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## LICTON SPRINGS VILLAGE EVALUATION

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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### PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



### EVALUATION TEAM

In January 2018, SHARE/WHEEL commissioned our team of eight University of Washington Community-Oriented Public Health Practice (COPHP) Master of Public Health students to design and implement an evaluation of Licton Springs Village, an organized and city-sanctioned “low-barrier” tiny house village in Seattle for people experiencing crisis outdoor living situations (homelessness), coupled with other health challenges such as substance dependence and/or mental health problems. As a pioneering and unique program, it was important to assess how well Licton Springs Village was working in general, along with some specific operational evaluation questions. With assistance from seven undergraduate Honors students, we completed this evaluation project over the course of 10 weeks.



# BACKGROUND

King County has the third largest concentration of people experiencing homelessness in metro areas in the United States. Not only has the city failed to meet the goals of Seattle's 10-year plan to end chronic homelessness, but the prevalence of homelessness actually increased significantly in recent years. Although there are a number of programs in King County serving individuals experiencing homelessness, few have embraced a housing first, low-barrier model. Licton Springs Village, which opened in April 2017, is the only city-sanctioned low-barrier shelter alternative for people experiencing homelessness. The low-barrier (harm reduction) model primarily means that the Licton Springs Village residents, called Villagers, do not need to be sober or have a valid ID to live at the Village or receive services. The Village is meant to serve individuals experiencing chemical dependency and follows a "come as you are" non-judgmental approach. The development of Licton Springs Village was

the result of collaboration between the City of Seattle (funding and placement), SHARE/WHEEL (Village management), the Low-Income Housing Institute (land and case-management), and REACH (Village referrals).

SHARE/WHEEL commissioned this evaluation to assess how well the Licton Springs Village encampment model is working, both for its Villagers and for other stakeholders. Per its Management Plan, Licton Springs Village aims to establish relationships of trust over time with folks who have been in crisis outdoor living situations by offering a non-judgmental, non-coercive environment, operated with a practice of gently encouraging participants to reduce potential self-harm. To determine how well Licton Springs Village is meeting this overarching goal, we devised six primary evaluation questions, all derived from the Management Plan and conversations with Michele Marchand (the Village Organizer).

## EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- 1 Is Licton Springs Village providing a non-judgmental, non-coercive place for people to live, stabilize, and work towards housing-readiness?
- 2 Do Villagers utilize, trust, and benefit from Licton Springs Village staff and service providers?
- 3 Has Licton Springs Village maintained productive relationships with the surrounding community?
- 4 Is Licton Springs Village serving hard to reach populations, not reached by other services?
- 5 Is Licton Springs Village doing what it intended to do?
- 6 What is the cost comparison between Licton Springs Village and the Navigation Center?



# METHODS

In accordance with community-based participatory research (CBPR) principles, SHARE/WHEEL was involved in each step of our evaluation. Our evaluation includes both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools (“mixed methods”), including paper and electronic questionnaires, focus groups, key informant interviews, and secondary data sources, as outlined below:

**TABLE 1: Licton Springs Village Evaluation Data Collection Methods and Participants**

DATA COLLECTION METHODS	PARTICIPANTS
QUESTIONNAIRES	LICTON SPRINGS VILLAGERS LICTON SPRINGS VILLAGE STAFF
QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS	LICTON SPRINGS VILLAGERS KEY INFORMANTS/STAKEHOLDERS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Elizabeth Dahl, Aurora Commons Executive Director</li><li>Steven Schrock, DESC</li><li>Sherry, LIHI Case Manager</li><li>Richard Horne, LIHI Case Manager</li><li>Aaron Goddu, Mobile Medical Van</li><li>Mary Preuss, Licton Springs Village Lead Food Volunteer</li><li>George Scarola, City of Seattle, Strategic Advisor</li><li>Lisa Gustaveson, City of Seattle TES Planning &amp; Development Specialist</li></ul>
FOCUS GROUPS	LICTON SPRINGS VILLAGE STAFF COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAC)
SECONDARY DATA SOURCES	Nickelsville Georgetown Tiny House Village; LIHI; Homeless Management Information System (HMIS); Information from Licton Springs Village staff; Information from Volunteers; Seattle Police Department; The Navigation Center



