



OFFICE OF NATIVE AMERICAN PROGRAMS CASE STUDY



Lummi Nation Housing Authority's Sche'lang'en Village

45 housing units for Native American families seeking sobriety, to regain children from foster care, in a safe gated community offering wrap-around supportive services in Bellingham, Washington.

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“Transformational housing is intended for individuals and families making transformational life changes.”

***- Diana Phair,
Executive Director
Lummi Nation
Housing Authority***



Background

The Lummi Nation, who call themselves Lhaq'temish, the People of the Sea, are located on a peninsula in the Puget Sound, near the city of Bellingham in northern Washington State. The Nation is located on 12,500 acres and has access to traditional hunting and fishing grounds outside of the reservation. Because of declines in salmon and halibut fishing Lummi elders worry about young tribal members growing up with less opportunity to connect with the sea than earlier generations.

The Sche'lang'en transformational housing development is a supportive services program within a gated housing community. It is designed for Lummi tribal member families who wish to be honest and accountable about problems they have faced and build healthy lives with their children. Residents can remain at the Sche'lang'en Village until they feel they have outgrown the structure that the village provides.



The Lummi Nation Housing Authority operates 332 housing units including Sche'lang'en Village.

First Steps

If you want to start a wrap-around housing program, here are a few steps to get you on the road:

- **Zero in on who you want to serve.** If you know your audience, you can better anticipate their needs and create strategies to help them succeed.
- **Begin planning early with a group of invested stakeholders.**
- **Revise policies before the program opens.** It can take time to get approval.
- **Make your case to tribal leadership from the start.** Keep them informed on a regular basis.



How It Began

Creating Healthy Boundaries. Many Lummi reservation services are located on Kwina Road. These include the Northwest Indian College, the Lummi Nation Housing Authority (LNHA), the medical clinic, Lummi Suboxone Clinic, Behavioral Health Department, and chemical dependency providers, a fitness center, an Early Learning Center, and the gated housing development called Sche'lang'en Village. It is a source of curiosity and suspicion for some who peer in from the outside, but for the families who are living inside, it is a refuge. The gate defines the community's promise of safety and was requested by participants to help them to maintain boundaries as they work toward changing their lives.

The idea for the Sche'lang'en development – housing with wrap-around services—began

during 2013 as long-time LNHA Executive Director Diana Phair considered on-going requests from Lummi service providers for housing units that could be set aside for tribal members returning from long-term treatment programs or who needed housing to get their children back from foster care. Diana realized that the housing was most likely to help the residents if the surrounding environment was also healthy and supportive.

Around that same time, LNHA had contracted with a Lummi Behavioral Health (BH) counselor, John Plummer. John said he hadn't always understood how important housing was to client success. His focus was counseling alone, but as he and Diana created behavioral contracts with troubled residents—offering a second chance to make life changes



Sche'lang'en means "way of life."

and keep their housing—he recognized the importance of housing as both an incentive for change and a base from which change was possible. However, for these families something was still missing: access to services and housing that combined a safe and supportive environment.

Getting to a (Committed) Committee.

In 2014 Diana began inviting department heads to discuss how to develop housing with wrap-around services. She wanted to ensure that many voices were heard and as many services as possible were part of the planning process. However, in a community with competing needs, it was sometimes difficult to convince people to make time for another committee for a non-existent housing development. The Lummi Indian Business Council (LIBC) passed a resolution endorsing the transformational wrap-around housing program and directing the agencies to participate in the weekly planning meetings.

The LIBC is a separate entity from LNHA, but LIBC has been a key supporter of the project throughout. They passed resolutions to direct tribal funds for repayment of the Title VI loan and to update the eviction code to include the transformational housing development. LNHA values LIBC's commitment and works to nurture the relationship. Diana points to the fact that she's always had LIBC members as part of the housing authority board. She provides LIBC with regular project updates, but having ongoing LIBC presence on the commission provides council members with an everyday awareness of the issues facing Housing and its residents.

With the LIBC resolution, Diana had her committee, but while the directive mandated bodies at her table every week, they were not always the same bodies.



“When we would talk, they would have blank expressions and we’d have to tell the whole story over every week.”

- Diana Phair



So, Diana shut down the committee. After a while, some committee members began to ask to meet. The committee began again but in a smaller form with just the members who really wanted to participate. That committee, which has met weekly since the beginning of 2015, became the wrap-around group where partners share progress, tackle issues, and propose new applicants. Diana specifically limits the meeting to an hour in order to streamline discussion and lessen the time imposition.

