

To: Members of the KConnect Network  
From: Pamela Parriott, President, KConnect  
Re: Process to address housing insecurity  
Date: January 22, 2019

I am writing to make you aware of work that KConnect and many community partners have begun to address housing insecurity among families in Kent County.

The number of people in Kent County who are Literally Homeless increased by 50 percent between 2015 and 2017. Rising home prices and a limited supply of affordable housing contributed to this increase. Seventy percent of those who came in contact with the homeless system in 2017 were people of color, and more than half were children and families. Many of them did not get help from the system, either because services weren't available or they did not qualify. That often left them sleeping in their cars or on friends' couches.

The steep decline in affordable housing is creating challenges, but also an opportunity. This crisis demands that we make the best use of all available resources to end homelessness. Concerned stakeholders asked KConnect to bring people together to examine how the system is working now, establish shared goals, and develop collaborative strategies to reach those goals. KConnect accepted the charge, as the people most in need of stable housing are those who are the focus of its work: children and families in marginalized communities.

As you know, KConnect works on the premise that together is better. KConnect has begun a yearlong process to convene organizations in the housing and homeless systems, funders, and other stakeholders. Together we will develop a comprehensive community plan with accountability measures. To be successful, all parties will have to see their work reflected in the plan and understand their role in implementing it.

Attached is a graphic that outlines the teams working on this. It should look familiar as it is modeled after our broader KConnect Network. Throughout the process, a Design Team will be responsible for moving the work to completion and will serve as the primary synthesizer of information that is gathered and discussed. The work will be supported by four other teams:

- Content Experts will represent the community expertise in the housing and homeless systems,
- Context Experts will ensure that those with lived experience with homelessness are represented in the process and plan,
- A Scout/Research Team will research best (and failed) practices around the country,
- And a Communications Team will ensure consistent communication between the teams and with the broader community.

There is also backbone support to manage and facilitate the process. The work will include opportunities for the community – people not directly involved in one of the teams – to become engaged and help shape and refine the recommendations.

Public Agency, an initiative led by the West Michigan Center for Arts + Technology, is helping to facilitate the work and will utilize a combination of systems and design thinking. Systems thinking examines patterns, policy, structure, resource allocation, information sharing, relationships, and mindsets that create the system. Design thinking is a problem-solving

process that focuses on the people at the heart of the systems. It considers their experiences, emotions, pain points, aspirations, goals, journeys, and hurdles.

The work will culminate in a comprehensive plan to achieve equitable housing outcomes. That plan will consist of a Common Agenda that explains the current state of housing and homelessness, opportunities for intervention, and a common vision with measurable goals and outcomes. It also will include a Roadmap that outlines the shifts in mindsets and values, the strategies, and the actions that will be required to achieve the goals, as well as guidelines to hold stakeholders accountable.

We anticipate the work will be completed by the end of November. We will provide further updates as it progresses. If you choose not to receive updates, please reply to this email and you will be removed from this distribution list.

*Definition of Literally Homeless: Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.*