# KEY FINDINGS

## VILLAGER RESULTS

Villager survey and interview responses indicate Licton Springs Village is succeeding in its commitment to provide a non-judgmental, non-coercive place to for Villagers to stabilize. We conducted a review of the social science literature to derive evidence-informed questions to elicit Villager views of their self-efficacy and independence. Three-quarters of the Villager respondents reported they feel free to do what they want, and 71% agreed they have more influence than anyone else over their daily lives. Villagers also seemed motivated to contribute to day-to-day operations: 77% of Villagers said they enjoy helping out around the Village.

Overwhelmingly, participants agreed they experienced positive life changes since moving to the Village. These included health, stability, and social changes. More than 50% agreed their physical health had improved since moving to Licton Springs Village, and 63% agreed their mental health was better. A large majority of Villagers we surveyed (73%) said Licton Springs Village is better than where they lived before. Four in five Villager respondents stated their life was more stable since relocating to the Village.

Some Villagers expressed concerns about theft. Of respondents living in tiny houses, 64% agreed or strongly agreed that their belongings were safe at Licton Springs Village, compared to just 36% of dorm-style tent residents, none of whom strongly agreed with that statement. Half of respondents living in dorm-style tents strongly disagreed they could be certain their belongings would be there when they returned. These findings suggest discrepancies in security between the tiny houses and the dorm-style tents.

Generally, Villagers do not feel staff treat them punitively; the majority of Villagers (70%) reported Village staff are not likely to punish them for their behavior. Similarly, 63% of Villagers reported staff are not likely to reward them for their successes either. This may be evidence of SHARE/WHEEL's goal to promote a "come as you are" atmosphere, where Villagers are free to act autonomously, without incentives or penalties associated with any particular behavior. However, further probing into Villager-staff relationships revealed some distrust within the Village. Only half of respondents agreed that they trust Licton Springs Village staff and less than half believe staff follow through on the promises they make. Qualitative interviews with Villagers highlighted concerns about favoritism, inconsistent treatment, and inadequate staff training. Our survey did not define the term staff, and therefore we cannot be certain whether respondents were referring to SHARE/WHEEL, LIHI, or DESC staff members.

Despite conflicting perceptions of staff, Licton Springs Villagers seemed to have a generally positive experiences at the Village. Still, 95% of respondents reported they would leave Licton Springs Village if a permanent housing option became available. We believe this speaks to Villagers' desire for permanent housing placement as well as the lack of permanent, affordable housing options in Seattle.

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## STAFF RESULTS

SHARE/WHEEL staff mostly agreed or felt neutral about the idea that staff are non-coercive and operate with a practice of gently encouraging Villagers to reduce potential self-harm. Nearly all staff agreed or strongly agreed that Licton Springs Village staff and resources have contributed to the prevention of Villager overdose and/or death from substance use. Staff also generally agreed the Village has made positive contributions to the surrounding community and most felt they did a good job of managing the relationships between Villagers and the neighborhood. Ten out of twelve staff agreed staff did a good job managing domestic violence situations. Villager hoarding of belongings and trash accumulation were unexpected problems with which the staff have struggled, given the limited space in the Village. Staff were generally neutral or disagreed that Licton Springs Village staff did a good job managing Villagers' hoarding. While staff initially thought medical problems and overdoses would be a larger problem than it has been, staff were evenly divided on whether Licton Springs Village staff did a good job managing Villagers' medical conditions. Staff did indicate that medical treatment is generally out of the scope of staff expertise and resources. A visiting medical van from the King County health department provides some services to Villagers.

Through both the questionnaire and focus group, staff expressed they face many challenges in their work at Licton Springs Village. An important feature of the staffing model is that staff themselves have experience with housing insecurity. Another important feature is that Licton Springs Village staff and their Organizer meet together every week, for at least a couple of hours. These weekly staff meetings dive deep into problem solving, policy creation, and also case studies of needful Villagers.

