

Check It Out! Podcast Transcript  
Episode #33  
“Oso to opioids with Shari Ireton and the Sheriff’s Office”  
Sno-Isle Libraries, July 26, 2019



Ken Harvey: 00:00 In today's episode we're going to talk about homelessness, opioids, drug use and maybe other issues with a spokesperson for the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office. Stay tuned for our conversation with Shari Ireton.

Ken Harvey: 00:20 Welcome to season 2 and episode 33 of Check It Out!, the Sno-Isle Libraries podcast for lifelong learners with inquiring minds.

Cindy Tingley: 00:28 The views and opinions expressed on this podcast may not necessarily reflect the official position of Sno-Isle Libraries.

Ken Harvey: 00:36 Well, hello everyone. My name is Ken Harvey.

Cindy Tingley: 00:38 And I'm Cindy Tingley.

Ken Harvey: 00:39 Hi Cindy.

Jim Hills: 00:39 And I'm Jim Hills.

Ken Harvey: 00:40 Hi Jim. And we are delighted to have with us Shari Ireton, the director of communications for the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office. Thank you so much for joining us in the podcast studio.

Shari Ireton: 00:53 Well, thank you for inviting me.

Jim Hills: 00:53 Thank you for turning your phone on silent long enough to talk to us.

Ken Harvey: 00:56 Yeah, so just before we hit the record button, we were talking, you were asked by Jim, "Is your phone always on?" And you were saying it's more like 24/5, something like that?

Shari Ireton: 01:12 24/5. We at the Sheriff's Office have lieutenants who cover the public information officer duties on the weekends, but as I was also saying when really big, bad things happen, we know that anybody who's PIO for the Sheriff's Office is going to be called out.

(Continued)

Ken Harvey: 01:29 So you actually used an analogy or illustration saying to your husband, if Glacier Peak erupted, while you are out hiking-

Shari Ireton: 01:39 Yes, I will be going to work. I don't even need a cell phone to tell me that that will be something I will need to do.

Jim Hills: 01:46 It's like the bat signal.

Shari Ireton: 01:47 Exactly.

Jim Hills: 01:48 When Glacier Peak erupts, everybody's on.

Ken Harvey: 01:51 Well, I think sometimes we take for granted that there are individuals like you who are putting themselves out that way, and just want to thank you for the service and you representing all the men and woman in the Sheriff's Office.

Shari Ireton: 02:06 Yeah, I would also say that I represent, I would like to think I represent, the public information officers in the county as well. There's over 120 of us working in fire districts and for schools, for cities, I guess now in libraries.

Ken Harvey: 02:20 In libraries.

Shari Ireton: 02:20 Exactly! And they play an important role behind the scenes, sort of, bridging that gap between the agency they work for the communities they serve to make sure the information is getting out to the right people at the right time and they're definitely an important piece of the community.

Ken Harvey: 02:37 Well, you've worked hard and diligently to make sure we were, kind of, a functional unit, a team working together to ensure that those kind of communications, emergency information, needs get covered.

Ken Harvey: 02:52 So, before we get further into the conversation with you, I'd like to give the audience a sense of your background, which is pretty extensive. Rather than reading a bio sheet out, would you mind if I just tried to summarize it and then you say yes or no, or true or not true, maybe that's a stretch.

Shari Ireton: 03:10 Sure, I would love to hear someone summarize my life. That makes me, there's a strange-

Cindy Tingley: 03:12 Makes you really comfortable, right?

Shari Ireton: 03:15 Yes, exactly.

Ken Harvey: 03:16 Well, before we go to the earliest part of your life, graduated from the University of Idaho?

Shari Ireton: 03:23 Yep.

Ken Harvey: 03:23 And then Gonzaga U?

Shari Ireton: 03:25 That is correct, with a Master's Degree.

Ken Harvey: 03:28 So, you consider yourself a Zag?

Shari Ireton: 03:29 I consider myself a Vandal Zag, yes.

Ken Harvey: 03:30 Or, Vandal Zag. Okay.

Ken Harvey: 03:35 So you've worked in the non-profit sector?

Shari Ireton: 03:39 Either worked in the non-profit sector or government sector pretty much my whole career.

Ken Harvey: 03:44 So I've also got on here medical research sector.

Shari Ireton: 03:48 I did, I was at the University of Washington and I worked both in neurosurgery as well as bioengineering which tells you how far a journalism degree will get you these days. I worked at the law school there as well, and did marketing for professional and continuing education.

Cindy Tingley: 04:06 And do you consider yourself a Husky?

Shari Ireton: 04:08 By default. I'm married to one.