Lessons Learned from Kwina Apartments.

LNHA began offering supportive services linked to housing with Kwina Apartment residents long before Sche'lang'en Village was built. This process helped create the policies and procedures that guide the Village. At the weekly meeting Kwina Apartment residents discussed their new sobriety and how hard it was to say “no” to family, friends, and partners who were not on the same path to wellness. This desire led to the idea of a gated community. At Sche'lang'en Village, residents develop a visitor list. Visitors must be pre-approved through a urinalysis, drug testing, and a background check.



The Village is located along Kwina Road, close to many Lummi Nation services.

Creating New Policies. Having the opportunity to create policies for this new community concept before it existed has been critical. Fortunately, the tribe offered the long-term service of one of their lawyers, who was as committed to the process as Diana and John were. In weekly meetings throughout 2015, they would develop and refine policies. The attorney always posed worst-case scenarios, “What happens when...” The attorney knew that Diana and her team were developing policy for new situations. The residents’ actions would test policies. The policies also needed to comply with tribal law and NAHASDA regulations. The policies have changed over time, based on experience and resident needs.

One important policy was eviction. Standard LNHA Policy and Procedures allows 90-120 days to evict through tribal court. The eviction code was amended to establish a separate section called the Exemption of Transformational Wrap-Around Housing Program from Unlawful Detainer

Requirements. This revised code allows immediate removal of residents once the decision to evict is made. Passage of the code took several months of public and council meetings.

Design Process

The site is owned by the Lummi Nation. It also includes a second area with market-rate housing. Those residents chose not to live by the rules of Sche’lang’en, so they do not have access to the gated community.

Designed for Interaction. In weekly meetings between May 2014 and May 2015 the team and architect designed the units. The many meetings increased the cost more than a traditional design process, but may have decreased the number of change orders during construction. The 24 units in pods were specifically designed to support families making transformational life changes. For example, initial designs called for three units

The Village contains a playground for younger children and one for older. There is also a paved path, known as the race track, along one side of the development, where children can ride bikes. As a way to create community, residents are responsible for taking care of their own small lawns and yard space. They can borrow community water hoses, lawn mowers, and leaf blowers.

The community garden brought another partner to the table. The Bellingham Food Bank (BFB) donated seeds for the garden, but after visiting, BFB wanted to offer more. Twice a month over the summer, the BFB truck pulled up to the community center and handed out to residents crates of groceries that included fresh produce and milk.

The development was designed with a community center that includes two meeting rooms and two office spaces. John uses one office space for counseling. Other tribal departments are encouraged to make use of the other on-site office space. Planning for the offices was a community effort which included Diana's team meeting with other tribal departments. "We are building this and you can use it, too. What would you like to see here?" Diana told them. The openness was new and appreciated. It led to the request to locate the counseling office with a window onto the playground. Children are not confined to the office and parents can more easily keep an eye on children while also discussing sensitive issues. The breezeways in the community center are Internet-wired to encourage teenagers to hang out.



The community garden, open to all Village residents, grows peas, tomatoes, squash, and flowers.



The counseling offices in the community center overlook a playground.

The on-site offices offer counselors the ability to better engage with reluctant clients. Counselors can dash over to a client's apartment if the client is late or has forgotten the appointment. At the same time, meeting in a different office is new to service providers. Supervisors might expect counselors to be in their usual offices or not know how to bill time spent outside of the office. It might also be hard to schedule multiple clients if not all live in Sche'lang'en. But a year in, Lummi Behavioral Health has started to make use of the additional office.

In the meantime, the community meeting rooms are well used. The community has a monthly birthday celebration and weekly resident meetings facilitated by John or other team members, as well as weekly men's

and women's groups. One of the elders has started a clothing closet. The space has also been used for parenting classes, financial literacy, and children's afterschool educational programs. The program might use the space for birthday parties, which would allow guests to enter who are not screened to be on-site. The gate is programmed through computer-based software, which allows staff to operate the gate from a computer desk. The gate can be programmed to open and close at various times during a 24-hour period.

Program Operation

The Application Process. Since 2016, tribal programs recommend most applicants to Sche'lang'en Village as part of the wrap-around meeting. The programs work from a

checklist with Sche'lang'en's requirements. As part of the application process, adult members of a family share what other organizations they are working with, submit to urinalysis, and complete a thorough self-assessment which pulls from the Symptom Checklist 90 and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). The assessment explores issues including drug and alcohol use, trauma, mental health issues, incarceration, and more. Sometimes families try to hide the extent of their problems, but John says, "Most important is that they need to tell their stories with honesty." Since LNHA's regular wait list for housing can be up to a year long, some families apply just for the housing, but the program only wants residents with a "level of desire and maturity" to tackle issues in their lives. Applicants must attend four to six consecutive weekly meetings at the community center to show commitment and get to know other families in the Village.

