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## Community Context:

*This example highlights how a community coordinated outreach across several teams to standardize services and develop a shared strategy for staff deployment while deduplicating efforts and reaching >90% of unsheltered single adults.*

This workshopped policy was based on Thurston County, Washington’s outreach policy. Classified as “largely rural,” Thurston County is part of the Washington Balance of State CoC. Thurston County has a population of approximately 300,000 and includes the Washington State capitol, Olympia. They joined the BFZ network in 2021 and achieved quality data for All Singles, Chronic, and Veteran populations in January of 2024 with a by-name dataset of >1,600 actively homeless single adults. Thurston County uses Clarity Bitfocus HMIS.

## Continuous Improvement Suggestions:

While this workshopped policy covers the major recommendations offered in the [BFZ Outreach Policy Guide](https://login.builtforzero.org/hubs/resources/bfz-outreach-policy-guide/) and meets the BFZ standard for initial quality data, we offer the following additional recommendations if your community seeks to build on this example:

* Involve people with lived expertise and front-line staff to create your policy and procedures
* Describe who drafted and approved your policy and how, when and by whom changes will be made, as well as feedback loops.
* Include information about data collection protocols for outreach staff

*Reviewing the BFZ Outreach Policy Guide fully will help you to create comprehensive outreach policies and procedures that align with the BFZ quality data standards.*

**Purpose Statement** 

Outreach to encampments and on the street is crucial to “meeting folks where they’re at,” and building relationships with our houseless community members. Each outreach team’s specific role will be determined by the agency you work for. The purpose of this policy is to make clear the responsibility outreach workers have when performing their duties, with an aim to reduce duplication of efforts, and ultimately reduce harm.

**Interacting with People in Encampments**

When entering an encampment or approaching someone’s campsite, always keep in the forefront of your mind that you are a guest into this individual’s home environment. In this space, it’s not appropriate to enforce rules that might be upheld at a drop-in center or agency office, but rather to respect residents’ space and autonomy. Be mindful of a participant’s yard, posted signage, and space around their camp as well. 

**NEVER ENTER A PARTICIPANT’S TENT, STRUCTURE OR VEHICLE, REGARDLESS OF PERMISSION OR REQUEST OF PARTICIPANT.**

**Safety** 

An outreach worker’s best safety tools include situational awareness, and the ability to leave when needed. Listen to your instincts and leave immediately if your gut says so. Announce yourself as you approach an enclosed area by identifying the agency/organization you’re with, and what you’re there for. For example: “Knock, knock! Outreach! (Insert Agency Name Here)! I’ve got water, Narcan, and connection to resources if you’re interested!” If a participant tells you to go away, or otherwise lets you know they’re not interested, respect their wishes and leave.

Staff must always perform outreach in groups of two, at the least. For the safety of participants, if a staff member breaks policy or engages in inappropriate conduct, we can ensure that the other staff member can step in to mitigate harm and hold the offending staff member accountable. For the safety of staff, if a participant crosses boundaries, or makes a staff feel unsafe, a second staff member will be there for support.

**ANY STAFF MEMBER CAN END OUTREACH AT ANYTIME DUE TO SAFETY CONCERNS WITHOUT QUESTIONS ASKED.**

Outreach workers may encounter any number of hazards including blood, used sharps, feces, etc. It’s important to prepare for outreach with these things in mind. Any group that is participating in outreach to encampments must have training for staff available and protocols in place for blood borne pathogens and naloxone use.

**Safety Requirements**

• Staff must always be in teams of at least two when completing outreach.

• Staff are expected to always be within eyesight of the other person in your pair.

• Staff are required to have their name badge on them to display if requested, if not worn.

• Staff are required to wear sturdy, closed-toed shoes on outreach.

• Staff are expected to make safety plans with coworkers

**Boundaries**

Boundaries are in place to protect participants from the inherent power dynamic that comes when participants engage with systems via outreach workers, social workers, or service providers. As outreach workers, we are tasked with the responsibility to uphold professional boundaries. The relationship between an outreach worker and a participant is not reciprocal. Outreach workers are here to address participant needs, and not vice versa. Upholding professional boundaries upon outreach comes with some special considerations to navigate when you are building rapport with a vulnerable individual in their own home environment. 

Another key piece of maintaining professional boundaries is avoiding making promises you can’t keep. Remember what is within your control and what is not. For instance, you may be able to bring someone a sleeping bag the next time you do outreach at a site, and if you make that agreement – follow through. Telling someone that you’re going to be able to help them get into an apartment is not within your control. “Never say maybe if the answer is no.”

Be aware of your scope as an outreach worker, and the scope of each of your outreach partners. Don’t pretend to be an expert when you’re not. Your role is not to have all the answers, but rather to refer folks to the experts in the community when a need has been determined by the participant.

