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## Not Sure Where to Start?

The Interfaith Task Force on Homelessness (ITFH) provides education, advocacy, and direct service to the unsheltered homelessness. Please contact us if you have any questions. Additionally, the following Safe Parking organizers are also available to discuss their experience with you:

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Quotes from the following sources: Charlie Bayer: [quora.com/What-is-it-like-to-be-homeless-and-live-in-your-car](https://www.quora.com/What-is-it-like-to-be-homeless-and-live-in-your-car)

Kate Budd: [columbian.com/news/2019/may/20/clark-countys-homeless-numbers-rise-report-finds](https://www.columbian.com/news/2019/may/20/clark-countys-homeless-numbers-rise-report-finds)

Gavin Cooley: [spokesman.com/stories/2019/oct/30/as-economy-grows-so-does-homelessness-in-cities-li](https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2019/oct/30/as-economy-grows-so-does-homelessness-in-cities-li)

Sarah Davidson and Charlene Downes: "Safe Parking Lots Outreach" report (as listed above).

Chrissy Norton, Karina O'Malley: [deseret.com/indepth/2019/10/19/20897026/living-in-car-seattle-homeless](https://www.deseret.com/indepth/2019/10/19/20897026/living-in-car-seattle-homeless)

Lily Rehrmann, Linda Taylor: [kuow.org/stories/seattle-launches-new-effort-to-give-vehicles-residents-a-safe-place-to-park](https://www.kuow.org/stories/seattle-launches-new-effort-to-give-vehicles-residents-a-safe-place-to-park)

# 2,700

More than 2,700 people in King County live in their cars due to homelessness.

[ 2020 Point in Time Count, Regional Housing Authority ]

→ Safe Parking Programs can help.

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How Religious Organizations Can Host Safe Parking Interfaith Task Force on Homelessness (ITFH)

## Why do people live in vehicles?

**“Rising rents are the main factor driving more and more people out of their homes—especially senior and disabled people living on a fixed income.”**

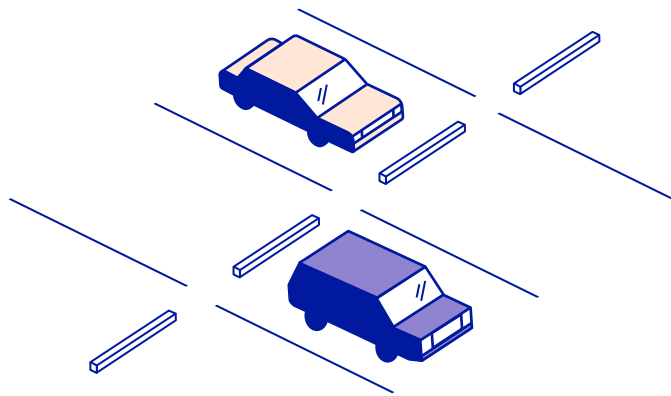
Katt Budd, Executive Director, Council for the Homeless, Clark County, WA

**“Often people who are living in their cars are pretty new to homelessness. Their car is their last asset. It’s what keeps them going to a job or to school every day.”**

Lily Rehrmann, Human Services Department, Seattle, WA

**“When you’re living paycheck to paycheck, a couple of bad weeks can be the difference between being housed or not housed.”**

Gavin Cooley, Chief Financial Officer, City of Spokane, WA



### BY PROVIDING SAFE PARKING, FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS CAN HELP CAR DWELLERS MOVE TOWARD HOUSING.

People living in cars can use safe parking programs while they are waiting for housing assistance.

While not a permanent solution, **safe parking is a critical step towards exiting homelessness.**

**“We struggled for a year to pay rent with odd jobs...last Christmas we finally couldn’t do it and got evicted. We stayed with some friends in the winter, but come summer, we had to leave, and since then, it has been truck living.”**

Crissy Norton, Lake Washington United Methodist Church Safe Parking Program

## WHAT DO PEOPLE LIVING IN CARS NEED?

### ➔ Personal Safety

People living in their cars are often victims of break-ins and theft, because their possessions may be visible and accessible (due to windows open for ventilation, for example). Violence is also a fear, especially for women.

### ➔ Basic Amenities

Bathrooms, showers, hand sanitizing, waste disposal, laundry, and places to prepare and store food are hard to find when living out of car.

### ➔ Relief from Parking Enforcement

Many cities ticket vehicles that are parked in the same spot on a public street for more than 24–72 hours. Vehicles can also be impounded for having expired tabs or multiple unpaid tickets. Fines and towing fees can be crippling costs that lead to seizure and loss of the car.