Ken Harvey: 04:13 A Husky Zag Vandal? Husky Vandal Zag? [crosstalk 00:04:17]

Shari Ireton: 04:16 But we also root for the Cougs too, it's super complicated since the Vandals are only 8 miles away from the Cougs, I felt like a Cougar by default. I always support the home team, whoever it is.

Ken Harvey: 04:25 So, and you've been with the Sheriff's Office as director of communications?

Shari Ireton: 04:29 Since 2012.

Ken Harvey: 04:30 Since 2012, so quite a while now. A lot of miles.

Shari Ireton: 04:35 Yes, by far the most interesting and hardest job I've ever had.

- Ken Harvey: 04:41 So, but also before we began taping, we were, actually, setting mic levels and we were just being forced by our technical producer Deborah Tahara to say some things on the microphone so she could set the levels and so we were talking a little bit about ourselves, and you mentioned, essentially kind of the origins of your name, your last name, Ireton. I thought that was pretty fascinating, so let's go through that again.
- Shari Ireton: 05:09 Well, I hope I get this right. I'm sure there'll be 700 ancestry and genealogy people who will let you know if I have gotten it wrong. What my understanding is there are two branches of the Ireton family, one coming from the Northern England area of Kumbria and a small area called Irton. It's like Ireton with out the "e." Another branch coming from the Scotch-Irish area, sorry, that would be coming from the Scotland Ireland areas. And Henry Ireton is a historical figure, he married Oliver Cromwell's daughter and pretty much anybody who's an Ireton, we are probably related if we go far enough back.
- Ken Harvey: 05:51 So I think you mentioned that when you and your husband were, before marriage, you were watching a television program, so it wasn't Game of Thrones-
- Shari Ireton: 06:04 No, it was not Game of Thrones. First of all, I'm a little bit older than that, so I don't quite pre-date HBO but definitely pre-date Game of Thrones. There's a movie that came out in the 70's, I believe, called Cromwell. And in the opening scene there Cromwell was riding his horse and meeting two people on horseback and one of them is Henry Ireton. So, it was quite a surprise for my husband. He finally had to believe the-
- Jim Hills: 06:30 Which he thought you'd been fibbing all along.
- Shari Ireton: 06:33 Yeah, I think it was one of those things he wasn't really listening to you until it came out of an actor's mouth, and then suddenly it was- [crosstalk 00:06:41] It must be gospel truth so...
- Jim Hills: 06:43 They wouldn't put that in a movie if it wasn't true.
- Ken Harvey: 06:46 Well, that is really interesting and just want to remind the audience that if you are interested in your family history and tracking that information down, finding out how rich it might be, there are individuals at Sno-Isle libraries who'd be delighted to help you.
- Jim Hills: 07:07 Are we going to keep score on how many times we can tie the library back in to Shari's life? That's be good.

Cindy Tingley: 07:12 We should, you want me to start that? Okay, that's one.

Jim Hills: 07:13 There's one.

Ken Harvey: 07:14 Okay, yeah. Keep track.

Ken Harvey: 07:17 So, Shari, you've been working, you've said, with the Sheriff's Office for a number of years now, and you actually came to the Sheriff's Office from the University of Washington, correct?

Shari Ireton: 07:30 Yes, that is correct.

Ken Harvey: 07:31 So that seems like a significant shift.

Shari Ireton: 07:34 It was, in many ways. I really had a wonderful career at the University of Washington. That was a place where I was able to grow from, basically, a program assistant to someone who was in a leadership role. The wonderful thing about being in an institution as large as the U-dub is you can move around in different positions but still stay within that university. The challenge was, is my husband and I wanted to purchase a house and raise a family. And when the median home price is about, at the time, a half a million dollars. The university pays well, but maybe not quite that well. He works at the university also. So, it had been kind of a challenging time for state employees during the recession and we were... figure out how to say this... it was a challenging time in terms of employment, as at-will employees, didn't know if we'd stay on the job. We were paying more for our benefits but not seeing any cost of living increases so it was challenging.

Ken Harvey: 08:41 Yeah, can I jump in just for a second. So for the audience, that silence that you heard a few minutes ago, that's called a pregnant pause. And it means that the person speaking is really trying to figure out what's the best way to phrase what they want to say.

Shari Ireton: 09:00 So, somebody had sent me a link to this job opening at the Sheriff's Office. We happened to live in North Everett, and I remember forwarding it to my husband and saying, "Wouldn't this be the craziest thing I've ever done?" Not even thinking that I would possibly even get the job. I did know Sheriff Lovick second hand. At the time his wife was teaching at the same school our children attended, so I had met him before at events at the school. And needless to say when they made me the offer I had to suddenly make a big decision, so my commute time

went down to about 7 minutes if I hit all the stoplights. I had an office where I could see-

Ken Harvey: 09:42 What was it previously?

