



# KING COUNTY EQUITY & SOCIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE

## JANUARY 2009 UPDATE REPORT

*Working toward fairness and opportunity for all*



**King County**

**In FEBRUARY 2008**, King County launched the Equity & Social Justice Initiative, to eliminate long-standing and persistent inequities and social injustices.

The goal of the Initiative is for all King County residents to live in communities of opportunity. To reach this goal, all communities must be equipped with the means to provide individuals with access to livable wages, affordable housing, quality education, quality healthcare, and safe and vibrant neighborhoods. King County is applying the principles of equity and social justice in its actions, decisions and policies.

### 2008 ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

#### SUCCESS THROUGH EDUCATION, LEADERSHIP AND LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

**EDUCATION.** Hundreds of people attended three Town Hall meetings with elected officials and community leaders, moving towards a common understanding of equity and social justice and jointly searching for solutions. Thousands of community members and county employees held dialogues about the underlying causes of inequities, and discussed how they could each make a difference in creating a more fair and just society.

**LEADERSHIP.** In 2008 county leadership made commitments and took specific steps to address equity and social justice. King County also established an interdepartmental team to champion this work, and is forming a community advisory group that will provide leadership and vision. King County Executive Ron Sims spoke in numerous occasions to local and national groups, sharing our region's ground-breaking activities to comprehensively address the root causes of inequities.

**LONG-TERM COMMITMENT.** In 2008 King County laid the groundwork to assure future success and a long-term commitment to equity and social justice. With the help of a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the county is developing a strategic plan to guide the Initiative's work in future years.

This Update Report provides select Initiative highlights from 2008 for policy development and decision-making, delivery of county services, internal education and communication, and community partnerships.



## POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND DECISION-MAKING

King County has committed to ensuring that promoting equity is intentionally considered in the development and implementation of key policies and programs and in funding decisions.

### 2008 HIGHLIGHT

By assessing equity impact, King County can determine whether policies and programs advance a shared agenda of fairness, spread burdens fairly, and help address historic patterns of institutional bias and discrimination. To this end, King County developed an Equity Impact Review Tool.

A training curriculum was created for the Equity Impact Review Tool, and county staff is being trained to use it. Several departments have used the tool. All departments described equity impacts of program reductions in their business plans.

## DELIVERY OF COUNTY SERVICES

In 2008 all executive departments reviewed their work and committed to specific actions that promote equity and social justice. The following are examples of activities.

### 2008 HIGHLIGHTS

**ADULT & JUVENILE DETENTION** – Adult & Juvenile Detention along with the Department of Community and Human Services revised information and assistance provided to incarcerated women about available services. This revision to the program was in response to an observation that women of color were much less aware of the services



that were offered, and were less likely to have attempted to access the services even when they knew about them.

**COMMUNITY & HUMAN SERVICES** – With its partners Community and Human Services has been reviewing its prevention and early intervention services for the population birth to age three, crafting and implementing strategies to mitigate inequities in these early childhood services. Among its activities, the department developed culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach materials for Somali, Spanish and Vietnamese families in response to data on utilization of birth to three prevention services for children with developmental disabilities.

**DEVELOPMENT & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES** – Development and Environmental Services has begun the process of rewriting the zoning code. The goal is to allow for greater flexibility for developers and encourages more vibrant, mixed use neighborhoods in return for providing public benefit such as mixed income housing, walkability and sustainability. Public meetings will be held in the two demonstration project neighborhoods in early 2009.

**EXECUTIVE OFFICE** – The Executive Office coordinated the launch of Opportunity Greenway in Summer 2008, offering court-involved young adult students the chance to learn about and train for high wage and high demand “green jobs.” Approximately 50 high school students were introduced to green jobs in three six-week educational internships programs operated through YouthSource.

**EXECUTIVE SERVICES** – To determine if the new Healthy Incentives (SM) employee benefits program was having

inequitable impacts on county employees, staff collected information on employee positions with lower participation rates in the health initiative’s wellness assessment. The results showed lower participation rates among jobs lacking regular access to computers such as roads crews, carpenters and maintenance workers. As a result, the benefits staff developed and implemented an outreach plan to those employees with lower participation with the goal of decreasing their health expenses and encouraging participation in interventions to improve health. Data show that the plan was successful in increasing participation in most cases.

