

King County Regional Homelessness Authority,

My life's journey is a testament to resilience, advocacy, and profound transformation. From being raised on a farm in rural WA, to currently navigating my transdisciplinary Ph.D. research within the fields of ¹DEI&B technology, my path has been intricately woven with both hardship and triumph. My academic, entrepreneurial, and parental endeavors have not just been milestones but beacons, guiding me through a personal and professional labyrinth marked by diverse experiences—from homelessness to senior leadership roles across the technology and nonprofit sectors.

In my early years, navigating the stormy waters of homelessness as an LGBTQIA+ single parent and a survivor of domestic violence, I encountered the chilling realities of discrimination, violence, and systemic barriers. These experiences weren't just episodes of struggle; they were profound lessons that shaped my understanding of societal failings and personal resilience. Living through various forms of homelessness, including transitional housing and even car camping while completing my Master's, I gained firsthand insights into the gaps within traditional support systems and the nuanced complexities of navigating government programs.

Professionally, I've worn many hats—Executive Director, CMO, and Tech founder, each role challenged me to push boundaries, innovate, and advocate for needed change within unsustainable complex systems. My efforts in establishing partnerships, leading fundraising campaigns, and spearheading strategic initiatives have been driven by a deep commitment to social impact and community empowerment and my experience founding for-and-nonprofit entities has provided an opportunity to change the outcome of my, and my children's lives for the better. One that I am a living testament to achieving over various social, familial, and individually-fought obstacles.

My story is one of hope, resilience, and relentless pursuit of change. As I vie for a position with the King County Regional Homelessness Authority's Lived Experience Bloc, I bring not just my personal experiences of homelessness and advocacy but a diverse skill set honed over two decades of work in technology and nonprofits. I believe in the power of lived experience to inform, transform, and lead for change. With gratitude and eyes set on the future, I am eager to contribute to advancing the mission of centering those with firsthand experience of homelessness in our collective efforts to create a more inclusive, equitable world.

~Bella Irons

¹ Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

Bella Irons

3/20/24

RE: Letter of Interest - Lived Experience Bloc positions

Dear King County Regional Homelessness Authority,

I am writing to express my interest in the Lived Experience Bloc position with the King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA). Having dedicated much of my life to social causes, and having experienced multiple forms of homelessness as an LGBTQIA+ single-parent and domestic violence survivor, I am aligned with KCRHA's mission of centering individuals with homelessness experience in your operations.

My multifaceted homelessness journey offers your position a unique perspective on the challenges and systemic barriers faced by those experiencing housing instability. From navigating domestic violence shelters to engaging with the complexities of the criminal and familial court systems in both Washington and Colorado and facing my own¹ LGBTQIA+ discrimination and violence, I have witnessed firsthand the intersecting issues that contribute to emergency shelters, transitional housing, mental healthcare systems, and even pet-care. Additionally, my national experience as a "digital nomad" and the transitional housing options of church placements, and car camping while I was finishing my Master's degree, have provided me with insight into alternative forms of homelessness and the gaps in traditional support systems for them, as well as the nuanced management of government systems for back-to-work/school, legal, housing, healthcare and DSHS programs.

In conjunction with my personal experience, I bring two decades of senior technology and nonprofit work to the position, contributing to various NGOs, Fortune 500 companies, and Federal programs like FEMA and AmeriCorps. During this time, I have not only developed a deep understanding of systemic issues in individual and social life, but I also bring my own story of hope to others facing such issues as a current Ph.D. researcher, an educational journey touched by homelessness but which holds an opportunity to share how personal triumph happens in the face of adversity.

I believe that my diverse background, passion for advocacy and community engagement, and my own unique story of hope, position me to meaningfully contribute to your position. Thank you for considering my application. I look forward to the opportunity to further discuss how I can contribute to advancing KCRHA's mission.

Warm regards,
Bella Irons

¹ Philippe-Benoit Côté, Lolita Frésard & Martin Blais (2024) 'I didn't want to be noticed': discrimination and violence among LGBTQ + youth experiencing homelessness, Journal of LGBT Youth, 21:1, 180-199, DOI: [10.1080/19361653.2023.2185337](https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2023.2185337)