

May 8, 2024

Disinformation

We are aware of the blatantly false information circulating about We Heart Seattle (WHS) by a small number of extremists. Indeed, despite our success in the field (or perhaps because of it), WHS has been subject to a baseless online defamation campaign and series of unsubstantiated claims.

We monitor these online complaints and our compliance officer looks into each and every allegation. This is not an easy task given that the allegations are almost exclusively anonymous. The few individuals who go on record to perpetuate these untruths refuse to have any meaningful contact with us. The bottom line is: there has not been a single verified instance of theft, bullying, stealing of dogs (yes, WHS was accused of that) or abusive behavior by WHS.

Even more relevant than the results of our internal review is the trust that WHS has earned among the people we serve. If we had committed the unkind acts of which we are accused, there would be zero possibility that WHS could earn or maintain the trust required to transition more than 200 individuals off the streets, and assist countless others into recovery, employment, etc.

It is incredibly frustrating that our organization has become a lightning rod for a small (though vocal) group of detractors. But our philosophy is to stay true to our vision and values and continue to work every day to make Seattle safe and more beautiful for all. Thanks to widespread community support and the tireless work of our volunteers, WHS continues to grow in size and influence.

The positive impact of our work and our individualized outreach methodology is well documented in the media (numerous examples on our website's Press / Media Coverage page at <https://weheartseattle.org/media-coverage-3/>). The Seattle Times referred to WHS founder and Executive Director Andrea Suarez and the work WHS does as a "[gift of our region](https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/editorials/the-gifts-of-our-region/)" (<https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/editorials/the-gifts-of-our-region/>) and journalists, including Pulitzer Prize winning photographer John Moore (see images of his time embedded with WHS [HERE](https://weheartseattle.org/photo-gallery-old/) <https://weheartseattle.org/photo-gallery-old/>) have documented our work.

But it's what happens when the media lens is off that is most telling. Since WHS' Oct 2020 inception thru Apr 2024:

- Held 356 cleanup events in 26 Seattle zip codes
- Over 1000 active volunteers provided 12,081 total person-hours for our field work
- Removed 1,208,000 pounds (604 tons) of trash, frequently in challenging terrain
- Removed housing barriers for more than 1000 people and assisted 216 people move off the streets

We Heart Seattle

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- Paid living wage hourly rates to 33 hard-working people with a recent history of homelessness
- Collaboration with more than 39 organizations including (but not limited to) the Salvation Army, Uplift Northwest, SODO Business Improvement Area, Rotary Clubs, Housing Connector, Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI), Seattle Latino Hiking Club, Young Professionals of Washington Policy Center, and four of the Friends of Seattle Parks neighborhood groups, and local apartment communities.

See WHS in action with this video: [WE HEART VOLUNTEERS \(youtube.com\) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xaLzgL4Hul](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xaLzgL4Hul). Recently, Seattle City Council President Sara Nelson, Councilmember Bob Kettle and Deputy Superintendent of Parks and Recreation Christopher Williamson spoke publicly in chambers of the good work that WHS is accomplishing (hear them and again, see WHS in action in this [VIDEO WE HEART CITY COUNCIL APRIL 2024 \(youtube.com\)](#)).

Protocols & Controls

WHS is governed by a professional Board of Directors that, from the outset of the organization, has insisted on gold standard governance that includes a dedicated compliance officer, along with a Code of Conduct, Conflict of Interest Policy, Whistleblower Protection Policy and an Anti-Harassment Policy. We have also partnered with other organizations, including the Union Gospel Mission, to ensure our team has trauma informed care and de-escalation training. Our field team's day to day obligations require each of our participants to:

- Act with respect and dignity in building relationships with people experiencing homelessness, residents and business owners, with no bias or prejudice towards race, religion, age, sex, disability, or sexual preference;
- Serve as a steward for our public spaces;
- Uphold organizational values, work ethically and with integrity, and follow WHS policies including, but not limited to, WHS's Non-Harassment Policy and Whistleblower Protection Policy;
- Conduct themselves at all times in accordance with good professional judgment for the sole benefit of the organization and in such a manner as to not create a conflict of interest or appearance of such conflict (a conflict of interest exists when a duty to further the interests of the organization can be prejudiced by actual or potential benefit from another source);
- Safeguard clients' personal property, data and privacy rights.

With regard to the final point above regarding personal property: if we ever remove/move personal property, we work with the camper/individual to ensure that we have informed written consent. End results vary case by case: in some instances, property is stored (at WHS expense) while the individual enters recovery or moves into temporary shelter; in some cases soiled or unsanitary items are disposed of with consent, etc. However, it is important to note that of the 1.2 million pounds of trash and debris that we have removed



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from our City's public spaces, the vast majority has been from abandoned encampments. This [time lapse video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_hp9R8W0X0) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_hp9R8W0X0) is a great example of the type of debris our team tackles on a weekly basis.

Conclusion

As a privately funded organization with a unique empowerment model, we bring a fresh perspective to the table. All voices should be welcome – even those potentially counter to the status quo - and we ask that you champion our success.

We welcome any further questions you may have and also invite you to join us in the field as we clean our city and offer assistance to those we meet along the way.

Sincerely,

Andrea Suarez

Founder and Executive Director

