



**BUILDING  
CHANGES**  
END HOMELESSNESS  
TOGETHER

**For Immediate Release**

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**Washington  
Families Fund**  
A Public-Private Partnership

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## **WASHINGTON FAMILIES FUND LAUNCHES NEW STRATEGY TO PREVENT AND END FAMILY HOMELESSNESS**

**Innovative public-private partnership deepens commitments from Gov. Gregoire, leaders from King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other funders**

SEATTLE, WA — The Washington Families Fund, an unprecedented public-private partnership led by Building Changes ([www.buildingchanges.org](http://www.buildingchanges.org)), today announced it is embarking upon a bold, new approach to end homelessness among families with children throughout the state, with the goal of reducing the problem by 50 percent in the next decade.

The State of Washington, in collaboration with King, Snohomish, and Pierce Counties, the cities of Seattle, Everett, and Tacoma and several philanthropic and corporate partners, affirmed their deep commitment to ending family homelessness by signing a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Under the agreement, all parties pledged to redouble their efforts to minimize shelter stays and provide critical, ongoing support services for homeless families with children, and to help families on the brink of homelessness. The MOU signatories also agreed to align existing family homelessness funding streams so that current resources can be used more efficiently and effectively and, where possible, to tap new resources to address the growing problem.

Beginning this year, King, Snohomish, and Pierce counties will pilot and tailor new strategies for meeting the unique needs of families in their communities. Pilot projects will test innovative ways to help stabilize homeless families with children, as well as those struggling to pay their mortgages or rents before they lose their homes. Lessons learned in the pilot counties will eventually be applied across communities statewide to ensure that no more Washington children are without a safe place to sleep at night.

Funders from the private sector— including the United Way of King County, Boeing, Microsoft, the Campion Foundation, the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation, and the Ben .B. Cheney Foundation—pledged to coordinate resources to help support this work. The strategy outlined in the MOU will be led by Building Changes, a Seattle-based nonprofit which has guided the Washington Families Fund since 2004 and has more than 20 years experience as a catalyst for ending homelessness.

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**“It saddens me that families with children make up nearly half of our state’s homeless population. And unfortunately, the economic crisis may push even more families with children into homelessness,”** said Washington Governor Christine Gregoire. **“We must do more as a community to help families achieve and maintain stability. This Memorandum of Understanding is an important step at a critical time.”**

Despite much progress and support, and an estimated \$200 million in combined annual funding by the state, counties, cities and private funders, the number of homeless families appears to be on the rise. Economic conditions have continued to worsen across Washington, dramatically increasing the demand for services and support.

To meet this growing need, the MOU partners have embraced five proven principles that will guide future family homelessness investments made by both public and private funders: early intervention and prevention; coordinating access to support services; rapid re-housing; providing services tailored to meet each family’s individual needs; and increasing economic opportunity through education and workforce services. The new Washington Families Fund strategy is based on innovative work in other communities across the country that have succeeded in reducing family homelessness rates.

**“We have a unique opportunity to reduce, and one day end, family homelessness through stronger prevention efforts and helping families increase their incomes and stability,”** said Betsy Lieberman, Executive Director of Building Changes. **“Building Changes has a proven record of success in assisting communities in their design and implementation of employment and job training programs targeting people who are homeless.”**

**“Every child in King County deserves a safe and stable place to call home,”** said King County Executive Ron Sims. **“We are building on the work of the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, strengthening partnerships, and looking at ways to make the greatest impact on the root causes of family homelessness.”**

**“Seattle is committed to making our existing resources work as effectively and efficiently as possible for families on the brink of losing their housing,”** said Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels.

As a lead investor in the initiative, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is committing up to \$60 million over 10 years, starting with funding to support family homelessness planning efforts in the three pilot counties. The foundation’s new commitment builds on a previous \$40 million investment in the Sound Families Initiative, which provided nearly 1,500 new units of affordable housing paired with support services for families in transition out of homelessness in King, Snohomish, and Pierce counties.

**“Children who experience homelessness are often exposed to significant trauma that affects their health and ability to succeed in school and in life. Today’s homeless children often become tomorrow’s homeless parents with children. We must do all we can to stop the cycle of family homelessness,”** said David Bley, director of the Gates Foundation’s Pacific Northwest Initiative.

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The Washington Families Fund was created by the Legislature in 2004 to ensure that homeless families with children have the supportive services linked to housing they need to move from crisis to stability. To date, the Fund has awarded nearly \$13 million to 36 programs across Washington state dedicated to preventing and ending family homelessness. Public and private partners have contributed more than \$18 million and in 2008, 456 families—including 901 children and 549 individuals—received help.

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### **About Building Changes**

Building Changes has supported individuals and families throughout Washington State for more than 20 years, and has administered the Washington Families Fund since its creation in 2004. Guided by a belief that everyone deserves the opportunity for a home, a healthy life and a good job, the Seattle-based nonprofit unites public and private partners to create innovative solutions, delivering expert advice, grant making and advocacy for lasting change. Building Changes serves more than 8,000 individuals annually, including homeless families with children, homeless single adults, housing and service providers and related government entities. For more information visit [www.buildingchanges.org](http://www.buildingchanges.org).

### **About the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, the foundation is led by CEO Jeff Raikes and co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.

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