Shari Ireton: 09:44 Oh, to the University of Washington? Anywhere from 30 minutes to, I don't know, the end of times?

Cindy Tingley: 09:51 Depending on the weather.

Shari Ireton: 09:51 When tankers explode on I-5 it tends to make things pretty nasty. And I remember telling my husband, "You know, if you do this, you lose your carpool buddy." But he was okay with-

Jim Hills: 10:02 Yeah, that's actually a significant choice, right?

Shari Ireton: 10:04 Yes, he's been very supportive, I have to shout out to my husband who has been supportive of not only my education and my career, but just as a great dad and partner so allowing me to be able to run off to, for example, Oso for five straight days in a row. I know that the kids are getting fed and taken care of. Maybe not eating what I would feed them, but I know that everything is good and very supportive, so...

Jim Hills: 10:32 Okay, so here's number two. On the up side, he gets more opportunities to listen to audio books he checks out from Sno-Isle Libraries. [crosstalk 00:10:39]

Cindy Tingley: 10:39 Oh, there we go, good job, Jim.

Shari Ireton: 10:45 That's right. Well, he's commuting, stuck in traffic on the bus, so...

Ken Harvey: 10:46 Well, look, you're not expecting this question and you can choose how you want to answer it, but I just comment and my own observation, now-a-days when we watch, and if we watch, televisions programs that involve law enforcement, it is very routine to see females in those roles, in uniform. It hasn't always been that way, though.

Shari Ireton: 11:15 No, it has not. I should clarify for the audience that I am not a commissioned officer. I'm a civilian employee. Sometimes I joke that I'm neither fish nor foul. Both within my agency because I don't wear a gun and I don't have the authority to arrest people and I work with the media a lot there can be some distrust. Same comes with the media as well because I work for the police. But there are very few women in law enforcement, it is

growing and I would say women are wonderful at law enforcement because as you mentioned, we probably talk about later, is the role of law enforcement in the community has changed quite a bit over the years. We're doing more social work, mental health work, then we have really ever done before. I would say that...

- Ken Harvey: 12:13 Yeah. Well so, I have seen you the uniform they allow you to wear. Even though you're not packing heat. But, if you needed to learn more about how to pack heat, for our audience members, we have books on that at the library so...
- Cindy Tingley: 12:34 Oh, in the library, number three. [crosstalk 00:12:34]
- Ken Harvey: 12:34 But seriously, we do appreciate that you're in the role that you're in as spokesperson and communications director for the Sheriff's Office. You happen to mention, and I'd be derelict if I didn't, just kind of, circle back to it, you mentioned Oso. That was a few years ago, in some way a reckoning, but it still seems like it was yesterday for some of us.
- Ken Harvey: 13:09 For our audience members who may not know, the Sno-Isle Libraries actually lost a member of our family in the event there, someone who had recently retired from the library and whose home was in the path of the mud flow, is that what we're calling it officially, or mud slop out.
- Shari Ireton: 13:29 Mudslide, yeah.
- Ken Harvey: 13:31 Okay, so would you like maybe just kind of remind us what happened with the sheriff office's role in that event.
- Shari Ireton: 13:44 Sure, so I'll try to do that as succinctly as I can.
- Cindy Tingley: 13:48 And if I recall this was on a Saturday, also.
- Shari Ireton: 13:50 It was on a Saturday, yes. I remember because I was shopping for science fair supplies with my family when, we will get paged sometimes, or nowadays I guess it would be a text message, that there had been a slide that had crossed over 530 and the road was closed. Now, in hindsight we all know how horrible and huge that was, but at the time, a lot of us who weren't there didn't think much about it because landslides here are very common. We had been dealing with one up in Index for a long time that cut off a small community, but it was not catastrophic in any way, shape or form.

Ken Harvey: 14:30 Inconvenient, not catastrophic.

Shari Ireton: 14:31 Exactly. The strangest thing, from my perspective, is usually when there's, sort of, activity on the weekends that draws a lot of response. I'll get phone calls, or text messages or emails, but it was completely silent. So after a few hours I actually called the department of emergency management. Since it was a weekend, there was a lieutenant covering the PIO duties, and I asked him, I said, "Do you know what's going on up in Oso?" and he said, "I don't know. I'm getting all kinds of information, but not a lot of it makes sense." So fast forward, I actually went up there and was a public information officer actually on site for the first five days. We started out with just four public information officers-

Ken Harvey: 15:16 Let me just stop, jump in for a second. Five Days. So not, five hours. Five days.

