



Strategic Plan: 2017-2019

Introduction

The Sophia Way provides innovative and life-saving programs and services, assisting women experiencing homelessness in King County. In 2006, our founder, Helen Luezzi, saw a need and responded by working with others in the community to initially open Angeline's Day Center, a place of shelter for homeless women during the day on weekdays. In 2008, The Sophia Way was founded, providing overnight shelter for women in need, case management, rent subsidies, and services to support them on their path to independence. Since its inception, The Sophia Way has added programs and services, always in response to needs in the community.

The Sophia Way continuously assesses its programs and services, evaluating how best to focus its work for greatest impact. We are devoted to being deeply involved in collaborative efforts across East King County in the goal of making homelessness rare, one-time, and brief. As we undertake these efforts, new approaches to solving homelessness emerge, with a greater emphasis on prevention, rapid re-housing, and housing first approach.

The Sophia Way has responded and re-evaluated its priorities for future work. These priority areas, outlined in this document, will guide the work of the organization over the next three years. The Strategic Plan 2017-2019 presents the initiatives that ground The Sophia Way's work, the assumptions that underlie its plan, and the strategic directions going forward.

Grounding Principles

Mission

The mission of The Sophia Way is to help end homelessness for adult women in King County by providing shelter, life skills training, social services and supportive permanent housing, offering a path from homeless to stable independent living.

Core Values

- We respect diversity, supporting individuality and personal growth.
- We believe in empowering women to achieve their personal objectives.
- We guide women with compassion and structure.
- We invite participation within the entire community.

Our Philosophy

At The Sophia Way, we believe in the necessity of shelter and safe living conditions for all persons. We believe in the equality of all, cherishing diversity, and treating each person we meet, whether they be a client, volunteer, donor, or staff member, with the same respect, dignity, and care.

Planning Assumptions

- We continue to be an organization focused on ending homelessness among adult women in East King County.
- We will transition to serve more women who are highly vulnerable and chronically homeless by reducing the barriers into our programs and aligning ourselves with the Coordinated Entry for All system.
- We will focus on assisting women who are experiencing homelessness through a variety of ways: (a) working with them to secure housing; (b) reducing the time spent by women in shelters; (c) rapid rehousing of women who are homeless; (d) using the housing first approach in serving chronically homeless women; and (e) providing or connecting women with ongoing, stabilizing services once they are housed.
- Government sources of funding will remain static or decrease. We will seek new revenue sources, including increased private support.

Strategic Planning Overview

Our strategic planning began in the fall of 2016. The Executive Director interviewed each board member and included individual feedback to inform and prioritize the content for the strategic planning retreat. The Sophia Way evaluated its strengths and weaknesses and analyzed how current and future trends may or may not impact the organization's ability to achieve its mission.

Defining Success Measures

In defining success, and how The Sophia Way will measure success, the Board of Directors and the Executive Director considered the following:

- The Sophia Way offers numerous entry points to services with the goal to move all women closer to housing.
- How many clients move into permanent housing in a calendar year?
- How many clients move to the next stage of services?
- Are we helping clients achieve personal goals?
- How can we decrease the length of stay in our programs: Sophia's Place and Sophia's Home?
- How can we deliver services in the most cost effective way, measured by operational costs per number of women served in a calendar year?

Key Stakeholder Interviews

The Board of Directors and the Executive Director identified several key stakeholders of The Sophia Way. These individuals included funding partners from both the Eastside Cities and King County, faith-based organizations, former and current Sophia Way staff, service providers, major donors and long-time supporters and volunteers, and business community partners. The objective of the interview was to continue relationship building and establish an open dialogue to cultivate, or deepen, connections and assist The Sophia Way in setting the direction for the organization's future. The questions included:

- What is your current understanding of the services at The Sophia Way?
- Why have you been a supporter of The Sophia Way in the past?
- What trends do you see with homelessness?
- What are some of the factors you believe are important to solving homelessness?
- What focus do you think Sophia Way should have over the next 5 years?

