

VISION 2030 | SOLID GROUND STRATEGIC PLAN

Thriving Residents, Stronger Communities



Before reaching 75 years old, 76% of Americans will have spent at least a year living in poverty.ⁱ

While the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in extraordinary governmental funding, that response was temporary. With the end of those emergency funds, communities around Puget Sound are struggling more than ever. People are grappling with a rapid increase in poverty,ⁱⁱ persistent crises in housing affordabilityⁱⁱⁱ and homelessness,^{iv} and more challenges accessing services.

In response, Solid Ground is committed to increase access to services and opportunities in Seattle and surrounding areas – especially for those who historically have been excluded due to racism and other oppressions.

This Strategic Plan was developed through a grassroots approach guided by our Community Accountability Council (CAC).^v It outlines how Solid Ground will build and expand on our 50 years of experience solving poverty through anti-racist direct services,^{vi} nurturing resources, and advocating for systemic change.

Human-centered response^{vii}



Community input into our planning was loud and clear: People who seek services and support are frustrated with existing care systems. They face barriers – and often trauma – accessing human services, behavioral health services,^{viii} emergency supports, and other resources. Current systems are designed to serve some community members and not others – and they often do not connect with each other.

- ▶ *Solid Ground will use our trauma-informed^{ix} and client-centered^x approaches to support people to navigate systems.*
- ▶ *We will listen and organize with community, bringing participant voices forward to advocate for breaking down barriers between external support systems.*
- ▶ *We will work to ensure that resources are developed and deployed strategically to be equitably available to all who need them.*



Be the village for today's youth

While Solid Ground has long worked to address intergenerational poverty, childhood poverty rates in Washington state have more than doubled over the past two years.^{xi} Research shows^{xiii} that participation in positive youth development programs starting at a young age may reduce poverty in adulthood – possibly aided by higher educational attainment and resultant increased income. But opportunities for youth that are rooted in developmental assets are not consistently available. Our youth need meaningful activities and opportunities to develop their skills, passions, and self-worth.



- ▶ *Solid Ground will greatly expand youth programming to provide asset-based^{xiii} opportunities for area youth that are validated by the experiences of program participants.*
- ▶ *This initiative will build on our experience mentoring and supporting formerly homeless youth to succeed in school, as well as a successful pilot program that enhances developmental assets to help interrupt generational cycles of poverty.*
- ▶ *We will advocate for and with youth to create public policy that sets them up to thrive and addresses their priorities and vision for their future.*

Enhance well-being

Our Community Needs Assessment^{xiv} highlights the critical lack of community support for mental health and well-being. People at all economic levels of our region need behavioral health services. But society's forced inequities especially impact Black, Indigenous, and People of Color – and those living on very low incomes^{xv} – making them more prone to illness.^{xvi}



- ▶ *Solid Ground will increase partnerships and collaborations to make culturally relevant,^{xvii} age-appropriate^{xviii} behavioral health services and other asset-based wellness services available to program participants.*
- ▶ *We will build on the Behavioral Health Partnership at our Sand Point Housing campus, using its successes as a roadmap to expand access to mental health services across all of our program areas.*
- ▶ *We will develop wellness services to support a broader sense of well-being.*
- ▶ *We will advocate for increased public funding and easing of barriers to critically needed mental health and wellness services.*



Organizational excellence & resilience

The University of Washington School of Social Work study on wage equity^{xix} revealed that human services workers are greatly underpaid. Our sector faces existential challenges in recruiting and retaining the staff needed to effectively respond to community needs.

- ▶ *Solid Ground will provide advocacy, leadership, and support for system-wide efforts to secure wage equity for human services workers.*
- ▶ *We will enhance our internal leadership development to build an even more talented team with the resilience and grace to continue working to solve poverty in Seattle/King County.*

As we carry out this Strategic Plan, Solid Ground will continue to build on our more than 20 years of work toward becoming an anti-racist, multi-cultural organization where everyone is welcome, everyone belongs, and everyone grows in their belief in themselves and each other.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Housing First

Solid Ground's housing and homelessness prevention programs and services operate under a Housing First philosophy. We believe that safe and stable housing is a basic human right. We work to quickly and successfully connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without preconditions and barriers to entry (e.g. sobriety, treatment, criminal record, or service participation requirements). The experiences of our program participants attest to the fact that people can best achieve stability and address the barriers they face when they have secure housing.

Why we're dedicated to undoing racism

Over half of the people Solid Ground serves are people of color. Many face challenges as a direct result of institutional racism: housing discrimination, benefits denial, predatory lending, employment barriers, and disparities in the education and criminal justice systems. Simply put: We can't be an effective anti-poverty organization without tackling racism!

Read more about Solid Ground's Housing First philosophy and ongoing efforts to further Race & Social Justice in the Our Impact section of our website: solid-ground.org/our-impact.

