

Since our Groundviews newsletter focuses mostly on the people involved in and affected by Solid Ground, we produce the semi-annual Big Picture News to give you an agency-level view of our work. ~ The Editors

Undoing racism in action

For more than 10 years, Solid Ground has worked to undo institutional racism, a root cause of poverty. So how does a social service agency undo the ways racism plays out for our clients? Here's a case study:

Imagine you are an immigrant, maybe a refugee from a war-torn land. You've come to Seattle to make a new life and are temporarily living with kin.

Camping out with your family in a living room might feel safer than where you left, but your housing situation is still unstable. And while you are eligible to receive housing stabilization support from various programs, how would you even know?

Immigrants and refugees living doubled up with family members are an underserved population, facing multiple barriers to getting the help needed to stabilize their lives. Barriers can include limited English proficiency,

fear of governmental institutions and lack of information about available resources. For instance, homeless prevention programs have resources that can be accessed through community phone systems. Unfortunately, the centralized phone entry point can also be a significant barrier to accessing the services.

In an effort to reach out to these and other underserved populations, our Homeless Prevention Programs (HPP) have worked for the past year to develop intentional partnerships with community-based agencies actively involved with immigrant communities, the LGBTQ community, domestic violence survivors, and other marginalized populations.

HPP staff developed a set of Guiding Principles, based on Solid Ground's Anti-Racism Initiative, such as: "We prioritize partnering with organizations that share anti-oppression principles and do not discriminate either by choice or by default against any marginalized group."

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While Solid Ground has always done community outreach, historically that has often been limited to making presentations and sending out materials. This new effort goes much further – into developing deep relationships with groups working in marginalized communities that typically do not have access to these resources.

“We realized that there are communities which are not accessing the 2.1.1 line. Hotlines can be a barrier for people with limited English, people with disabilities, veterans and people who have had difficulty navigating systems,” says Sukanya Pani, of Solid Ground’s Seattle Housing Stabilization Services (Seattle HSS).

While Seattle HSS was designed to use 2.1.1 as their primary intake mechanism, during 2010 about 65% of people who accessed its services came through partner agencies rather than 2.1.1.

In fact, 90% of referrals for households living with other people were through partner

agencies. “People who are doubled up are not calling 2.1.1 as much,” Sukanya said. Additionally, 73% of immigrant and refugee households served came from partner agencies.

Earlier this spring, the programs shared their work at a statewide conference on homelessness.

Among the learnings:

- 1) Some agencies do not have the resources it takes to build partnerships.
- 2) We are still learning about barriers that systems like 2.1.1 may create and how to overcome them.

3) Limited funding can create barriers to partnerships.

The bottom line is helping families avoid homelessness and regain stability. As this quote from a client attending a focus group attests, the programs are having an important impact:

“I came to Solid Ground about two steps away from being homeless – it was like being upside down. I can’t stress enough how Solid Ground has helped me – it’s been like turning a corner in my life.”