Applicants also submit to a background check. Applicants who are registered sex offenders or have first degree assault (i.e. firearm) convictions are screened out. Applicants with felony drug convictions are allowed on a case-by-case basis.

The Gate: Safety Within. Gates are an uncommon feature of Native American or lower income housing communities. The gate at Sche'lang'en Village is accessed by a unique code given to each family. Car visor remote controls are available to expedite entry as well. Approved visitors who have passed a screening process, which includes urinalysis for those aged 14 and up, can be admitted by residents. If codes become compromised, they can easily be changed. Although the closed gate can be a cause of rumor in the community at large, it is prized by residents who appreciate that it keeps everyone safe



Residents requested a gate to help them maintain boundaries.

and allows people newly in recovery a clear method to set boundaries with family or friends, whom they might otherwise feel unable to turn away. As one elder said, "It's only the people outside the gate who have any problem with it."

It Takes a Village Case Management.

The weekly wrap-around meetings that began back in 2015 are even more vital to Sche'lang'en Village today.

Member partners include Employment Training Center, Indian Child Welfare Office, Lummi Counseling Services (CARE), the Clinic, Behavioral Health, Drug and Family Wellness Courts, and Victims of Crime.

If the residents have a shared sense of community, so also does the workgroup of case managers and partner representatives who meet to discuss the success and struggles of residents. The group works hard to offer second and third chances to families who break contracts. Discussions can be difficult. Some partner representatives have found it challenging to address difficult issues, but overall the group provides support for each other, a way of checking one's own biases, an opportunity to gain perspective, and share responsibility. Decisions are generally not made by a single person or organization, which provides accountability and support. In the end, though it is the family that makes final decisions: "We explore all avenues, but they have to do the work," adds program partner, Topsy Kinley of Employment Services.

Following a Contract. The first phase of the program began in the Kwina Apartments, as early as 2013. John and Diana developed family-specific contracts for families whose actions put them close to eviction. The contracts included home visits to check housekeeping and mental health services. In Sche'lang'en Village, contracts form the map that residents need to follow to keep their housing. Families are strongly encouraged to share their interactions with all agencies. "We don't want them to reinvent the wheel. If they are already visiting AA meetings, for instance, under requirements of one program, they can use those same meetings to count for fulfilling requirements under their contract in Sche'lang'en," said Topsy.

Diana came to realize that "Tribes are rich in social services." Partners can provide a range of supportive services. Employment services, for example, can pay a family's first month's rent and assist with applying to get a driver's license in addition to providing employment leads and support in writing a resume.

Getting Serious in Counseling. John comes to counseling with experience as a minister and a PhD in clinical psychology. His work is funded through NAHASDA and available to all residents of LNHA. Behavioral health counseling is a large part of what creates change in individuals and families. "We are client-centered," says John. "Clients have to get serious about taking responsibility for their own lives." Sche'lang'en Village creates a structure that is safe enough to allow people to risk change. These families have experienced loss or trauma, have not had healthy relationships, have not been parented,

or may not always have parented well in the past. "Working closely with each family helps us see the relational dance and helps the families change the dance." Counseling helps family members gain insight and confidence, which helps them move out of a continual crisis mode.

John and his wife live in the Sche'lang'en community and have many opportunities for informal interactions with families.

Elder Gatekeepers. Sche'lang'en Village is intentionally an intergenerational community where elders live in triplex units located near the entrance and community garden, where they can see everything that goes on. They welcome the community's rules, the sense of safety, and their proximity to one another. Some of the elder residents have moved back to the reservation after years away

and are working through culture shock and downsizing. Living with Sche'lang'en rules can cause issues with relatives who may balk at meeting the visitor requirements. In some cases, the elders identify with the struggles of the younger residents, having lived the same lifestyle, but without the advantages of a program like this. The intensity of their connection with the young residents varies. Rather than preaching to the young families or serving as parents, they describe their role as listening or praising successes. "The lives of our elders are stories available for the younger families," John says. In this way, they can teach, but also serve as a symbol for thriving as an option. Certainly, they are ambassadors of the program, praising its safety. On the Elder Bus, for example, if rumors spread about curfews and lock-ins, the elders will set the other passengers straight.



