowledge. Source: *Communities Count: Social and Health Indicators Across King County 2005; Communities Count Initiative.*

Ensuring that child care is affordable is equally important as the quality of the care available. Average costs for child care are higher in East King County than anywhere else in King County. Infant care averages \$1,048 per month compared to \$868 per month in South King County (*Child Care Facilities and Rates in King County, Child CareResources*).



For More Information:

United Way/SOAR - www.uwkc.org/soar - Harla Tumbleson - htumbleson@uwkc.org
Children's Alliance - www.childrensalliance.org - Sarah Cherin - sarah@childrensalliance.org
WAEYC ("The Collaborative") - www.waeyc.org - Krista Rhea - krista@WAEYC.org

Eastside Human Services Forum Policy Recommendations:

Increase accessibility to child care by increasing investments in child care reimbursement rates.
Fund implementation of the statewide Quality Rating Improvement System for child care providers to ensure high quality child care for all children.

Goal 2: Support All Efforts to Prevent and End Homelessness

Lack of affordable housing is a significant problem throughout King County, and is especially apparent in East King County. No cities on the Eastside have sufficient affordable housing for families with incomes in the 30-80% range of annual median income. (King County Benchmarks 2006 Affordable Housing Report.) As a result, families must spend a high percentage of their income for housing, which leaves little for other basic needs. Spending more than they can afford on housing puts them at increased risk for homelessness.

Washington State provides funding for low-income housing needs through the **Housing Trust Fund** (HTF). These monies help local housing providers to develop much needed affordable housing throughout the state. The Housing Trust Fund was increased to \$130 million during the 2007 Legislative Session. The increase was a victory, but the Trust Fund is not keeping pace with demand. The Washington Low Income Housing Alliance reports that the current fund is just over a third of the total amount required.

The Eastside Human Services Forum actively supports efforts to end homelessness. This requires working hard to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place, and also to prevent it from re-occurring. The **Washington Families Fund** (WFF) is a public-private partnership to support development of service-enriched housing for homeless families. WFF funding has enabled local supportive housing partnerships between service agencies, housing developers and housing authorities to create 14 service-enriched housing programs in 11 Washington counties. When the newly funded programs start in spring 2008, more than 500 homeless families will be given the chance to break the cycle of homelessness. WFF is a proven model helping homeless families reach self-sufficiency. State funding of WFF is essential to continue the program. State dollars would leverage the \$7 million in foundation and corporation support that has already been committed. The Governor's 2008 budget includes an additional \$50 million for the Housing Trust Fund and \$6 million for WFF, a good start towards ending homelessness in Washington State.

East King County has the lowest proportion of affordable housing compared to other regions in King County. Among Bellevue, Redmond and Kirkland, the average percent of rental housing that is affordable to low-income households earning 50% or less of median income is 11.7%, far below the King County average of 46.4%.

For More Information:

Committee to End Homelessness - www.cehkc.org - Bill Block - bill.block@kingcounty.org

Eastside Human Services Forum Policy Recommendations:

Increase funding significantly for the Housing Trust Fund, with an ultimate goal of \$230 million.
Appropriate an additional \$8M to expand the Washington Families Fund this biennium.

Goal 3: Increase Accessibility to Available Resources

The King County call center for 211 is The Crisis Clinic's Community Information Line. In 2006 there were 9,309 calls made from Eastside residents, up from 6,421 calls in 2005.

The **Washington Information Network (WIN) 211** is an easy-to-remember phone number for people to call for health and human service information and referrals and other assistance to meet their needs. In the 2007 session WIN 211 received \$2.5 million less than the prior year, resulting in call center reductions (fewer days and hours, staff lay offs, and the elimination of outreach to educate the public about 211). Calls to 211 continue to increase and an additional \$2.5 million is needed to reinstate the level of service required. With reduced hours of operation, those seeking information may turn to 911 or crisis phone lines, potentially burdening those systems. And, since few social service agencies are open in the evenings, 211 allows for greater accessibility for individuals and families.

For More Information:

WIN211 - www.win211.org - Kathleen Southwick - ksouthwick@crisisclinic.org

Eastside Human Services Forum Policy Recommendation:

Increase funding for the Washington Information Network 211.

Issues to Monitor

The Eastside Human Services Forum has identified three other issues that it will monitor in the 2008 session and provide support as needed:

- **Cover All Kids by 2010:** In the 2007 session, the Cover All Kids bill was passed, making affordable, comprehensive healthcare available to *every child in the state*. Because the bill has already passed, this item is on the "to monitor" list. The Eastside Human Services Forum will watch the '08 session closely for ways to support policies and investments that implement what was mandated by the bill.
- **Child Welfare Reform for Children in Foster Care:** Overall reform of the system is needed, with particular attention to the benchmarks for reducing the overrepresentation of children of color in the system.
- **Support for Immigrants and Refugees:** More services for adults who are refugees and immigrants, such as basic levels of ESL and Adult Basic Education offered at community colleges and community based organizations and housing are needed, as well as better ways for school districts to track student data for refugee and immigrant children in the K-12 system to see how they are faring in the WASL test.

For more information about the Eastside Human Services Forum, please visit www.eastsideforum.org or call: 425-587-3324.