Staff have a variety of personal and professional backgrounds, different amounts of formal and informal training, and divergent personalities and beliefs. These differences cause staff members to approach Villagers' issues and concerns from different angles and to have differing opinions on how to operate the Village. The Village staff identified a wide variety of unmet training, financial, service, and staffing needs that impede their ability to work most effectively. Staff consistently identified a need for more formal training opportunities that could be made available were there more resources. Additionally, several staff members also expressed they do not receive enough support from partner organizations for day-to-day operations, including trash disposal and needle exchange. Some staff members also felt Licton Springs Village is understaffed and supervision of staff members is insufficient. If SHARE/WHEEL were better resourced, the Core Organizer could give more time to Licton Springs Village. Additionally, SHARE/WHEEL as an organization is short-staffed and if the Village were better resourced, services like specialized mental health outreach and programming could be offered.





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## COMMUNITY RELATIONS

We learned about community relations from interactions with the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) to Licton Springs Village and some key informant interviews. Overall, CAC members and the informants we interviewed, including service providers and city officials, had positive impressions of Licton Springs Village and agreed it should be renewed for another year. Stakeholders from the Aurora/Licton Springs neighborhood consistently agreed Licton Springs Village has had a positive effect on the community and exceeded the expectations of those involved in its development. Participating stakeholders consistently agreed that the village was often blamed for issues in the community that were either pre-existing or caused by unrelated external factors. Although opponents of Licton Springs Village have expressed concerns about an increase in crime in the region, we found no statistically significant difference in crime between the years before Licton Springs opened and its first year of operation. Licton Springs Villagers and staff attempt to mitigate negative perceptions by routinely participating in litter clean-up around the neighborhood.

Engaged community members have contributed to the success of Licton Springs Village in three main ways: volunteer and in-kind donations, service provision, and involvement in the CAC. Collectively, individual volunteers have donated hundreds of hours and more than \$2,500 of their own money to the Village (probably significantly more, but data are not well retained about this). SHARE/WHEEL has successfully recruited community breakfast and lunch offerings and volunteer projects like gardening. Additionally, SHARE/WHEEL has been successful in building relationships with other organizations, including the Green Lake Library, King County/Seattle Mobile Medical Van, and the Union Gospel Mission Rescue Van, among others.

## LICTON SPRINGS VILLAGE VS. NICKELSVILLE GEORGETOWN (A SELF-GOVERNED TINY HOUSE VILLAGE)

A component of Seattle's formal homeless network, LIHI participates in the federal Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) by providing information about the characteristics of residents and, when discharged, their destinations. These data reveal the average age of everyone who has ever lived at Licton Springs Village is 46 years. Half of all current and former Villagers identify as female, 48% male, and 2% gender non-conforming.

To put these figures in context, we compared Licton Springs Village data with a self-governed tiny house village, Georgetown. We found the age, gender and sexual identity of Licton Springs Villagers was not different from Georgetown; neither were there differences of ethnicity, chronic homelessness, veteran status, or the presence of a disabling condition. Where the two sites differ, however, is in the racial breakdown of the Villagers. We found people of color, specifically people who identify as Black or African American and American Indian/Alaska Native, were more likely to live at Licton Springs Village compared to Nickelsville Georgetown. Our results suggest Licton Springs Village may be more inclusive to the disproportionate number of people of color experiencing homelessness in Seattle.

Although the populations leaving Licton Springs Village and Nickelsville Georgetown do not differ demographically, the proportion of people exiting to different destinations do vary significantly. Licton Springs Villagers were more likely to exit into permanent housing (as defined by HMIS) than are Nickelsville Georgetown Villagers; more than half (59%) of people exiting Licton Springs Village moved to permanent housing, compared to just more than a quarter (28%) of Nickelsville Georgetown Villagers. There is also a statistically significant difference in the proportion of Villagers exiting to temporary housing from the two encampments: 36% of Villagers exiting Licton Springs Village moved to temporary housing, whereas almost double that proportion (63.9%) in Georgetown exited to temporary housing. Those who left their encampment for institutions such as jail or foster care, did not differ between the two sites (5% and 8% for Licton Springs and Georgetown, respectively).