### ➔ A Safe Place to Park

People living in their cars need a safe place to park while they are sleeping. Additionally, many people living in a vehicle have a job, but can’t park at their job site. These vehicle residents need a safe place to leave their car for an extended time while they are working.



**“If you are car homeless, you have to find somewhere for your car to remain for a full night. There is a constant worry of a police officer knocking on your window asking what you are doing—and that is nerve-wracking.”** —Charlie Bayer, Vehicle Resident

# Understanding Safe Parking



## WHAT IS SAFE PARKING?

Safe Parking Programs give people who live in their cars a safe place to park. Cars can be hosted overnight (for about 12 hours) or longer. Programs vary by the number of spaces provided and the types of services offered.

### SAFE PARKING PROGRAM LEVELS

#### BASIC: 1–2 spots

Overnight sleeping only.  
Program provides emergency contact (phone number) while lot is in use.



#### INTERMEDIATE: 3–6 spots

+ Access to outside portable toilets  
+ Access to an outside tap water source  
+ Connection to social services



#### ADVANCED: 7+ spots

+ Additional hours beyond evenings  
+ Organization of 2-3 camp leaders who help with peer safety, compliance with rules, and program oversight



## WHO USES SAFE PARKING?

Many guests are new to homelessness and need their vehicle to get to a job or school. Some guests use safe parking while they save money for their own space. Others are waiting for housing assistance (in many areas, there are months-long waiting lists for subsidized housing.) On the personal level, car campers use safe parking to escape loneliness and to find a supportive, caring community.

**“Most of these folks are desperately trying to get back into housing.”**

Karina O'Malley, Safe Parking Coordinator,  
Lake Washington United Methodist Church, Kirkland, WA

## WHAT MAKES SAFE PARKING SAFE?

### → Safety in Numbers

Guests feel safer when sleeping near other car campers on private property.

### → Trusted Community

Programs screen all applicants. If needed, background checks could be used to eliminate those with records of violent crime, child or sexual abuse, or domestic violence.

### → Available Help

Most programs work with local government and have public safety partnerships. Car campers receive contact numbers for both the host and local law enforcement. Social service partners can connect guests to housing, jobs, healthcare, and other resources.

## IS HOSTING SAFE PARKING LEGAL?

Yes! WA State Bill ESHB 1754–2020<sup>1</sup> “Concerning the Hosting of the Homeless by Religious Organizations” became effective on June 11, 2020. This bill outlines how hosting the homeless legally occurs within all jurisdictions in Washington state.

This bill aligns state law with the Federal “Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act–2000” (RLUIPA).<sup>2</sup> Both laws enable faith-based groups to use their properties to pursue religious missions such as hosting those who are homeless via safe parking lots, outdoor encampments, indoor overnight shelters, and tiny homes.

<sup>1</sup> legiscan.com/WA/bill/1754/2020

<sup>2</sup> justice.gov/crt/religious-land-use-and-institutionalized-persons-act

## DO SAFE PARKING PROGRAMS ENABLE CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS?

**NO. SAFE PARKING CREATES A PATH AWAY FROM HOMELESSNESS.**

Safe parking programs are a critical service for people living in their cars due to homelessness. They provide much needed safety, peace, and dignity to people who are working towards stable housing—many of whom are homeless for the first time. While safe lots are not a permanent solution, they help people who are living in their vehicles recover a more normal life.