The interviews provided a wealth of information and will prove to be invaluable in helping the Board of Directors make informed decisions about the direction and future of The Sophia Way. In general, stakeholders shared the following:

- Homelessness will continue to increase, especially among the most vulnerable.
- Broad awareness and understanding that lack of affordable housing is the greatest obstacle to solving homelessness.
- Homelessness is a community problem and can only be solved with community solutions by partnering with the community.
- Our programs and solutions must consider and adapt to the needs of the local community.
- The Sophia Way continues to fill a niche on the Eastside and board and staff must be ever mindful of securing resources that get women into housing quickly.
- They want to see The Sophia Way focus upstream-working to prevent homelessness and stabilize those in housing.
- Reassured to learn that The Sophia Way is proactive in addressing and nimbly adapting to the funding changes and requirements.
- The relationship and connection to The Sophia Way are mutually beneficial and valued; they want to continue the partnership and, in some cases, expand and work closer together.
- They would like to see more and frequent updates about progress, changes, and successes that include measurable targets and data and that these are broadly publicized.
- Partners want to engage with us in a more meaningful, impactful way that allows them to be a part of the solution.
- The Sophia Way has proven itself to provide strong, robust services and is positioned well to take on larger projects such as a 24/7 permanent emergency shelter.
- The Sophia Way needs to continue to strive to serve more women effectively and efficiently and continue to focus on helping the “whole person’s” full potential in the human services realm.

Trends and Critical Issues

As part of our strategic planning process, the Board of Directors and the Executive Director have identified key trends and critical issues that have emerged recently and will have an impact on our work. As such, the strategic plan will focus on how to address the issues and trends while staying relevant and in alignment with delivering our mission and committed to our values and philosophy of care. The following have been identified as some of the main trends and critical issues in the field of homeless service providers:

- The effort now is to exit people as quickly as possible from shelter by bringing rapid rehousing to scale and having a rapid pathway to exit.
- Shelters will need to re-orient their work to focus on helping people to exit to permanent housing as quickly as possible.
- The recommendation is to shift from shelter and transitional housing to rapid rehousing, with an emphasis on becoming low barrier and prioritizing the chronically homeless.
- The focus has shifted away from the thinking that the way to end homelessness is to end poverty and more towards creating a homeless crisis response.

Strategic Initiatives and Action Steps: 2017-2019

Strategic Initiative 1

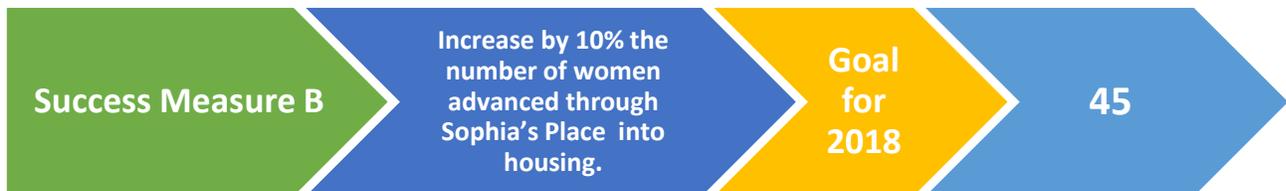
The Sophia Way will advance women on a pathway to housing.



The Sophia Way's physical capacity is limited.

Strategies

- Increase capacity at the Emergency Shelter.
- Through the Street Outreach Program, increase awareness of the Emergency Shelter and Day Center services.
- Conduct mobile outreach so staff connect and deliver life-saving services to women surviving on the streets.
- Increase accessibility to the Emergency Shelter and Day Center.
- Reduce barriers for entry into The Sophia Way programs.



Strategies

- Provide improved, targeted housing case management.
- Equip and incentivize clients to collaborate with us in transitioning to independence.
- Educate and connect clients to the support and stabilizing resources available once they are in housing.
- Increase sourcing – find more low income or market rate housing.



Strategies

- Decrease the length of stays.
- Increase sourcing – find more low-income and affordable housing.
- Implement move-on strategy – moving current Sophia Way clients in The Sophia Way permanent housing into non-Sophia Way permanent housing – low income or market rate.

Strategic Initiative 2

Advocacy: Work to raise awareness of homelessness in King County in by promoting legislative measures to end homelessness in the community we serve.

Goals		
Meet the annual goals of the Advocacy Committee.	Increase the number of community members actively engaged in advocacy.	Design and implement an advocacy plan for local governments where The Sophia Way operates.

Strategic Initiative 3

The Sophia Way will increase employee stability and invest in the professional staff.

Goals	
We will aspire to be the leader in the nonprofit field to build the capacity to raise wages to a living wage for the Eastside.	We will increase the opportunities for continued professional development.

Strategic Initiative 4

The Sophia Way will optimize fundraising that results in sustainable and increased revenues from diverse sources.

Goals	
Achieve annual fundraising goals that will increase each year in order to build capacity to meet increasing needs.	Meet with current funding partners to confirm commitments and stay informed of potential changes while building new relationships with local foundations, businesses, and individual major donors.