

JOHS Provider Conference

June 6, 2025

Notes from Session: Demystifying the Village Model

Presenters: Victory LaFara and Lisa Larson

Moderators: Doc Ramblings

Notetaker: Alexa Smith-Rommel

-Main Points from Session Overview/Presentation (high level; detail not required):

- Village Model is more than the physical structures - it's a democratically-designed coop model. Built on the healthy ways poor people survive poverty. Repairs and replaces critical supports and restores stability. Villagers are nonprofit members and have legal right to voting power.
- 12-60 people per village and meant to be adaptable community assets for the unhoused and refugees. Transitional housing, emergency shelter, and more.
- Can be any type of physical structure, just need gathering spaces.
- Highest operating budget is \$264k including FTE.
- Dignity Village was the first Village, began in 2000. Won use of city land to provide a shelter at their current location by the airport. Currently have 43 structures, solar power, common room, utilities, offices, gardens, guest shelter, wifi, donations center, wood shop and metal forge, small biz production areas, mail/phone, and more.
 - They take donations as long as it is for adults!
- Supported by a full time macro MSW. Villagers gain training and experience in nonprofit admin. Members coordinate many departments and small businesses. Active in research, neighborhood associations, and more.
- Partner with mobile service providers (outreach largely). People don't lose their progress with mobile supports if they need to move locations. Work with JOIN, Portland Street Medicine.
- Call to action: take a tour of Dignity Village! Give a ring first and ask for Lisa Larson.

-Questions/Answers (summarization):

- Q: Conflict navigation?
 - A: Try to handle internally/between parties. If this doesn't work, they write a report and pass to security coordinator who attempts to mediate. If that

doesn't work, it is presented to the council. There are consequences which can range from a warning to expulsion from the community.

- There are basic rules (no violence, no drugs/alcohol in main areas, no disruptive behavior, and everyone must contribute both \$ and work shifts).
- Because the rules are set by villagers, people feel more investment and ownership in the system they are living in. Peer enforcement is very effective. But there is also flexibility in enforcing rules depending on the context of each person. Membership can essentially veto a council decision (with the exception of violence).
- Q: Differences between Dignity Village and other "villages" in Portland?
 - A: Many are not really "villages". It's possible to have an agency-managed hybrid, but it is hard to balance power in these formats. There is a capitulation to hierarchy of staff/agency holding the contract, and then there is literal power that an agency has over people living there.
 - Challenges arise when people don't fully understand how a village model should work. Some copying of C(3)PO hybrid sites that isn't done correctly; hyper specific to pandemic context.
 - Part of this model should include capacity building for those running the villages - structures that need to be in place, and essentially non-profit management.
 - Ex: Contractor (Urban Alchemy?) taking over village contract and changing it substantially in a traumatic way for villagers.
 - Another difference - use of control and containment theory; panopticon/prison design. We know from village and refugee camp studies that lack of privacy from staff/enforcers is a huge predictor of violence. Also, grid designs are reliable predictors of aggression in refugee camps and shelters. Yet, we continue to see this design.
- Q: How to replicate this outside of the COVID context?
 - Need community organizing with people who are already in an area. Don't want to build something and force people into a new community, but meet people where they are and organize them accordingly based on their needs.
 - Due to the way funding is, this work typically needs to go through an existing org (RFPQ qualified) and then transition to a true village model.
 - Multnomah Village is an example of an org trying to put something together and identify funding. They have a population and are grassroots-style organizing people with neighborhood associations involved, but need a 'sponsor' essentially.

-Main Discussion Points not captured above:

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-Takeaways or Follow-Ups for JOHS

(expectations/priorities/recommendations/etc):

- Use of control and containment theory; panopticon/prison design. We know from village and refugee camp studies that lack of privacy from staff/enforcers is a huge predictor of violence. Also, grid designs are reliable predictors of aggression in refugee camps and shelters. Yet, we continue to see this design in other “village” shelters.
- Seems to be need/demand for an organizing to lead the village-ification process, facilitate funding, and build while meeting communities where they are and evolving this into a true village model.