## A CLOSER LOOK AT SAFE PARKING

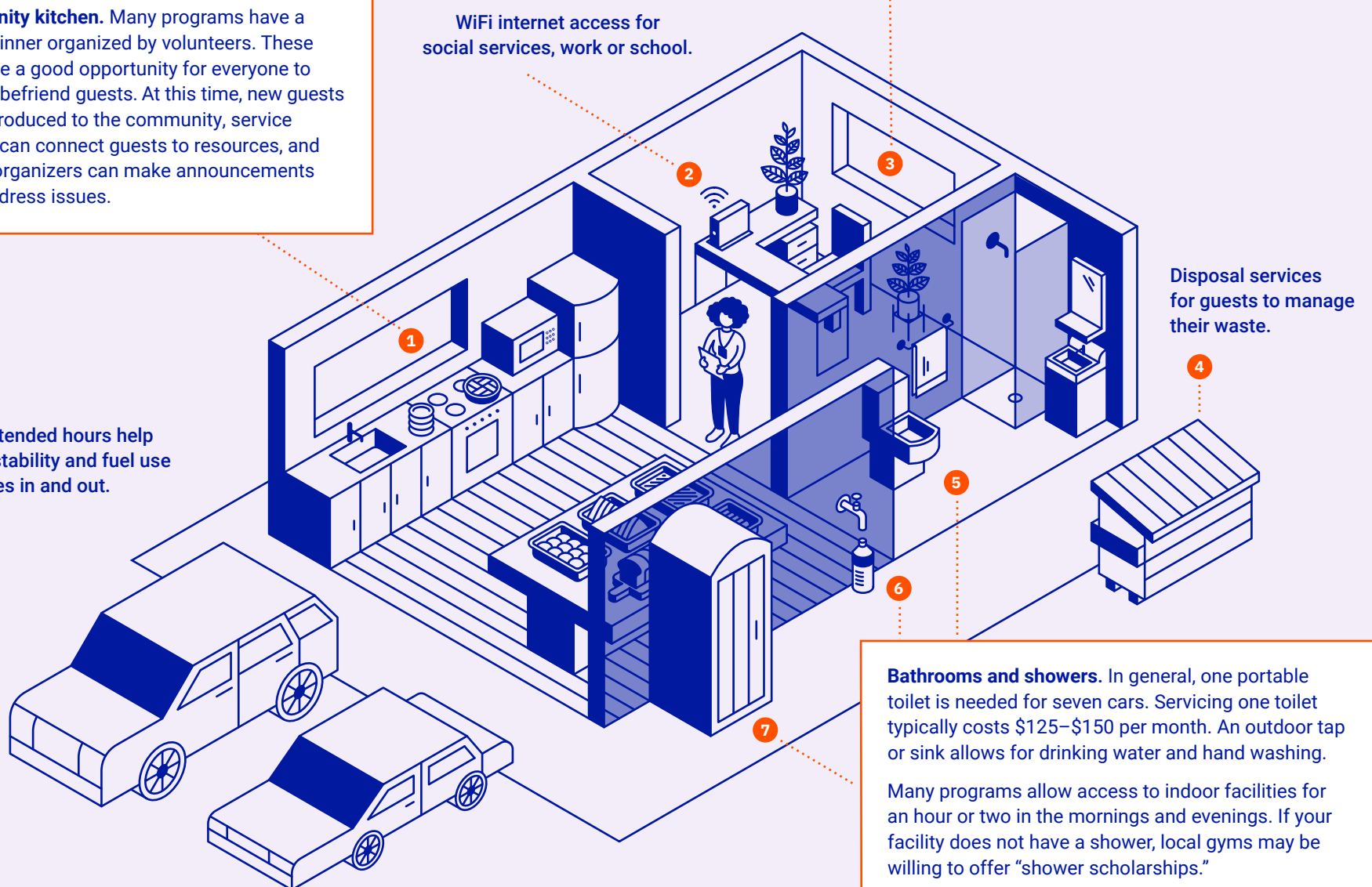
Many programs start small, with just one or two spots for guests to safely park overnight. Over time, your program could provide additional amenities, such as:

**A community kitchen.** Many programs have a monthly dinner organized by volunteers. These dinners are a good opportunity for everyone to meet and befriend guests. At this time, new guests can be introduced to the community, service providers can connect guests to resources, and program organizers can make announcements and/or address issues.

WiFi internet access for social services, work or school.

**Social service partners.** Agencies can recruit guests from their existing client base. They can also conduct background checks to screen applicants for criminal records. Agencies can further help your guests apply for housing, healthcare, and other forms of support.

**Daytime or other extended hours** help guests avoid the instability and fuel use from moving vehicles in and out.



## Getting Started With Your Safe Parking Program

### GET BUY-IN FROM YOUR CONGREGATION

The congregation and leadership needs to commit to hosting a safe lot. Ideally, a group of volunteers steps forward to be the lead safe lot organizers. This group can visit existing safe lots and determine the best structure for your program (i.e., hours of operation, type of guests to host, etc.) The group should present a final written proposal to leadership and the congregation. If approved, this written document can guide the team as they put their plan into action.

### CONSULT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In successful safe parking programs, the congregation, guests, and local government are collegial partners. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) can be written and signed to confirm what everyone has agreed to do.

#### → PUBLIC SAFETY

Note that your safe lot is subject to public health codes. Program organizers should consult with officials from their local Department of Public Health to determine if the facility is safe for guests.

#### → LAW ENFORCEMENT

Organizers should meet with local law enforcement to discuss if officers will patrol the lot. Many guests do feel safer with patrols. However, officers should not shine lights into vehicles at night, etc. Some programs do have issues with officers who disturb guests. If this occurs, you may need to ask officers to stay off the property unless there is an emergency.