**MANAGEMENT & BUDGET** – To promote engagement and leadership from underrepresented groups in neighborhood revitalization activities, the Office of Management and Budget supported the design and facilitation of an inclusive public process to create a community vision for Skyway Park through the county’s inter-departmental Community Enhancement Initiative. Encouraged by strong participation and the successful implementation of early action items in the park, this project has been expanded to produce a wider community agenda for neighborhood revitalization, addressing the root causes of long standing and persistent inequities.

**NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS** – Natural Resources and Parks conducted a GIS-based equity assessment which mapped benefits (for example, proximity to a park or trail) and burdens (for example, proximity to a wastewater regulator facility) related to demographic variables such as race, income and language. This analysis helped to identify and promote action on potential areas of disproportionality in the department’s facility locations and service delivery.

**PUBLIC HEALTH** – To increase availability of health information for people with limited English proficiency, Public Health developed a translation policy and system. The policy includes processes for creating translations of consistent high quality, and has innovative translation guidelines, resources and best practices. Included are language maps for King County, priority language tiers with 20 languages, quality translation vendors chosen in a competitive process, and a translation worksheet to guide the translation process.

**TRANSPORTATION** – Along with key partners, Transportation has been actively engaged with community organizations, schools, businesses, and residents to elicit their feedback about possible changes to bus routes in the southeast Seattle area and southwest King County in light of Link light rail service and RapidRide starting in 2009. Activities have

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included over a dozen sounding board meetings, mailings to over 92,000 addresses, a multi-lingual hotline, questionnaires and other materials translated in seven languages, and numerous community discussions, public speaking engagements and other intensive community outreach activities.

## INTERNAL EDUCATION & COMMUNICATION

Hundreds of King County employees at all levels have participated in dialogues about equity and social justice. Discussions followed a screening of the ground-breaking PBS series “Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?” The dialogues served to educate employees about the root, underlying causes of inequities and to spark a dialogue among staff about how to best address inequities within their programs, divisions and departments.

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

King County has committed to supporting capacity building of local organizations and communities and to more effectively listen to and involve community members in creating solutions to inequities.

### 2008 HIGHLIGHT

The Initiative’s Community Engagement Team, comprised of King County staff and community partners, has been providing leadership to engage communities in dialogues and actions related to equity and social justice.

Over 100 people have been trained to facilitate dialogues involving screening of the PBS documentary “Unnatural Causes: Is inequality making us sick?” Throughout King County, discussion and dialogues have already taken place with over 100 groups. These groups cross many sectors of the community, including education, criminal justice, human services, public health, youth and faith-based groups.

Hundreds of King County residents attended three Town Halls meetings in 2008 – one led by King County Executive Ron Sims, a second hosted by the King County Council, and a third one focusing on neighborhoods and health. Videos of the town halls are available at [www.kingcounty.gov/exec/equity/getinvolved.aspx](http://www.kingcounty.gov/exec/equity/getinvolved.aspx).

## OUR VISION FOR EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

We in King County will apply the principles of equity and social justice in our actions, decisions and policies. To achieve **EQUITY**, we will look at who gains and who loses as a result of our decisions, actions and policies. Equity requires fair decisions when distributing society’s benefits and burdens so that all people can reach their full potential.

**INEQUITY** refers to differences in well-being between and within communities that are systematic, patterned, unfair, and can be changed. They are not random, as they are caused by our past and current decisions and policies.

The communities most affected by inequity are those where people with lower incomes and people of color live. These residents are confronted with racism, underemployment, poor education and health, jail time, loss of opportunity, and unsafe living environments.

**SOCIAL JUSTICE** refers to all aspects of justice, including social, legal, political and economic. It demands fair distribution of and access to public goods and services (mass transportation, quality schools, a clean environment), resources (social and financial wealth), and life opportunities.

For more information about the King County Equity & Social Justice Initiative:

[www.kingcounty.gov/equity](http://www.kingcounty.gov/equity)

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