

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, a large unsanctioned tent encampment grew at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds. With the state's eviction moratorium and the Washington Supreme Court decision in *State v. Blake* legalizing all drugs, law enforcement and government actions were challenging, and conditions worsened quickly. Behavioral health incidents and petty crime led to over a hundred anti-harassment orders being filed with the Prosecutor's Office. Solid waste accumulated and there were significant health and safety impacts for the encampment residents, including an overdose fatality. Emergency response agencies such as fire and EMS, law enforcement, and behavioral health agencies were stressed and struggled to maintain levels of service. Jefferson County dedicated significant American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars to working with partners to develop a solution prior to the end of the eviction moratorium.

Working with residents of the encampment as well as the other stakeholders led to an innovative outdoor shelter, Caswell-Brown Village, which preserved the rhythm and flexibility the population required while moving them in a timely fashion to a supportive environment that could deliver services, and mitigate the health and safety impacts to the residents and surrounding population.

Jefferson County is committed to the concept of Housing First, but in listening to the population we were working to help, we settled on a solution that wasn't quite housing but met the population where they were. The housing crisis impacts every rung of the housing continuum, but it is a responsibility of local governments to protect those most in need in our communities. Governing with compassion is critical, but it is also important to recognize the ancillary costs to our emergency services and law and justice systems when we don't prevent homelessness. Housing First is a good financial investment as well as a good social investment.