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JustCARE Update On City Hall Park

JustCARE is an alliance of multiple organizations that emerged in 2020 as many neighborhoods experienced an upsurge of people living unsheltered during the COVID crisis (due to de-intensification of shelters and jails, closure of publicly accessible spaces, economic stress, and retreat of the behavioral health service world to remote access). JustCARE was a response to neighborhoods' call for a response that was an alternative to enforcement or sweeps—resolving encampments in public space, but by providing non-congregate, dignified emergency housing options like tiny homes and hotels.

The JustCARE organizations fought to ensure that some of the federal COVID relief funds flowing into the region went to those living unsheltered – and made sure that those resources were concentrated on people facing greatest barriers: exposed to the criminal legal system, with complex behavioral health needs, overwhelmingly Black, Indigenous and other people of color.

All JustCARE organizations oppose sweeps, and providing an alternative approach to sweeps is the core mission of the model.

Starting months ago, pressure for a sweep at City Hall Park began to mount, with Superior Court judges and some County Councilmembers calling for immediate removal of the scores of people living in the park. Those demands were directed at the Mayor's Office, as City Hall Park is owned by the City of Seattle and under the control of the Seattle Parks Department. The Mayor's Office repeatedly declined to "sweep" the park or immediately close it—rather, they joined with King County to ask JustCARE to do the same kind of work there that we have done with other encampments where many residents have complex behavioral health needs and legal system history.

The JustCARE outreach reach has worked for many weeks to identify those who have been living in the park. (Others who are housed are in the park operating commercial enterprises, which are relocating because the park will be closed for restoration after we complete placements for people who need shelter and services.) Our field team placed approximately 58 people in emergency housing and shelter options they voluntarily accepted from Monday-Wednesday of this week. Last week, before the first JustCARE moving day, the HOPE team was also able to place 7 other people from the park in shelters, for a total of 65 people to date placed in safe shelter and emergency housing that they voluntarily accepted. Placement work continues today.



When the park closes tomorrow, no one who was living in the park will be removed or excluded without having had the opportunity to move into responsive housing or shelter. We expect all but one or two people who have been living in the park to be in shelter by that time, and will continue to discuss options with those few people who remain by the end of the day.

This is not a sweep. This is not a removal. This is not a clearing. This is the opposite: taking the time needed to make meaningful offers of shelter and support to people based on their actual needs and situation, while respecting individual self-determination. We appreciate and acknowledge that both the City of Seattle and King County have chosen this approach to the highly charged, highly visible situation in City Hall Park, which has been the site of numerous violent incidents in recent weeks, but which is also the location where many people in need of care and support have been forced to live after other sweeps. A different approach was taken here, and scores of people are now in safe and supported situations they chose for themselves.

JustCARE is Evergreen Treatment Services/REACH, PDA/CoLEAD, Asian Counseling & Referral Service (ACRS), Wheeler Davis Safety Team (WDC), and the Urban League.

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