Shari Ireton: 15:24 Right. And I should clarify that then I also kept working on that incident for the next four months. So the Sheriff's Office role is, obviously, public safety. So, search and rescue and recovery. Helicopter team along with search and rescue volunteers as well as hundreds of people from community jumped in and helped find people who are missing, who thankfully, were still alive, rescue those who were injured, and then the next part was the really difficult part which was trying to find all 43 people who had died in the slide.

Shari Ireton: 16:05 So, I was not working full time up at the Joint Information Center up there the for the last three months and three weeks, but heavily still involved until we found the last victim.

Ken Harvey: 16:19 So one of the reasons why I'm glad you just shared that is, it points to, I think, a reality that I know exists having done disaster emergency public information, and that is when something happens, there's a period of time in which it's really not clear what just happened. And though the public audiences, everyone want to know what happened. And questions may be being asked, but whoever is the official spokesperson doesn't know what to say other than, "We don't know yet." It can be really difficult because there can be so much information, conflicting information or information that is changing minute by minute and it just makes it really a challenge.

Shari Ireton: 17:20 Sure, and that one for me was, I mean, there were a lot of lessons that I learned in that. I came from more of a traditional, again, civilian approach working at the University of Washington, in terms of my communication. I had not had the

training yet, I was on a waiting list to take, basically what you would call, more like the advanced public information officer, kind of thrusting you into the incident management world understanding that there are operations and resource request and briefings. I hadn't quite gotten there yet.

Jim Hills: 17:50

Oh my gosh.

Cindy Tingley: 17:51

Wow.

Shari Ireton: 17:54

So there's a couple things I always think about when I think about Oso and my experience up there. Number one, I have learned this phrase called situational awareness, which is really important and I will say that I did not even really have a true grasp of how significant the event was, even though we went to the Red Cross shelter that had been set up at the high school and talked to some of the families. Even though I had gotten some information from our patrol units out in the field along the road, it wasn't until about 10:00 that night that we got video from our helicopter, which had done the fly-over, and the size of the slide and how it just went on and on and on and they were following 530 but you couldn't see the road any more. And it finally sunk in, this is big. This is bigger than anything I've ever seen before. And it just so happened I just finished reading a book, which I can't remember the title, but I bet librarians at Sno-Isle library-

Cindy Tingley: 18:50

There you go, that's another.

Shari Ireton: 18:51

-can help you find it. It's about the term, black swan, and Cook's expedition and that was sort of what I was really wrestling with was it couldn't be a black swan because they don't exist, until I saw that video up link and then three days later, actually, started taking media out to the site to see the recovery efforts and realized, no, that's exactly what that is. So, a lot of good lessons.

Jim Hills: 19:19

So when you said you hadn't actually gone through the training, I just find that amazing. So I've had some exposure. I know that Ken has been a FEMA trainer, Federal Emergency Management Agency. I can't imagine the role you were in pre-training, because it's extensive. And I saw you when you were talking about that, you said The Joint Information Center and you stopped yourself because you were going to use the acronym, you were going to say JIC. And this FEMA training is just full of acronyms. You almost said JIC, but then realized that we'd have to explain it.

Jim Hills: 20:01 I had no idea. I was going to ask, in your transition from the U-dub to the Sheriff's Office, what kind of emergency management training you'd had at the U that would be applicable to the Sheriff's Office, but almost Oso...

Cindy Tingley: 20:22 It's a category of its own.

Jim Hills: 20:23 It's a category of its own, it's unbelievable. I am just stunned and so, in such admiration that you did that at the point where you were in your role with the Sheriff's Office that's incredible.

Shari Ireton: 20:37 Well, I should be really clear that I didn't necessarily do my role very well while I was there because I didn't necessarily know how everything worked and I have to give credit to the fact that there were a lot of other public information officers that showed up throughout the time I was there who helped. People in my own agency were able to guide me along. I was not doing the heavy lifting alone. And the other thing I have to say is, I have to give a shout out to the Everett Herald and the reporters there because I will say, yes, we had a lot of media from a lot of different parts of the world, but that journey, those reporters and I walked through it together from day one, and I would say we sort of taught each other along the way. And it was a invaluable experience.

Ken Harvey: 21:24 So I really appreciate your saying that. How many different agencies do you think ended up being part of the response effort and recovery effort there? Do you have any sense? I mean, is it dozens, is it hundreds-

Shari Ireton: 21:37 It's higher than that and it goes all the way up to the federal agency. I mean, even within, when we did a tribute a year later in our own agency, just looking at the units - volunteer and law enforcement - there were over a dozen units in our own agency that contributed. So our records people, somebody has to manage all the paperwork that takes place. Major crimes, people don't realize that those missing person investigations have to be done by a law enforcement detective. And then search and rescue, I can't say enough about the hundreds of people who came out.

Cindy Tingley: 22:10 We don't want to forget dispatch. Because that was an insane time for them. So many people.

