

5. PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE: MYTHS AND FACTS OF HOMELESSNESS

Always be prepared to respond to statements that are actually myths or stereotypes about homelessness. Even people sympathetic to the problem may harbor questions or opinions stemming from stereotypes and misunderstandings. Practicing how to respond is key, both in terms of fostering a lasting relationship with the decision maker and in making sure they have a full understanding of the issue at hand.

Values-based talking points are especially helpful. These are short, succinct statements that open a door to a longer talking point with statistical evidence or further explanation. For example, many of us have heard a person in power say, “Homelessness is a choice.” A useful short response could be: “Everyone deserves the opportunity to live in a safe, healthy, and affordable home.” Then,

follow this up with, “Nobody wants to be homeless. Individuals and families do not choose a life without stable housing. But sometimes there are barriers to housing and services that are hard for us who are not experiencing homelessness to see.”

The Myths and Facts of Homelessness in Washington State factsheet provides more examples of possible responses to stereotypes and myths. You can add to the sample answers or personalize them in a way that feels comfortable for you. We highly recommend practicing with a friend or coworker. It is very helpful in preparing for a meeting with a decision maker. The criminalization of those who are homeless is often based on myths and stereotypes that we know are not accurate. Having tough conversations is part of shifting our responses to these issues as a community.