Single-story triplexes house seniors at the front of the Village near the entry gate.

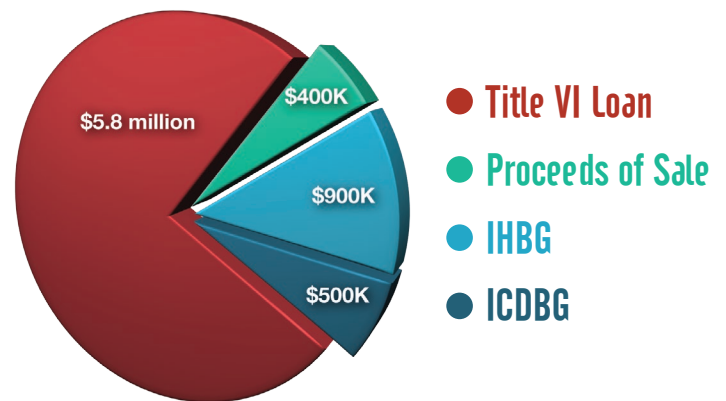
Results

In July 2018, Sche'lang'en Village celebrated a year of operation with a cake and pizza in the common area. The development is currently half full, but Diana is happy with that. The program does not rely on rent to operate and the reduced number of residents allows for intensive work with families and time to further test policies and procedures. In the first twelve months since the Village opened, three families have been asked to leave for breaking contracts. "We tell them, come back when you are ready," Diana says the decisions were agonizing, but needed in order to protect the rest of the community. While Sche'lang'en Village has had no law enforcement service calls since it opened, the nearby Kwina Apartments, where the first wrap-around services began, experience a large number of calls for police intervention.

During the first year, one family decided to "graduate." Upon leaving prison and working for the return of their children, the parents successfully added employment and addiction support into their lives. Then, their names came up on the housing authority waitlist for a larger unit that would better fit their blended family. Families in Sche'lang'en can turn down a waitlist unit without penalty if they don't feel ready and still retain their position on the list. In the end, this family decided to move. They felt that they had grown and developed support systems with other tribal organizations which would continue to support them if they left the Village. The Sche'lang'en program staff agreed.

Financing

Project Cost/Sources and Uses.



Like any project of this size, Sche'lang'en Village is the result of many meetings, partners, and applications. The largest funding source was a Title VI loan for \$5.8 million. ICDBG and IHBG Proceeds of Sale brought in \$1.8 million for infrastructure. The total overall cost was \$7.6 million. Bank2, a subsidiary of the Chickasaw Nation, provided the Title VI loan. The bank walked LNHA through the complicated Title VI process, which took nearly 2 years to complete.

A Title VI loan is guaranteed by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development under the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act of 1996. It can be difficult for tribes and tribal organizations to work with funders who do not understand land and construction issues on tribal land: the Title VI loan provides access to capital. It can be repaid using the Indian Housing Block Grant funds and increases leveraging opportunities, since it can be combined with other funding sources.

The Sche'lang'en project came in under budget by about \$400,000, which reduced the principal on the note.

Lessons Learned

Housing is the Hub. Sche'lang'en Village is not the first time the Lummi Nation attempted wrap-around services. Behavioral Services started a wrap-around program earlier, but it was not long-lived. Housing was a critical missing piece. As John says, you need "a place to put your toothbrush" to make changes. Counselors have difficulty locating clients without reliable housing. Program staff say that a family's desire to keep housing and Housing's ability to provide clients with the mental and physical space to experience positive change are important benefits of this program. "We don't have to start over every time we see them," Diana commented.