Ken Harvey: 22:17 Well, in similar vein, you were giving some credit to the Everett Herald reporting team. Do you have a sense of how many different news organizations ended up, kind of, touching-

- Shari Ireton: 22:29 Hundreds. I mean, I did interviews with Al Jazeera, the BBC, The Weather Channel, stations from China, newspapers from all over the world, so it was, for at least the first few days, it was definitely, in fact, we have friends who live on the East coast and then some friends who live in Europe and my husband started getting text messages the next day, "What does Shari do for a living again?" Because they were confused as to why they were seeing me on the television and just what was I talking about?
- Ken Harvey: 23:02 Well, I think commendations, admiration, and just kind of continued heartfelt... our hearts continue to go out to all those who were involved in the effort and those who lost loved ones, and property and all. So definitely a major moment in the history of this county. But then, kind of moving on from there, what would you say in terms of some of the realities that are being faced these days as the Sheriff's Office does its work?
- Shari Ireton: 23:49 Well, I would say it's probably mirrored across the rest of the United States in terms of the things that we're dealing with and you mentioned how it's changed quite a bit. We're dealing with a lot of social issues that we really never necessarily dealt with before. Mental health and mental illness is a huge one with the deinstitutionalization of a lot of mental health facilities. We're seeing more and more people who are really struggling with mental illness. Law enforcement and EMS and Fire are often the first on scene. When people first envisioned what American policing would look like, it didn't have crisis intervention as part of the training, and now it's mandatory. Homelessness is a big issue, in trying to move away from the criminalization of homelessness and trying to get to the root cause of it, which usually is mental illness and/or addiction or substance abuse disorders.
- Jim Hills: 24:58 Let me jump in, because I know that in my recent connections, not official to the Sheriff's Office like not a police stop or anything like that, but the Sheriff's Office is doing some really groundbreaking work in a number of areas, embedding social workers... wait a minute, is this number four or five on the library mention?
- Cindy Tingley: 25:20 This will be number six.
- Jim Hills: 25:21 Six? Awesome. Issues that matter. The library district runs a series of public community conversations called Issues that Matter and in some of those, we've had opportunities to hear from Sheriff's Office representatives and community representatives about how the Sheriff's Office is working with

community; how they are bringing services into the Sheriff's Office so that they can better deal with the challenges that society is facing. I'd love to have you, because I read the headlines and I know a little bit about my one little peak into it, but I'd love to hear a little bit more about that part of it.

Shari Ireton: 26:03 Sure, so, one of the things we started here in Snohomish County is a law enforcement embedded social worker team.

Jim Hills: 26:10 That's the one.

Shari Ireton: 26:10 And it's now grown over the past few years, it was started in 2015, called it our Office of Neighborhoods and that's basically where we pair a deputy with a social worker and they go out to homeless encampments and places where people are squatting, where we know there's going to be drug use and/or untreated mental health - almost always as both. And again, rather than cite someone for trespassing, put them in jail for 24, 48, hours and let them go and, kind of as they say-

Cindy Tingley: 26:40 Vicious cycle.

Shari Ireton: 26:40 -wash, rinse, repeat, move up a little bit in terms of, why are you here? Why are you living in a tent in the woods behind a big box store? And that has been really successful. I want to say that since 2015 we've found housing for over 300 people who had been homeless previously. And it's one of the things that we've learned in the process is homelessness is not just, "I don't have a home to live in," it's, "I can't really get a safe place to live, because I'm trying to manage so many other chronic issues in my life." Whether it's unemployment, again, substance use disorder, mental health... and so I think the Sheriff's Office has done some pretty amazing stuff and then partnered with a lot of other agencies in the community, Marysville Arlington Human Services with the county.

Shari Ireton: 27:37 Also really one of the things I never realized when I left the U-dub and came onto the Sheriff's Office is I will now be a spokesperson for the largest directive of mental health and addiction treatment center in the county, which is called the Snohomish County Jail, and working with leadership and seeing how they've been really changing how that facility runs and treats inmates. Especially at booking, starting to medically evaluate everybody, provide a mental health evaluation for everyone who comes in, start treating withdrawal symptoms from opioids in a different way than we did before. So I think there's been a lot of stuff, changing our pursuit policy, which can seem sort of like a small thing but is actually pretty

significant both internally and externally, setting the bar a little higher for when we should institute a pursuit to help keep the other people in the community safe.

