

# ***Mental Health, Substance Use, and Homelessness***

## **Human Services Campus Client Town Hall**

**October 11, 2022 – Phoenix, AZ**

### **THE INTERSECTION OF MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS**

Mental health, substance use, and homelessness are often connected. A job loss or other circumstances can cause homelessness which then leads to mental health or substance use. Likewise, substance use can lead to mental illness which can then lead to homelessness. Undiagnosed mental illness, like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), can lead to substance use and then homelessness.

Whenever possible, it is important to try to prevent these crises before they occur.

All of these issues need to be addressed together with all entities working together to keep people on the right path. Relationships and respectful treatment of those experiencing homelessness are important. For those experiencing homelessness, it is important to have consistent rules and guidance on services. It is also important to have consistent housing.

It would be helpful to have life coaches and other support to help people get out of the cycle. Just knowing who to talk to and where to go can make a big difference, as can destigmatizing mental health issues.

If we do not address the homelessness, it is hard to address the other issues. They are all related and interconnected. If you are homeless for too long, it becomes even more challenging to break out of the cycle, especially if housing does not include other services that provide connections, job opportunities, or mental health services.

### **SETTING PRIORITIES**

It is critical to have compassionate staff with proper training to serve people at the Human Services Campus. Someone who is burned out does not provide the same level of care, which creates roadblocks and can bring down the spirit of those being served.

Consistency is very important, both in rules and in the treatment of people. Consider having printed guidelines (similar to what is in the dining area), so everyone knows what to expect of staff. This would lead to greater consistency.

Work to move those with serious mental illness (SMI) to different areas to minimize the impact on others.

Consider drug testing the staff.

We need to look at how to provide training and support to staff so they can provide more training on different types of jobs to those being served (including seasonal jobs).

Create more programs that can be accessed during the down time – specifically programs that provide hope and opportunities for a way out of the cycle.

The longer someone stays on campus the more difficult it is to transition out. Create more programs that make good use of idle time and that incentivize and encourage people to get out of the cycle. As an example: create a survey asking “What are five things you have done this week to help yourself? Change programs and policies that do not incentivize making or saving money.

Create more housing that is affordable for those trying to transition out of homelessness. Minimum wage is simply not enough to cover the cost of rent for most apartments. Explore different housing solutions.

## **WHAT ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS NEED TO KNOW**

- Empathize, engage and walk in other people's shoes.
- Provide more resources for reporting abuse of power or mismanagement. Have an advocate or call line.
- Focus on prevention and prioritize resources to prevention.
- There needs to be better communication between those providing services and those being served. Provide a progress report to those being served so they have more knowledge of their own circumstances, including the status of available housing.
- Explore how to collaborate better between different services so they are more integrated.
- Come from a place of ethical values and doing what is best for people instead of how to get elected.
- Come down to the Human Services Campus and just observe so that you can better understand the challenges people are dealing with, which will allow you to make better decisions at a leadership level.