### ENGAGE WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

Your immediate neighbors—those within a two block radius—will likely have concerns. Others may want to help and/or be involved in planning or hosting.

Many congregations open a dialogue by inviting nearby neighbors to a small gathering. Your invitation should include contact information for the program organizers so that neighbors can ask questions, express concerns and/or ask for more information. At the event, you should explain the program (but legally, you do not need their permission to proceed.)

### ADDRESS COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Neighbors are often worried about drugs and crime. They may also have concerns about noise, cleanliness, litter, pets, and their own safety. Safe lot organizers can often address these concerns by:

→ Being transparent about the partnership developed with local government and local law enforcement.

→ Requiring guests to sign a “Code of Conduct.”

→ Populating the program with a specific, pre-screened guests who pass a background check (see “Selecting Guests for Your Program” on the next page).

**“I’m very strict about the rules. I don’t put up with anything. That said, I’ve had 400 people come through this program and only had to ask five to leave.”**

Sarah Davidson, Kent United Methodist Church, WA

### DEVELOP A CODE OF CONDUCT

All guests hosted in safe parking program should agree to follow a signed Code of Conduct. This document is the cornerstone of a successful program. It creates a mutual sense of accountability and ensures that both guests and hosts follow the rules. A code of conduct could include:

#### RULES FOR SAFE CONDUCT

Guests can be required to be non-violent and drug/alcohol free. For safety, cooking and flames (i.e., candles) in vehicles should be prohibited. Weapons could also be banned.

#### GUIDELINES FOR PERSONAL INTERACTIONS

You can encourage speech and actions to be civil, threat-free, and absent of discrimination/bias.

#### RULES FOR LITTER AND WASTE

Guests can be responsible for their space. The host should provide designated bins for waste.

#### TIMELINES FOR DURATION OF STAY

Typically 90 days, with extensions possible.

#### HOURS OF OPERATION

Can be overnight only, or include additional access. Note “Lights-Out Hours” and “Quiet Hours.”

#### RULES FOR A REQUIRED PARKING PASS

Typically shown in the front vehicle window.

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## » Selecting Guests for Your Program

Different programs serve different populations for the safety and security of the guests. Your safe parking program could serve:

- **Single women**
- **Families (defined as at least one adult and one child)**
- **Single men**
- **Couples without children**

When choosing the population for your safe lot, consider what groups are already served by other programs in your area. Many safe parking programs preferentially serve families and women, which leaves men and childless couples with fewer options.

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**“The best candidates are those who have a steady income from work or disability payments, and who are committed to getting into housing fast.”**

Linda Taylor, Urban League, Service Partner for City of Seattle Safe Lots

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**Most safe parking programs hosted by faith-based organizations limit vehicle types to passenger cars, vans, and small campers (those that fit on top of a pickup truck).**

Larger vehicles (such as RVs and travel trailers) can be difficult to monitor for unapproved guests. Additionally, if a large vehicle in poor condition is abandoned or becomes unsafe, removal and disposal can be costly and cumbersome.



The first meeting with a guest is an opportunity to connect and make a difference in the life of an unhoused neighbor. An example of an intake process is described below.

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### INTAKE: WELCOMING GUESTS AND MAKING A CONNECTION

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#### STEP 1 BUILD MUTUAL TRUST

**Briefly get acquainted.** Ask the guest(s) what they hope to see happen, and with their permission write these ideas down to revisit at a later point.

#### STEP 2 BASIC INFO AND BACKGROUND CHECK

**Ask guests to fill in a basic information sheet.** You need the names and phone numbers of everyone living in the vehicle; the license plate/make/model/year of the car; any work and school information; and who to contact in case of emergency.

**If a background check is needed, explain that these checks ensure that the community is a safe place for everyone.**

This is a good time to ask if they know of anything that will come up on the check that they would like to talk about.

#### STEP 3 ORIENTATION AND CODE OF CONDUCT

**Tour the facilities, discuss, and sign the code of conduct.**

#### STEP 4 CONNECT TO RESOURCES

**Encourage the guest to see the safe parking program as a pathway to housing.** Explain any deadlines (programs may require guests to meet with a housing counselor within 90 days). Ask if there are other service providers they would like to meet with (medical, job placement, etc.).

#### STEP 5 PROVIDE THE AUTHORIZED GUEST PASS

**Give the pass to the guest for display in their front window.** The back of the pass is a good place to list the contact information of program organizers.

**“Our first responsibility is to tell new arrivals this is a safe, welcoming place where they can be accepted and build some relationships.**

**Many are ashamed and mistrustful.”**

Charlene Downes,  
Lake Washington  
United Methodist Church  
Kirkland, WA