- Ken Harvey: 28:43 So you mentioned opioids, again, a minute ago and just wanted to draw us to the last time that we had you here in this building was last fall, you were here for an evening event in which that was called Finding Fixes and we actually ended up taping part of that and airing it as one of our episodes, so would you remind our audience what that was all about?
- Shari Ireton: 29:14 So Finding Fixes was a podcast put together by two independent public broadcasting reporters. They reached out to us after they had heard about, I think, another innovative project that the county has put together and the Sheriff's Office has been involved in, which is the opioid response multi-agency coordination group. We call it the MAC group, it's a lot to wrap your brain around. But it's essentially bringing together agencies in the county who had already been addressing the opioid addiction through their silos, whether it was the health district or human services or the independent law enforcement agencies or fire agencies and actually bringing all of us and our leaders in to the same room, because the reality is the population is the same. It doesn't make sense to be trying to throw lots of different agencies at a problem that are not connected.
- Shari Ireton: 30:07 For some reason Anna and Kyle were really fascinated by this concept and they-
- Ken Harvey: 30:14 For some reason? For a great reasons!
- Shari Ireton: 30:14 They spend a few weeks up in Snohomish County talking to people who are doing the work like our Office of Neighborhoods and going out with them, talking to people that have been effected by opioids, both people who are in recovery, people who are struggling with addition, as well as people who've, unfortunately, lost family members to addiction and overdose. And I think it's been a really interesting journey for us to look at it from a 30,000 foot view together in collaboration.
- Jim Hills: 30:51 I was there that night and I was taken by a story that Sheriff Ty Trenary told when he was police chief at Stanwood. So prior to him becoming sheriff, he had been, where was he before Stanwood? Part of the story was where he had come from, then he'd gone to Stanwood, and he got to Stanwood and he goes, "Well, at least I won't have drugs to deal with," because he was in this idyllic spot.

Cindy Tingley: 31:16 He'd been in patrol.

Jim Hills: 31:18 And, "This will be great. I'm in Stanwood, it's a great place, this is fantastic." And he got there and then he realized that the same kinds of issues that affect people anywhere, show up in Stanwood. They affect people everywhere. That was an ah-ha moment for him, that this is not something that is somewhere else. It's not something that's someone else's problem. It's everywhere, it's everyone's problem and he can do something about it. He made it feel like, that was a beginning of a change for him in how he viewed law enforcement's role in these societal issues that are absolutely impacting lots and lots of people.

Shari Ireton: 32:05 Yeah, and it's been really interesting because he was appointed sheriff in 2013 and then was elected the following year, so I sort of feel like he and I have gone through a little bit of that journey together. His perspective is coming from the patrol perspective and heavy law enforcement and how you, kind of, view that social ill. Mine was from a complete place of naiveté. At once point I was laughing, joking with one of my co-workers, if they look up my google search, they are going to find me googling black tar heroin vs. brown sugar heroin because I have no idea what those are. I didn't even know that was a thing. Or, opioid withdrawal symptoms, I don't know what it's like to withdraw from opioids. So, it's been, I think, a journey and an incredibly educational to start to see this is all of our community. It's very hard to find places in our community that aren't impacted, or people who don't know someone who have lost someone or someone's whose been struggling with addiction.

Shari Ireton: 33:16 One of the things that has really impacted me is, I'm not commissioned and I can't arrest people, so that's not how you can throw me at the problem to fix it. I'm not a substance use disorder counselor, I'm not a social worker, I'm a communicator, I'm a story teller. And so one of my passions had been to try to humanize the story. In this case it's people who've struggled with addiction and we all seem to have a specific picture in our mind of what that looks like. But I find that it's really important that people tell their stories. That mothers who've lost their 18 year old sons, who just had a football injury, who ended up addicted to heroin eight months later, tell that story. And I cannot tell you how many people I've met, young people in their 20s who have said, "I started using heroin when I was 13 and I started with one of my parent's." And I've heard that at least a half a dozen times. And that-

Ken Harvey: 34:14 Started it with their parents.

Shari Ireton: 34:17 Yes. And as a mother and a community member-

Ken Harvey: 34:19 Almost breaks your heart.

Shari Ireton: 34:19 Yeah, exactly.

Ken Harvey: 34:21 Wow. Well I wanted to tell you that the Finding Fixes evening event that you facilitated was very powerful and I thought you did a tremendous job really, kind of, marshaling the stories to be told around it. It certainly made an impact with me.

Shari Ireton: 34:51 Well thank you. Thank you for giving a venue for those stories to be told, because I think they're very important and often don't get heard, so thank you.

Ken Harvey: 34:58 It's part of what the library sees itself doing. So I think that's number seven.

Cindy Tingley: 35:04 That's number seven. You saw me writing.

Shari Ireton: 35:06 And I believe, for your listeners who are interested, there was a list of resources that were provided that night about addiction and treatment. And I'm sure if you to the Sno-Isle Libraries website, you can find that list.

Jim Hills: 35:19 Yes, there it is. Does that count as eight? I don't know.

