

Mental Health, Substance Use, and Homelessness

New Freedom Community Town Hall

August 23, 2022 – Phoenix, AZ

THE INTERSECTION OF MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS

It is important to address mental health, substance use, and homelessness together because they are branches of the same tree and are interconnected with each other at the root.

It can be a chain reaction with all of them connected to each other and with one often leading to the other. Treating one without the other is like putting a band aid over a bullet hole. Addressing the issues together is the most efficient way to optimize success and to stop the revolving door.

If you don't have stable housing, it is difficult to get a job, to feel motivated and to deal with health issues, including mental illness. Conversely, substance use may lead to mental illness and homelessness.

It is important to address these issues together so that we can create more effective, preventative, and supportive programs. Many people do not realize they have a mental health issue that can be addressed until they have an opportunity to see a therapist. For example, veterans may have PTSD and other mental health issues from their service that have never been addressed. People with mental health issues are given medication without addressing the cause of the problem or understanding its source. We should try to address these issues early, bring more awareness to those experiencing these challenges, and remove the stigma associated with mental illness so that people who face these challenges can find the resources they need.

When we support people who have mental illness, remove the stigma associated with mental illness, and educate people about why and what they are experiencing, we free people to have a chance to lead a fuller life for themselves and their family.

Transportation is also critical so that people can get to jobs and the services that help them to overcome these challenges.

ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND HOMELESSNESS

We need more places like New Freedom that cluster programs under one roof. The community and mental health support are critical to those they serve. However, we need funding and changes in policy that allow people to stay longer than 90 days.

We need to make resources more available and have outreach to people so they know where to get assistance. Using mentors who have navigated these challenges themselves can be a powerful tool because they do not come with the answers, they come with the right questions.

We can use mentors who have been there to light the path and inspire people to make change.

We need to meet people where they are, whether physically or culturally, and provide safe places for them to get the help they need, including basic needs like food and glasses.

Policy, business, and community leaders need to work better and more collaboratively to help address these challenges holistically and change policy in a way that creates better solutions.

Some of the other policy changes we need are decriminalizing mental illness, creating more programs for women and more diversion programs for substance use and mental illness. We need real changes to programs in prison, rather than just name changes, and we need to provide compassion training to prison employees to change the culture.

Educating the public about why it is important to address these issues will help with needed policy and law changes. It will also help with general outreach and provide more support for much needed funding for navigation services, therapy, one-on-one treatment, transportation, and more programs like New Freedom.

SETTING PRIORITIES

1. Funding
 - a. Fund in a smart way with programs that are tried and true. Have funding accountability. Do not waste it on things that are not working.
 - b. Fund one stop shops.
 - c. Provide incentives for cooperation. A lot of people are not willing to share resources and information. Agencies and organizations should share resources and work together instead of competing with each other.
 - d. We need more shelters and beds, especially for couples and families.
 - e. All people who need it should receive services under AHCCCS and we need to bring more awareness to people that they have the ability to choose their access plan.
2. Educate, build awareness, and provide funding to support education
 - a. Use outreach and success stories with those who are out there struggling.
 - b. Start early, the younger, the better. Treat the entire family and have them address mental health and substance use as a family unit.
 - c. Have community publicity that shows the benefit to the community as a whole and why it is a community problem and a human problem.
 - i. Show them the cost of not doing anything. What does it cost the health care system? What is the cost to our communities and to families if we do not do anything?
 - ii. Make it relatable with personal stories. Show how the investment of resources now will reap benefits over time to everyone.
 - d. Educate to reduce the stigma of these conditions and show how we need to address it with compassion and empathy.
 - e. Maximize the time people are incarcerated to provide education and support for mental illness or substance use while they are in prison.
 - f. Maintain a grassroots approach to solutions, similar to New Freedom.