Endnotes

- i** [Confronting Poverty: Tools for Understanding Economic Hardship and Risk](#), [Poverty Myths and Facts: Most Americans Will Experience Poverty](#)
- ii** A “rapid increase in poverty” is when many people experience a significant decline in their incomes or well-being over a short period of time. This can be caused by various factors, such as economic shocks, food insecurity, climate change, population growth, or political instability. We most recently saw this in 2022 as the pandemic continued, yet support and resources to address its effects were limited or used up. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that the poverty rate in 2022 was 12.4%, up from 7.8% in 2021 ([‘The streak is now broken’: US poverty rate over time shows spike in 2022 levels](#), USA Today, 9/12/23). Child poverty also more than doubled in 2022, from 5.2% in 2021 to 12.4% ([2023 Poverty Rate By State, Per The Latest Census Data](#), Forbes, 11/9/23).
- iii** A household is considered “cost-burdened” if they spend 30% or more of their gross income on housing costs. According to Public Health – Seattle & King County Community Health Indicators, one in three households (36%) in King County reported being cost-burdened between 2016-2020.
- iv** According to [Regional Homelessness Data](#) from King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA), individuals experiencing homelessness rose from 11,119 in January 2019 to 13,368 in March 2022 (as tracked by the annual Point in Time Count, which captures data from just a single night). Using a different methodology, the County estimates that nearly 40,800 people experienced homelessness in King County during the year 2020 ([Integrating Data to Better Measure Homelessness: DCHS Data Insights Series](#), King County, 12/2021).
- v** A “grassroots approach” engages people in a specific community to address issues that impact their community. A grassroots approach to strategic planning means that people with experiences accessing services like ours have leadership in building the plan. This recognizes that people know best what they need to thrive, and it welcomes them to the decision-making table. (To learn more, see [Community Tool Box, CHAPTER 18, Section 1. Designing Community Interventions](#).)
- An example is Solid Ground’s [Community Accountability Council \(CAC\)](#), made up of people with lived experience of poverty who are committed to leading change – and who understand that what’s happening in their lives is also happening to others. CAC members participate in leadership development, advocacy, and social justice training. They provide perspective on issues and decisions that Solid Ground grapples with. Their leadership in this Strategic Planning process helped keep the focus on community-driven solutions to issues affecting people experiencing poverty in the Seattle/King County area.
- vi** “Anti-racism” is the active pursuit of working to end racism at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels. To provide anti-racist direct services means to ensure that our services, practices, and policies are not contributing to unequal outcomes between racial groups. We also work to dismantle white supremacy culture structures that have long held racism in place. This might include using data to ensure our services reach historically marginalized groups in need, bringing community members to the table as decision makers, and reflecting on areas where our individual racial biases may appear in our services ([Being Anti-Racist is Central to Trauma-Informed Care: Principles of An Anti-Racist Trauma-Informed Organization](#), *The National Child Traumatic Stress Network*).
- vii** “Human-centered design” is an approach to problem solving that starts with listening deeply to what communities really want and need, then testing new ideas but remaining flexible enough to make changes to maximize impact ([How organizations can apply human-centered design in crisis response](#), Devex). A human-centered care system prioritizes the experiences of participants. It aligns service delivery to the needs and concerns of clients, rather than the expectations of funders, organizations, and governments ([What is human-centered design?](#), *Harvard Business School Online*).

viii “Behavioral health services” address a person’s overall well-being by focusing on emotions and behaviors related to their health.

ix “Trauma-informed care” shifts the focus from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?” A trauma-informed approach to care acknowledges that human services organizations and care teams need to have a complete picture of each person’s life – past and present – to provide effective services. Adopting trauma-informed practices can potentially improve participant engagement and outcomes, as well as provider and staff wellness. It can also help reduce avoidable care and excess costs for both the health care and human services sectors. Trauma-informed care seeks to: a) Realize the widespread impact of trauma and understand paths for recovery; b) Recognize signs and symptoms of trauma in participants, families, and staff; c) Integrate knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and d) Actively avoid retraumatization. (Adapted from [SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-informed Approach](#), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.)

x A “client-centered approach” places highest priority on each client, participant, or resident’s needs and values. This puts each person in a position of power to design and make decisions about their care or services.

xi See a “rapid increase in poverty” **ii** above.

xii [Long-term effects of a community-based positive youth development program for Black youth: health, education, and financial well-being in adulthood](#), BMC Public Health, 3/26/22

xiii Many services supporting young people treat them as “broken” and in need of “fixing.” An “asset-based approach” empowers them and treats them as capable and able to solve their own issues with appropriate support. Asset-based approaches apply to how services are planned, delivered, managed, and evaluated.

xiv Solid Ground assesses needs of individuals and families living on low incomes in our region by conducting a periodic “Community Needs Assessment (CNA).” It helps us identify barriers that may limit our effectiveness to develop recommendations to better address challenges. For our [2022 Community Needs Assessment](#), the greater King County area was our primary geographic range. It included qualitative and quantitative information collected from members of our community, as well as external research from partners and other institutions. Our CNA uses data from national, state, and local public sources – as well as participant surveys and focus groups – to identify both a community’s needs or service gaps, and the strengths and resources available to meet those needs.

xv Households or individuals living at or below 50% of the federal poverty level (FPL) are considered very low income. Based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s [American Community Survey 5-Year Data \(2009-2022\)](#), 89,200 (or 4%) of King County residents had income below 50% FPL.

xvi [Mental and Behavioral Health – African Americans: What is Mental and Behavioral Health?](#), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health

xvii “Culturally relevant behavioral health services” (see **viii** above) take into account people’s specific cultural backgrounds. They also adapt services to be accessible and respectful of cultural differences.

xviii “Age-appropriate” is defined by Cambridge Dictionary as an adjective that means “suitable or right for people of a particular age.” It can refer to clothing, movies, activities, or behaviors that match the expectations and norms of a certain age group. Age appropriateness is based on the prospective timetable of development, which is influenced by social factors.

xix [Wage Equity Study](#), University of Washington School of Social Work, 2/2023

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