Cindy Tingley: 35:20 That's kind of tied in.

Jim Hills: 35:22 Okay.

Ken Harvey: 35:24 So our hats off again to Anna Weyrauch-Boiko?

Shari Ireton: 35:32 Yes, that was good. And Kyle Norris.

Ken Harvey: 35:32 And Kyle Norris who were the original Finding Fixes podcasters, and so, it was real interesting to do a podcast of the podcast at an event of their podcast. So recently you also sent me and others an email alerting us to something that you wanted to share with us, and it was one of the things that reminded me, "Oh, I want to get Shari in on a podcast," so talk to us a little bit about-

Jim Hills: 36:06 It's your own fault.

Shari Ireton: 36:09 I know.

Ken Harvey: 36:09 -the seven days of the opioid epidemic.

Shari Ireton: 36:11 Yeah, so, first of all I have to give a lot of credit to the Snohomish Health District. Two years ago they wanted to do a point-in-time count. This is different then, I think people are pretty familiar with a point-in-time count for homelessness, so one day out of the year volunteers go out and see how many people are without a home. The health district wanted to look at a seven day period and to look at overdose data related to opioids to get a snapshot of how it was impacting the county.

Shari Ireton: 36:43 So last year when they were getting ready to launch their second annual point-in-time count for overdoses, we brainstormed about the idea of trying to get, again, those stories and getting behind the scenes. We partnered with some reporters and we basically took them out every single day for five of the seven days and showed them the faces of addictions. So we took them to homeless encampments and we took them to the medical unit at the jail, they went to the needle exchange, the medical examiner's office. And then on top of that, we added calls that we had received throughout those seven days that EMS or law enforcement had received, sorry, fire and emergency medical services. I hate acronyms and I'm so bad at using them myself. And then what we wanted to do was, kind of, take all those stories and create that into a journal. And we wanted to show the community this is what is happening while you're at the grocery store, or working, or sleeping, or your kids are at school. This is what's happening in the county.

Shari Ireton: 37:52 I think the first overdose, I think, happens at 12:36 am. We had one death, multiple overdoses, dozens of people booked into the jail who were going to be treated for opioid withdrawal.

Cindy Tingley: 38:09 And did you do this, kind of, on a timeline so they could visually see how this was tracking?

Shari Ireton: 38:15 Yeah. Starting with that seven days from midnight through midnight of the end of the week and it's just one snapshot. It doesn't mean it's the worst week, it's not the best week, it's just one week. I think, again, having people tell their stories, there's some powerful stuff from, I think, drug court in there and people telling their stories.

Cindy Tingley: 38:37 And were you able to gauge and quantify the impact?

Shari Ireton: 38:42 I think that's one of the things that the MAC group is... it's like an onion, the more you peel back the layers, I don't know,

maybe the more you cry I guess. Yeah, so 57 reported overdoses, one death, 119 inmates booked into the jail who were treated for opioid withdrawal. And then four people who tested positive for hepatitis C at the syringe exchange and that's just in seven days.

- Cindy Tingley: 39:10 Oh my goodness. It's eye opening, what's going on.
- Ken Harvey: 39:16 Yeah, a lot of reality there.
- Cindy Tingley: 39:17 Well, let's shift gears a little bit. Let's talk a little, we kind of delved into it in the beginning, about your personal journey and how you've gotten here, but I have a big question because I also worked in law enforcement many years ago. I was commissioned and also did other things as well. But with everything you deal with, I mean, you've had some major cases that you've dealt with, Oso being but one, undoubtedly the biggest, but how do you de-stress? How do you not take this home?
- Shari Ireton: 39:47 Well, I have to make sure my husband doesn't listen to this because he'll probably say, "She doesn't do it very well." So the first thing you should know about me is I love very complicated things. I love puzzles; I love complex problems. So my brain is attracted to this kind of work because very little of it is easy, so I guess my point of saying that is not all of it feels very stressful. I think, again, I'm very passionate about using this small set of skills I have to help make the community be informed about what's happening and engaging with law enforcement or volunteer search and rescue. I have a passion for it. But where you're probably trying to go is, what do I do when I'm not working? Is that-
- Cindy Tingley: 40:41 Yeah. Well, and I have to put one in there, as far as the library, do you do a lot of reading and what type of books?
- Shari Ireton: 40:48 I am. I'm an avid reader. I still love books. I'm currently reading a non-fiction book about Postal Inspector Oldfield and the Black Hand Society, is a-
- Cindy Tingley: 41:01 Oh my. That's interesting.
- Shari Ireton: 41:01 -non-fiction book about, basically, America's first gang which came over from Italy.
- Ken Harvey: 41:07 So you didn't really get too far away from work.

