

network stories

Graduate Tacoma - Tacoma, Washington



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context

Community organizations in Tacoma, Washington, are making a commitment to residents' self-sufficiency by allocating funding to help people gain the skills they need to succeed in the workforce. They believe that the return on this investment will be compounded as more Tacoma residents become gainfully employed and no longer require public assistance.

Cradle to Career Network member Graduate Tacoma has partnered with the Tacoma Housing Authority for several years around a somewhat unexpected goal for a housing agency: postsecondary success. Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) is known as a progressive leader in housing policy and programs. Realizing that many of its tenants were juggling paying rent and college tuition, the authority initiated a voucher program for college students facing eviction and homelessness called College Housing Assistance Program, or CHAP.

Through CHAP, the Housing Authority finances housing in three ways:

- By providing rental assistance to help pay rent on the private rental market;
- By providing apartments THA has purchased near campus; and
- By signing long-term contracts with private developments near the campuses to reserve apartments for students experiencing homelessness or near homelessness.



THA piloted this program in 2014, and in that first year, they subsidized housing for 47 students facing homelessness. In six years, THA has grown their portfolio to 350 units. That growth has been due in large part to partnerships with local community organizations like Graduate Tacoma as well as private developers. Recently, the private developer for one of THA's newest properties, Kōz Development, agreed to help with the fundraising efforts for an operational reserve that will allow CHAP students to use flexible funds for living costs such as deposits, household items and emergency expenses.

Elvin Bucu serves as deputy director for the Foundation for Tacoma Students, the backbone organization supporting Graduate Tacoma. Bucu says that one takeaway from this project has been the value that place-based, cradle-to-career partnerships can bring just by being able to bend and mold to fill gaps. He says, "Housing authorities don't have leeway to make large budgetary or operational changes —even though they often know that these changes could make a big impact. There is a huge opportunity for communities if they can find a way to create public-private partnerships that leverage the know-how of a housing agency and the flexibility of a private or social sector organization."

Graduate Tacoma's partnership with the housing authority has also led to other offshoots in support of Tacoma students, such as cross-sector data partnerships. As THA looked to address future evaluation of the impact of CHAP as well as their other education programs, they turned to Graduate Tacoma for its local expertise and understanding of data within their education ecosystem.

"We've been working with THA on a deeper data partnership between our two organizations, which would potentially have us serve as data analysts and evaluators for their suite of education programs. This would be an exciting new scope of work for our organization that would put us in a better place to help connect and support both THA and Tacoma Public Schools as we have existing data relationships with both." - Bucu



Graduate Tacoma views this as one of the most impactful ways the organization can support higher-level systems change. Data has always been a cornerstone of what their organization brings to the table, so it made sense to test a model for data sharing that improves connection and analysis between systems.

“We have created a culture of data sharing, but not across sectors. This opens the door for that. The potential here is big, and we feel like this model could bear some fruit.” -Bucu, Graduate Tacamoa

Across the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network, partnerships like these are evolving in the ways they approach systems change. Still rooted in the same guiding principles of shared vision, evidence-based decision making, collaborative action and sustainability, more and more communities are expanding their shared goals outward from a focus on education to a macro-level approach that’s connected to the broader well-being of a community.



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