Emily Reimal

Pronouns: she/her

Current professional role: Housing Stability Evaluator, King County Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (PME)

Please describe how racial discrimination in housing has affected you in your work or in your life?

The impact of racial discrimination in housing has so deeply affected our society that it is naturally a responsibility of my professional role as a housing stability evaluator to ensure it is a central consideration in any work that I do. The team I work with is invested in advancing equity, so it is a frequent topic of discussion and professional development.

Please describe what housing justice in our region would look/feel/sound like to you?

Housing justice in our region would mean that all who live here or move here can find a safe, affordable, healthy, and pleasant place to live. The housing supply would be plentiful and varying, with different types of housing options to suit all types of people and families, including sufficient permanent supportive housing for all who need it.

What is your current understanding of the following:

- Housing First Approach: this approach follows the logic that peoples' basic needs (mainly housing, food, and safety) must be met in order for them to succeed at other goals like maintaining income, improving their health, or getting substance use treatment
- Trauma-Informed Care: this approach acknowledges that everything that happens or has happened in a person's life impacts their health and wellness, and that care and treatment should acknowledge and adjust for the impacts of any trauma someone has experienced
- Harm Reduction Strategies: these are strategies to reduce consequences and negative effects associated with substance use. The idea is to meet people where they are and not enforce sobriety or abstinence for someone who isn't ready or interested. These strategies include needle exchanges to prevent transmission of diseases and safe use sites to help prevent overdoses.
- Racial Equity and Justice: broadly, these concepts reference dismantling hierarchical aspects of our society, removing disparities, and improving the welfare of all, specifically prioritizing improvement for Black, Indigenous, and other people of color.
- Data Analysis: systematically collecting information (at person-, program-, event-level, etc.) and using statistical or qualitative methods to explore new information or answer questions. Data analysis can support visual or narrative information.

How will your understanding of the above influence your work in the System Performance Committee?

The above principles/strategies mainly revolve around taking pragmatic, empathic, and nuanced approaches to working on complicated problems, and these themes naturally translate to something as complex as understanding and monitoring system performance for the homeless response system.

What challenges do you see in the homelessness response system in King County?

The main challenge I see is the lack of funding to meet the scale of the crisis. This has forced the system to try to make difficult decisions to prioritize people for resources, when in reality all people in need are deserving of support.

What data or information do you think would be helpful in order to better understand these challenges and how can this be used to improve our system?

In a quantitative sense, the main pieces of information I think are helpful are knowing how big the problem is and what resources it will take to meet it. The cross-systems analysis done in recent years which yielded a much larger figure than the PIT has been helpful in understanding the size of the response required. Standard program evaluations to determine which approaches are most beneficial and efficient are also helpful, as we cannot have all the resources we need so we should be careful to use the ones we have wisely. In a qualitative sense, we should know how people who are using these resources think and feel about them, and learn directly from them what they want and need, which the KCRHA has made an effort to capture with their large scale interview project.

How do you think as a community we can reframe how we talk about homelessness in our region by using stories from those with lived experience or currently experiencing homelessness?

It is too easy for those of us who don't have these life experiences to separate ourselves from the issue, and we can chip away at that distance by consistently approaching the conversation with empathy. When people with lived experience are willing to share their stories and wanting to advocate for themselves we should uplift that as much as possible. Ideally, this can help the community see and relate to the actual people experiencing homelessness so that it can be understood beyond numbers and data. Many people want to feel like the circumstances around homelessness would never happen to them, and so they may resist relating to people going through these crises. Yet there are so many people in our community who are just one or two emergencies away from similarly dire circumstances. We should help people understand that it is in all our best interests to build a strong support system for all who need it, and that all people deserve safety and dignity.

Why do you want to serve on this committee? What skills and experiences would you bring to the committee? (i.e. data evaluation, HMIS, lived experience, social services experience)

Monitoring system performance is a critical function to ensure we are using our limited resources appropriately and equitably, and to build public trust. I have strong data and evaluation skills that are relevant to this work, including several years of working with HMIS data and evaluating housing and homelessness programs.

What impact as a committee member do you hope to have?

I hope my data and evaluation skills, especially HMIS data experience, will be a useful resource to the committee and allow me to provide knowledgeable input from an evaluator's perspective.