COMMUNITY INNOVATIONS ON TRANSIENCY AND PUBLIC INTOXICATION

The art of city-wide, cross-sector collaboration
In May, 2014, the Downtown Billings Alliance (DBA) dedicated its annual membership meeting to discussing the growing issues of transiency and chronic, public intoxication, a pressing issue in the City of Billings, especially Downtown Billings. Attendance numbered in the 100’s and discussion was lengthy, sparking conversation between the director of the DBA, Lisa Harmon, and Billings’ City Administrator Tina Volek about a larger initiative to address the issues.

“WE’RE GOING TO NEED A BIGGER BOAT”
Significant efforts were made to collect data and input from our stakeholder groups including the business sector, social service providers, faith leaders, and local law enforcement.

The data showed that there are 74 individuals who frequently commit alcohol related crimes in the downtown streets and have repeated interactions with law enforcement, emergency services, and medical providers, totaling thousands of arrests and resulting in over $8.5 million of public services every year.
PLANS FOR A SUMMIT AND EDUCATION

- Searching the country for best practices - we began studying programs in Reno, NV., San Antonio, TX., and San Diego, CA.

- Plans began for a Summit of leaders to convene, and a public campaign for education, with funds being leveraged from the Downtown Billings Alliance and the City of Billings.
Utilizing our homeless outreach and granting organization Spare Change for Real Change, we launched a public-service announcement. The media picked it up, and played it during primetime TV (during “The Voice” multiple times):
The Community Innovations Summit, free and open to the public, was held in October, 2014 to showcase best practices that could help Billings ameliorate the issues, and catalyze action by community, civic, governmental leaders. The summit was attended by 350 individuals on Day 1.
Task forces were organized to move initiatives and solutions forward. They continue to meet monthly and have fostered amazing cross-sector collaborations.
Thanks to collaborations with Rimrock (Montana’s largest addictions treatment center), the Crisis Center, and a grant from our own Spare Change for Real Change initiative, an Outreach Coordinator rides with our downtown resource police officers 5 days a week.

- 10 people have been admitted to a specialized treatment program at Rimrock in just over a month of beginning the new program!
ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

- The MT-WY Tribal Leaders Council and the Native American Coalition introduced a peer-to-peer counseling program called TRAC, and has begun work with more than 17 clients who were identified as part of the highest repeat offenders downtown.
- The Billings Police Department has expanded its downtown bike patrol to extend into night hours in efforts to assist the progress being made with downtown transient issues.
- The Downtown Billings Alliance, the MT-WY Tribal Leaders, and the City of Billings are hosting a follow-up conference in June 2015, Community Recovery/Community Innovation Progress Report.
Collaborative legislative efforts to pass a localized ordinance for public intoxication

A variety of funding sources and assets have been discovered and donated, including buildings, vehicles, human capital, and donations.

Strong collaborations between law enforcement, service providers, city and court officials, and facilities.

Extensive media coverage and public relations
WHAT’S NEXT

- Working to develop a dedicated “Sobering Center” and co-location facility for counseling, detox, education, and additional services
- Development of sober housing options and ongoing treatment continuum
- Continued fund raising and grant writing
- Solidifying process and protocols for law enforcement, court officials, and service providers
- Expanding mobile case-worker capacity and position
- Public education/outreach through media, public summits, and discussion forums
There is unprecedented momentum in transforming systems that heretofore were ineffectual and costly in addressing these issues. A diverse group of leaders from various sectors within the community representing many cultures continue to drive the discussion and the solutions.

COMMUNITY INNOVATIONS
Initiatives on transiency and public intoxication