**Equity**

It’s crucial for outreach workers, and the agencies that employ them to have a firm understanding of equity principles and commitment to continuously evaluate outreach strategies. Equitable outreach strategies should aim to reach those who are underserved, prioritize services and supplies for individuals with identities that are overrepresented in the Thurston County homeless crisis response system: *individuals who identify as black, indigenous, or people of color; those who belong to the LGBTQIA+ community; those with disabilities; and those who are fleeing violence.*

**Collaboration** 

If you are doing outreach to encampments within Thurston County, please familiarize yourself with the Greater Regional Outreach Workers League (GROWL). This group meets every other Wednesday from 11:30am-1pm via Zoom to discuss camp updates to address resident and encampment needs, as well as discuss coordination of efforts to reduce duplication.

If you are connecting individuals to Coordinated Entry within Thurston County, please familiarize yourself with the Name by Name meeting. This meeting occurs weekly on Wednesdays from 10:30- 11:30am via Zoom to case conference the 10 clients assessed to be most vulnerable on the Coordinated Entry list for single adults.

If you are new to outreach in our community, please connect with a group already doing outreach to learn about different camps, their needs, and the current outreach schedule to that site. It’s encouraged to join another outreach group to meet residents alongside outreach workers who are already known to the encampment.

Understanding the diversity of service provision among outreach providers is important to recognize. It is imperative that each of us work to understand and respect the varying values, eligibility requirements, confidentiality limits, and potential reporting requirements of the organizations providing outreach to collaborate effectively.

**Confidentiality** 

Each agency will have their own guidelines regarding confidentiality. Be sure to get to know, ask questions about, and follow your agency's guidelines regarding use of releases of information and what you can and can’t share. Some guidelines that are specific to outreach include:

* Limiting the amount of information you share about a participant, even with a release of information, to only information that’s necessary for a specific task or activity.
* Never speaking to one participant about another participant. Not only can this degrade the relationship between outreach worker and participant, but can also create an unsafe situation for all.
* Never photographing encampment residents or their camp sites without explicit consent. If you have consent and intend to use the photo in a public facing manner, ensure that you have written consent with a clear statement of what the image will be used for.

**Recommendations** 

It’s recommended that anyone engaging in outreach receive training on various subjects related to work in homeless services generally, as well as specific to outreach activities. Trainings may include but are not limited to

| Thurston County Outreach 101 | Mental Health First Aid/Suicide Prevention |
| --- | --- |
| Trauma Informed Care | Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault considerations |
| Harm Reduction | De-escalation |
| Naloxone/overdose reversal training | Non-Violent Communication |
| Racial Equity | Motivational Interviewing |
| LGBTQIA2S+ Equity | Blood borne pathogen/First Aid |

**Outreach Map**

Thurston County uses the web platform **Miro** to create an outreach map. This map depicts the borders of their outreach services and is used in outreach meetings to determine the location of hotspots and to assign teams to each location.

**Team Capacity and Schedules**

Thurston County’s outreach team capacity and schedule is maintained in a separate living document that is discussed and updated bi-weekly at the GROWL (Greater Regional Outreach Workers League) meeting. GROWL serves as the region’s outreach collaborative; outreach services are discussed and coordinated during these meetings. An example of their outreach schedule is shown below.

| **LOC** | **Sunday** | **MONDAY** | **TUESDAY** | **WEDNESDAY** | **THURSDAY** | **FRIDAY** | **Saturday** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Jungle/**  **Ensign** |  | City of Olympia 2-4pm | HOST Tues -Friday  OlyMap SOAP  HOST | CRC  City of Olympia 2-4pm  FNB 5-6pm | HOST  CYS - noon | OlyMap SOAP |  |
| **Desmond/Sherwood - expected to be closed by 12/31/23** | CARE Olympia |  |  | CRC | OlyMAP ROW  12-3 |  |  |
| **Wheeler: Closed 9/25/**  **Nickerson, expected to be closed by 11/30** | CRC sometime during the week. |  |  | CRC  HOST |  | PiPE once monthly 12-2 |  |
| **Downtown/Tiny Homes** | EGYHOP 6-8:30p | EGYHOP 6-8:30p | PiPE-CYS joint 11am  AJA  HOST All the Time | EGYHOP 6-8:30p  Providence Outreach (nurse and behavioral health), every other week with EGYHOP - meds monthly | Salvation Army Event 10-2  Mobile Clinic  10-2 UGM | EGYHOP 6-8:30p  PiPE once monthly 12-2  CRC @ Quince 2-3:30 | EGYHOP 6-8:30p |