

Frequently Asked Questions about Tent City

What is Tent City?

- Tent City is a temporary encampment of homeless adults that moves approximately every 90 days.
- There are two Tent Cities in King County: Tent City 3 is in Seattle, and Tent City 4 is on the Eastside. (Tent Cities 1 and 2 were camps in Seattle during the 1990s. They no longer exist.)

What is the mission of Tent City?

- To provide a safe place for homeless people to spend the night and keep their belongings;
- To give a homeless person the privacy and dignity of their own residence (a tent);
- To develop a sense of community for homeless people who are isolated and alone;
- To empower homeless people by being responsible for their own community.

Who sponsors Tent City?

- Tent City is sponsored and managed by SHARE/WHEEL. (SHARE stands for "Seattle Housing and Resource Effort". WHEEL stands for "Women's Housing Equality and Enhancement League".)
- SHARE/WHEEL operates 15 indoor shelters and two Tent City locations.
- SHARE/WHEEL manages 350 indoor shelter beds in Seattle, making it the largest shelter-providing organization in the Pacific Northwest.

How long has SHARE/WHEEL been operating?

- SHARE/WHEEL has been operating fixed site shelters for over seventeen years.
- SHARE/WHEEL has been operating Tent Cities for over eight years.

How is SHARE/WHEEL funded?

- SHARE/WHEEL is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, tax-exempt, public charity.
- SHARE/WHEEL receives about 80% of its funding from the City of Seattle, through contracts for the management of shelter facilities.
- SHARE/WHEEL's administrative overhead is around 9%.

Who runs Tent City 4?

- Each Tent City has an executive committee elected by the residents. All residents are expected to attend weekly community meetings and to perform at least one task a day for the community.

How many people live in TC4?

- Maximum occupancy is 100.

Who are the people living in TC4?

- Homeless adults: single men and women, and couples. Families with children may be housed overnight in an emergency, but they are referred to other social service agencies as soon as possible.

What percentage of Tent City residents have a job?

- The percentage varies with the TC4 population. Many of the residents are employed, either permanently or temporarily. Many others are actively seeking employment or are in educational programs to improve job skills. There are a few people with disabilities that prevent them from getting a job.

Do people leave Tent City 4?

- The typical length of stay for residents is about six weeks.

Does TC4 have toilet and shower facilities?

- TC4 has portable toilets which are serviced three times per week. A portable shower was built during their first stay in Woodinville and has been transported on its own trailer to successive sites. Drainage from the shower and sinks (called "grey water") is piped into a sewer drain at the church.

What about garbage and laundry?

- TC4's garbage dumpsters are emptied weekly. Residents do litter patrol of TC4 and surrounding areas.
- Blankets and sleeping bags are laundered once a week at Everett Overall Laundry (services donated). Personal laundry is handled by each resident.
- Holy Spirit plans to supply a washer and dryer for the residents' use without charge.

Can I come to Tent City 4 to see it firsthand?

- Yes, Tent City 4 is open to visitors 24/7. Visits are encouraged and complete tours can be given during the day and early evening.

Frequently Asked Questions about Safety & Security

Does Tent City pose a threat to its neighbors or to school children?

- No. According to an official King County investigation: "Concerning children's safety and the potential threat posed by Tent City 4, no evidence exists in the record suggesting area children or others are facing safety risk.... There is no reason to fear people living at Tent City 4."

Has there been an increase in crime in areas where Tent Cities 3 & 4 have been located?

- No. According to the police in Seattle, Shoreline, Tukwila, Bothell, Woodinville, and Kirkland there has been no measurable increase in crime in neighborhoods near any Tent City. On May 21, 2004, the Seattle Times published an independent investigation which found that SHARE/WHEEL's Tent Cities do not affect crime rates. (the complete story can be found in the Seattle Times archives at archives.seattletimes.nwsourc.com; free registration required.)

Has a Tent City ever been located in a residential area or near schools?

- Yes. Because the host is usually a church, Tent Cities have normally been in residential neighborhoods. In Bothell, an elementary school was located within a block of Tent City 4; previous Tent Cities have been within two blocks of at least ten schools, pre-schools or day cares. The Woodinville site was the first that was not in a residential area. During the entire history of all Tent Cities, not a single child or other neighbor has been harmed by any Tent City resident, according to police records.

Are neighborhood schools and children safe from possible intruders?

- Schools already have procedures in place to deal with unauthorized persons in their buildings and on their grounds. For specific information, contact the schools directly.

What was the police coverage at the previous Tent City locations?

- Generally, law enforcement has made regular daily contact with Tent City. Unscheduled visits are made several times a day. This is the model followed by the King County Sheriff's officers (under contract with the city) at the Woodinville site for Tent City 4. The City of Bothell chose to provide an officer at the site 24/7. At other locations, either King County sheriff's officers or local police officers were available at any time.

How does TC4 handle security?

- Tent City 4 is in a fenced area, with a single entry/exit point which is staffed around the clock.
- Potential residents must have, or obtain, photo ID. With the help of the King County Sheriff's Department, a check is performed for each applicant in which the applicant's name is checked against Washington Criminal Information Center (WACIC) and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) for outstanding warrants and sex offenses.
- All residents must agree to abide by a code of conduct, which includes rules making the area a drug-, alcohol- and weapon-free zone.

What happens to potential residents who are not accepted?

- If the person is denied access to Tent City due to an outstanding warrant, law enforcement is notified.
- If the person does not have appropriate ID, he/she must obtain it within 48 hours or leave.
- If the person is denied access to Tent City, he/she is escorted to the nearest bus stop and given a bus pass if necessary.

What happens to residents who violate the Tent City Code of Conduct?

- Illegal activities are referred to law enforcement.
- The code of conduct includes consequences for other violations. Repeated or serious offenses will result in the resident being barred from Tent City.

Frequently Asked Questions about Homelessness in King County

What is the homeless situation in King County?

- The January 30, 2009 One Night Count by the Seattle/King County Coalition for the Homeless found **2,826** people surviving outside without shelter in King County. This number does not include the estimated 6,000 people taking advantage of shelters and transitional housing. Based on these numbers, on any given night there are 8,000 people who are homeless throughout the County.

What is the difference between emergency shelter and transitional housing?

- Emergency shelter is typically available on short notice, for a limited time only. Transitional housing on the Eastside is primarily for families, available after an application and qualification process; all programs currently have waiting lists. It typically guarantees housing for 6 to 24 months, and includes case management.

Why are there so many homeless people on the street?

- Every person who is homeless has his or her own story. Unemployment, medical expenses and disabilities are among the reasons that people find themselves without enough money to provide for their housing. Not everyone has family or friends in the area who can help provide a home.
- King County does not have enough shelter space to accommodate all its homeless people. Current public and private funding is inadequate.
- Shelters don't work for all people. Hours and safe storage for belongings are limited. Shelters are usually segregated by gender, forcing couples to choose between shelter and staying together.

What are some sources for more information on homelessness?

- *Interfaith Task Force on Homelessness* www.itfhomeless.org
- *Committee to End Homelessness in King County* www.cehkc.org
- *Seattle/King County Coalition for the Homeless* www.homelessinfo.org
- *Washington State Coalition for the Homeless* www.endhomelessnesswa.org
- *National Coalition for the Homeless* www.nationalhomeless.org
- Note that all the above sites have extensive lists of other sources of information on homelessness.