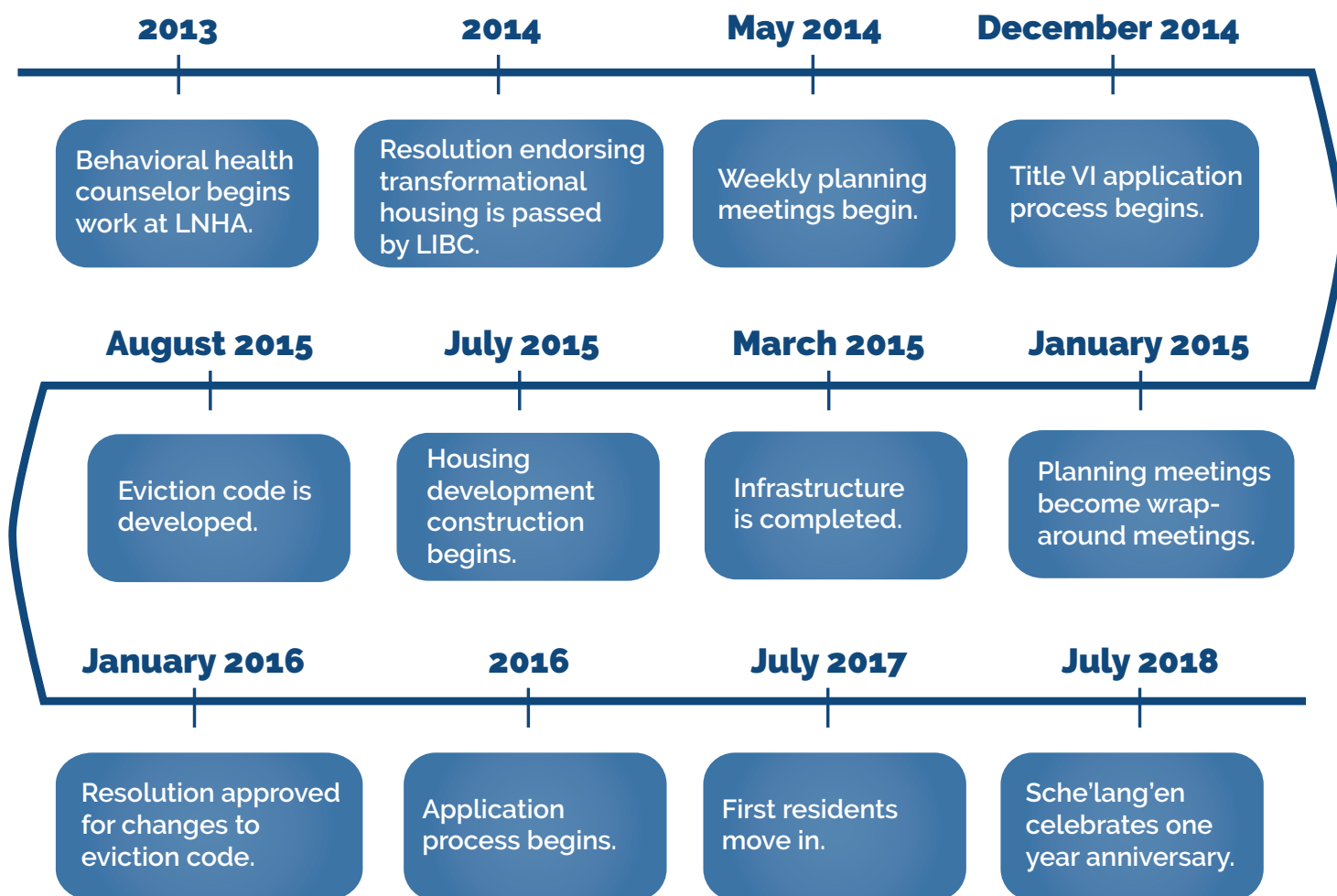
Partnership Outreach is Ongoing. Before the program existed, Diana visited many tribal departments and organizations. She made presentations about the need, the vision, the program, and the design. She educated others, but she also learned the amazing wealth of services that were available. These services increased options for the residents and decreased the number of services that Housing would have to provide. Departments and programs were likely to become enthusiastic partners when they realized that Sche'lang'en Village could offer something that would benefit their clients. This process of learning and informing is ongoing, both because the program changes, but also

because staff members throughout the tribe change. A new presentation is an opportunity to gain a new partner or strengthen an old partnership.

Shared Responsibility. Providing case management through a group can be a slow and contentious process, but partners say that it also provides checks and balances that ensure the family's interests are best met. Each participating family has faced enormous obstacles and is vulnerable to stress. John says, "Even when things look great, families are often teetering on the edge." The responsibility to monitor, nurture, and hand down consequences weighs heavily on program staff. It is a form of self-care when this responsibility can be shared among the group members.

Consistency Is Caring. Residents sometimes approach Diana to thank her for letting them live in Sche'lang'en Village. She tells them, "You got here yourself. All I want to see is for you to get up every morning and do what you need to do." These are families whose lives have been ruled by chaos, violence, and/or low expectations. They have often not had much experience raising their children and are afraid of making mistakes. The Village needs to be a place where they can learn both to succeed and to make mistakes that do not ruin their lives. For that to happen, the program needs to provide consistency. The rules are consistent and are enforced with consistency. Meetings that are scheduled weekly, take place weekly. If a staff member who is responsible for a meeting is away, someone else fills in.

Timeline



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