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## **COST COMPARISON: LICTON SPRINGS VILLAGE AND THE NAVIGATION CENTER**

To answer the question “what is the cost comparison between Licton Springs Village and the Navigation Center?” we obtained budget data from LIHI for the Village and DESC for the Navigation Center. The data provided included security staffing, operation, and case management and did not include food or any start-up costs. The sum of operating costs for Licton Springs Village was \$491,127, which we divided by 270 days (total days the Village was open in 2017, from April 5-Dec 31), and further divided by 65 Villagers (average number of Villagers on site). From this we found the operation of Licton Springs Village is \$28 per bed per night. Using this same formula for the Navigation Center, we took their \$1.8 million (sum of costs per Navigation Center budget documents), divided by 365 days (total days the Navigation Center was open in 2017), further divided by 75 beds (average number of Villagers on site). From this we found the operation of the Navigation center is \$65 per bed per night. Therefore, on average, Licton Springs Village operation costs are less than half of the Navigation Center operation costs.

**AVERAGE OPERATION COST PER BED PER NIGHT:**  
**LICTON SPRINGS VILLAGE: \$28**  
**THE NAVIGATION CENTER: \$65**





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# RECOMMENDATIONS

Our evaluation concludes Licton Springs Village is succeeding in providing a non-judgmental, non-coercive place to for Villagers to stabilize. The Village is operating in accordance to its 2017 Management Plan, despite the very limited resources. Villagers, staff, and community stakeholders had overwhelmingly positive perceptions of Licton Springs Village, although all three groups identified room for improvement. These criticisms mostly pertained to LIHI or SHARE/WHEEL staff-Villager relationships and inadequate training for staff. Based on our findings, we developed a number of recommendations for improving Licton Springs Village functioning. Because our surveying did not distinguish between staffing entities, these recommendations apply jointly to all partners. Some recommendations could be carried out by SHARE/WHEEL and staff, while others apply to or require support from SHARE/WHEEL's partner organizations. Our recommendations are as follows:

1

The City of Seattle should provide additional funding to address infrastructure, utilities, record-keeping, training, service, and staffing needs in the Village. Additional funding should expand mental health and medical specialization services as a priority need.

2

Develop a comprehensive training program for all SHARE/WHEEL and LIHI staff, especially harm reduction training. A variety of public health and management training organizations might be engaged to partner in this effort. Current LIHI and SHARE/WHEEL resources are insufficient to provide comprehensive training, and therefore additional resources would need to be garnered for this purpose.

3

SHARE/WHEEL and LIHI should increase supervision of staff. Staff reported wanting more training and issues between staff and residents could be addressed through closer oversight. This additional oversight would require additional staffing and/or funding.

4

SHARE/WHEEL should develop more written harm reduction protocols. Written protocols would promote equitable (but person-centric) treatment, and ensure staff can consistently, effectively, and confidently address emergent Villager issues.

5

Locker should be installed in the dorm-style tents where Villagers can store their belongings.

6

Licton Springs Village staff should establish a system for obtaining Villager feedback about on-site staff, Villagers, and operations in addition to staff/Villager meetings and implement this feedback via new or modified policies. This would allow for greater resident control over the Village and promote staff transparency.

7

SHARE/WHEEL should collaborate with the City of Seattle, LIHI, and other partners to establish more low-barrier shelter in Seattle to meet the needs of underserved and hard-to-serve populations. The City of Seattle could also fund additional low-barrier encampments to be run by other community partners.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS CONTINUED

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SHARE/WHEEL, LIHI and the City of Seattle should make known the current crime and complaint data, which indicate no significant change in non-vehicular crime in the immediate neighborhood since Licton Springs Village was established. The Aurora-Licton Urban Village meeting might be a good venue for this engagement.

9

SHARE/WHEEL and LIHI should improve its recordkeeping of volunteer hours and donations to better understand the Village's true costs of operation.

10

The City of Seattle should examine the Village referral system to ensure REACH is operating it equitably and a high proportion of Villagers come from the Aurora-Licton neighborhood.

11

LIHI and other partners should investigate the factors contributing to the inequities in exits to permanent housing between Villagers of color and white Villagers. Although POC Villagers represent 45% of residents, only 25% of exits to permanent housing at Licton Springs are Villagers of color.