WHAT ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERD NEED TO KNOW

- Walk the three blocks to CASS from the legislature and experience the area. Spend a day on the streets, in tent city, or any of the shelters without them knowing who you are to see what it's like.
- Create more shelters that are ADA accessible.
- Invest in solutions or pay the cost of the problem.
- Policy is about people not punishment.
- Have a solid commitment to a generation and let New Freedom lead the way to show people how to change their lives.
- Stop locking people up.

- Take a risk on humanity. It is worth the investment.
- Talk about the cost of the problem versus the cost of the solution. If you look at the destruction to the community versus what it costs to help, it is well worth it. Be loving, compassionate, genuine, and wage war against the things that destroy.
- Listen to the people who have experience with these issues.
- Put supports in early on and invest in the whole person with holistic nurturing and opportunities.
- Give opportunities for people to have more safe spaces.
- Demand results. How many more people have to die?
- Address what is not working. Be someone's champion and keep fighting for them when they can't fight.
- Build organizations with the clients in mind (similar to New Freedom).
- Have result based funding. What is really working? Create more vocational training and other programs that are working and reduce recidivism (like New Freedom).
- Locking people away into a cycle of incarceration doesn't work. Think about a restorative system that works.
- Stop medicating and start educating.
- Have mandatory educational guidelines instead of mandatory sentencing.

INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENTS TO ACTION

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions during the New Freedom Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Never give up and keep my best self in front always.
- Continue to share my story to the next person, so I can continue to live life free of addiction and be a living example to the next person in need.
- Continue my education, so I can affect change in me and my community.
- Continue my education, so I may be of better service to the community I live in, work in, and move on to in the future.
- Be a part of New Freedom.
- Get connected with resources that will help me to provide outreach services to women who are incarcerated.
- Lobby my elected officials.
- Be the change I want to see, work for New Freedom, and come back as a VA Rep to help veterans, combat veterans with PTSD, and those with substance abuse issues.
- Give back what was so freely given to me by being of service to others.
- Continue to send hope to those who are incarcerated.
- Continue to serve "the least of these" and walk in love.
- Continue to find and provide resources for those who cannot come to New Freedom.

- Help New Freedom grow and grow to rebuild lives and families.
- Outreach with an open heart and compassion.
- Continue to be a servant for those in need and help New Freedom grown to serve the community.
- Use my voice to educate and encourage people to get active about these very important issues and continue to do what I already am, which is being of service to others like me.
- Continue to advocate to increase understanding about these topics and how they are related with legislators, funders, and leaders who have resources to give toward these solutions.
- Take the skills and mindset I have not only built for myself, but also what I have gained at New Freedom, and put them to use by building a life beyond what I ever imagined and share what I have to offer for those in need.
- Spread awareness in my journey by sharing my story with mental health, substance use, and homelessness to show there is hope in order to normalize these things and stop the stigma.
- Help others based on what my experiences were.
- Make sure people know about the different resources available to them.
- Continue to volunteer at rehabilitation and re-entry centers.
- Continue to do the next right thing and service my community.
- Learn, listen, and reflect on the impact of substance use, mental health, and homelessness by talking to more people who have experienced these issues. The more awareness I have, the more I can share with other people.
- Continue to be an example of success and show those who want to change and do better that change is possible. I will help those who want and need it.
- Help lead folks out of the hold I once found myself in. Be a navigator.
- Continue to be active in my community by helping people in addiction and homelessness to be aware of resources, offer a hand up, and treat them with dignity and respect.
- Love God and love my neighbors.
- Ask people to share their stories, so I can truly begin to see, hear, and have a better understanding of who they are, their journey, and how we can connect and support.
- Speak to policy makers about promoting human dignity for all.
- Use my voice. I will share my experience, strength, and hope to better educate and inform people that do not understand this mission or maybe don't know there even is a mission.
- Continue to promote and commit to the peer-to-peer program to impact the lives of those in need at New Freedom. Invest in the solution or pay the cost of the problem.
- Take my lived experiences, strength, and hope along with the skills I've gained at New Freedom into my community to help others and change lives. Peer support = Peer love.