

Welcoming, Empowering,  
Safe Habitation Initiative with  
Neighborhood Engagement



WeShine

WeShinePDX.org

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To the Willamette Week Editor:

As chair of the WeShine Board of Directors I'd like to offer a bit of clarification for the two recent WW articles (6/22 & 7/15/22) describing WeShine's development of "Tiny House Villages".

**"Young" Nonprofit.** Although WeShine was only incorporated a little over a year ago, the organization is not young in experience. The diverse Board and staff consist of seasoned professionals with backgrounds in social work, nursing, peer support, addiction treatment, engineering, city planning, construction law, information technology, shelter management, lived experience of houselessness and recovery, and in organizations which are committed to equity and inclusion.

**Population.** Our mission is to develop and operate neighborhood-based micro-villages to provide transitional shelter with wrap-around services for those individuals whom local Point in Time counts identify as amongst the most at-risk and vulnerable unsheltered. These populations include LGBTQ+ (sexual and gender non-conforming), BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), veterans, women, people fleeing interpersonal violence, people with disabilities, seniors, and more.

**Housing/Shelter.** While WeShine sleeping pods resemble "tiny houses", they are a type of temporary shelter, not housing. Guests will not have tenant rights (i.e., no 90-day eviction notice requirements, for example). Our village-style shelter serves as a bridge between inhumane survival on the streets and access to permanent affordable housing.

**Low Barrier.** Low barrier to admission does not mean there is no screening process. Applicants must complete an application, as well as an interview, and sign a Good Guest Agreement. Applicants are also prioritized according to criteria such as LGBTQ+ identity, BIPOC status, female identity or gender, and mental and physical health conditions. Once accepted into the village, behavior – not history – determines the guest's continued stay. These practices are consistent with the best practices in emergency shelter operations set forth in the 2019 Oregon Statewide Shelter Study.

The goal of a low barrier shelter is to offer shelter first, rather than make sobriety or abstinence a condition of admission. Harm reduction has been found to be a more effective approach to substance use than policing drug or alcohol use in the privacy of guests' sleeping pods.

**Community Engagement.** WeShine representatives approached and spoke to a number of neighborhood groups over the months prior to the May meeting referenced in the WW article. These included the Russell Neighborhood Association, the Gateway Business Association, Historic Parkrose, East Portland Action Plan, and the East Portland District Coalition. Since the May meeting, a series of Good Neighbor Agreement meetings were held virtually and were open to interested neighbors, businesses, neighborhood association representatives, and a neighborhood watch group. The Good Neighbor Agreement is in process of being finalized.

We look forward to opening the Parkrose Community Village within the next few weeks. We have accepted guests who will benefit from the safety and security of the village, and the support of the community – both within the village as well as the neighborhoods around it—to make a successful transition to permanent affordable housing. While there are people concerned about the impact of the village on the neighborhood, there are also neighbors who have stepped up to help build the village and who plan to provide support to guests in the village. We believe, and the evidence suggests, “it takes a village!”

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Chair, WeShine Board of Directors