

## **Executive Summary of the Public Opinion Leader Focus Group**

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### **Opinion Leader Priorities**

When asked what were *their* major priorities for the community and what kinds of issues were most important to *them*, the public opinion leaders in this focus group mentioned the following:

- Increasing economic, cultural and ethnic diversity
- Providing affordable housing
- Better meeting special education needs
- Better meeting the needs of youths who are not necessarily in the college prep tract at school
- Addressing the needs of the "hidden poor"; "They need a voice"
- Addressing the implications of the under-representation of 18-30 year olds in the community and the shift to an older, wealthier population

Asking the same question, but in terms of what do they think are the most important issues to the *community*, these public opinion leaders mentioned:

- The lack of current political consensus
- The fact that it is too expensive for many to live on the Island
- The difficulty in attracting workers to the Island because the work doesn't pay enough
- The fact that many of the Island's public servants can't afford to live on the live Island

### **Human Services Commitment**

When asked what they saw as the most important *human service needs* to address they mentioned:

- Transitional housing
- Domestic violence services/shelter (should be met off Island)
- Alzheimers care
- Affordable day care
- Insufficient services for mental health issues
- Emergency health care
- Affordable housing
- Services for special needs children
- Respite care for those caring for the elderly and for special needs children
- Adult day care
- Transportation to services

Among these public opinion leaders it is believed that no human services can be eliminated, but some might be combined. As one participant said - "Can't think of one we can do without."

In looking at how community members might become more involved with the human services offered on the Island, participants mentioned:

- New residents need to know more about how to participate
- Information on available services and numbers of customers served would help with awareness
- Community leaders need to discuss how to bring about the next generation of participators
- Need to link school children with service agencies so that they value such services
- Give school children awards for community service

### **Awareness of Services**

Most of the public opinion leaders were aware of a few human service agencies, but they seemed more aware that Bainbridge Island has many services and less aware of the specific names of those services. They were most familiar with the Bainbridge Foundation (because of its role in funding human services) and with Helpline House (which they saw as a place that not only provided direct services, but which also functioned as a kind of clearinghouse for directing customers to appropriate agencies). As one person said – “Helpline does a great job of knitting together agencies.” There was also acknowledgement of Bainbridge Youth Services and the Teen Center.

When asked if community residents know about the services that are available these public opinion leaders indicated that although the needy are in the minority, many people don’t realize just how much of a need exists. And although there was acknowledgment that the community is very supportive of human services, there was agreement that there needs to be more publicity about the vast network of human service resources that are available on the Island.

### **Access to Services**

The most commonly mentioned place to seek human service help was Helpline House. However, a number of issues make it difficult for those seeking help from agencies. One of these issues is transportation. It was acknowledged that the transportation system is designed mostly for commuters and that using the bus system for other purposes can be problematic. Arranging transportation for off Island services can be especially difficult.

Perhaps even more of an access issue is that Bainbridge Island is “such a small world” where people do not want to be seen seeking help. The group agreed that many people on the Island don’t access many of the services available to them because of their pride. One example is the marked reduction in the use of the free lunch program available to school children as they progress through the grades.

## **Unmet Needs**

One of the most commonly mentioned needs was more affordable medical and dental care available on the Island. Other unmet needs included more low-cost or assisted housing, services for the elderly and for special needs children.

When this group of public opinion leaders was shown the results of the online surveys in regard to unmet needs they were not surprised by the needs identified by others (alcohol and drug abuse among youths, affordable medical and dental care, affordable housing, services for elderly and special needs children). However, in regard to drug and alcohol prevention/treatment they mentioned that drug and alcohol problems are very prevalent and is a "hidden issue" on the Island. Furthermore, they mentioned that children and youths get mixed messages from parents regarding the use of alcohol and that these mixed messages are contributing to the problem.

Some additional unmet needs include services for unwed mothers, family planning services, rape and assault services, domestic violence services, and sexual abuse services. Also noted was a need for support for families with "troubled" kids. As one participant mentioned - "Those families go through hell."

Finally, these public opinion leaders acknowledged that although improvements are needed in regard to human services and access to such services -- "Compared to other places we're doing pretty good. We're doing an incredible job as a community."