Cindy Tingley: 41:10 She's not really leaving work. That's what I was looking for, how are we getting away from work?

Shari Ireton: 41:15 We're all over the place. I am very fortunate, again, I said to have a wonderful family. I have two very active teenagers. So even if I don't want to be de-stressing, being involved in their many, many, many, many, many activities is a great outlet. I'm also an avid outdoor enthusiast, so I do a lot of backpacking and hiking. I'm actually working with my son to prepare him for climbing Mt. Baker in a couple weeks.

Cindy Tingley: 41:46 Oh my goodness.

Ken Harvey: 41:48 Oh, wow, that's a big deal.

Shari Ireton: 41:50 What I used to be able to do in my early 20s is a lot harder.

Cindy Tingley: 41:55 Have you ever found you've taken one thing home more than, that took you longer to shake? People, places, events, things like that?

Shari Ireton: 42:04 Yeah, I don't want to talk about anything specifics, but I will say incidents that involve children are very hard for me to let go of and sometimes take a while. There was a time when I was really struggling after Oso, and I thought, my husband's great, he's from Chicago so he likes to get right to the heart of things pretty quickly, also from a big family, and he said "You got to like, either get over this, because this is your job, or do something else, because this is the job. This is what it is."

Shari Ireton: 42:41 And I think what really helps also is that I work in a very supportive organization. Wellness is something that's really important for our leadership so it's not only just nutrition and getting exercise but also mental wellness. We have really great peer support teams and access to chaplains when things are rough. And I would say one of the things I've learned working with my fellow public information officers who work at schools or cities, they don't have access to that, and public information officers can be exposed to a lot of trauma and if an agency doesn't have a way to support them it's tough.

Cindy Tingley: 43:25 Yeah. Well it's good, it sounds like you're pretty successful thanks to your family and everything. And I do want to circle back, because I know when we first started talking, you had a really interesting story about your love of libraries and that's something we cannot let you out the door without hearing, so please tell us.

Shari Ireton: 43:42 So I come by my love of reading from my parents. My mother has her own private library, basically. I mean, I don't want people to picture like it's a New York mansion or something, but she even has a catalog.

Ken Harvey: 43:58 Oh wow.

Cindy Tingley: 43:58 Wow!

Shari Ireton: 44:00 Yes, so my family of avid science fiction, fantasy, nature and, interestingly enough, murder mysteries. My mother love murder mysteries and I've never like them. I never can figure out who did it. Maybe I'm not in the right job. That's why I'm not a detective.

Cindy Tingley: 44:20 That's why you're not commissioned.

Shari Ireton: 44:20 Exactly.

Jim Hills: 44:20 That's why your role comes after they do their work.

Shari Ireton: 44:23 So, as a small child I grew up in Mountain Home, Idaho, which is in southern Idaho south of Boise.

Jim Hills: 44:29 I know where that is.

Shari Ireton: 44:30 I actually didn't even grow up in town. I grew up five miles outside of town.

Jim Hills: 44:34 That's hard to know where, even outside of Mountain Home is.

Shari Ireton: 44:37 Well, it's when you can no longer see lights at night, and it's really dark, then you are now outside of town. And as a small child, we had a Carnegie library in town.

Jim Hills: 44:48 Or?

Shari Ireton: 44:50 Or Car-neggie. I get teased about that a lot. It was one of the original stone, small town, Carnegie libraries and I went there with my mother probably every week, especially in the summer time when I was little and we didn't have air conditioning. It was a wonderful place to go and read. The town built and opened a brand new library when I was in grade school. It happened to be right across the street from my grade school which was great. I loved card catalogs. I loved requesting books and putting them on hold as you did in the old days, which was all paper, and having the cards pulled out and stamped. I guess I have a lot of

ties because in junior high and in high school I took library sciences.

Ken Harvey: 45:38 Wow, there you go.

Cindy Tingley: 45:39 Wow, there's a tidbit!

Shari Ireton: 45:42 Probably practically lived at the two libraries while I was in college, but at the University of Idaho and Gonzaga by default because I had a lot of research to do. And then when we started a family, I hope this isn't bad to plug a different library, but we live in North Everett.

Jim Hills: 46:01 All libraries are great.

Cindy Tingley: 46:02 That's right.

Shari Ireton: 46:03 The Everett Public Library was just a great, wonderful resource for our kids not matter what age they were, whether they were six month old. And I still go there every week.

Jim Hills: 46:14 Wow, that's awesome.

Cindy Tingley: 46:15 Very cool.

Shari Ireton: 46:16 And my kids go there.

Ken Harvey: 46:19 We love hearing that. Appreciate both the historical, early history that's connected to the library, but also that the library's still serving a purpose in your family's life.

Shari Ireton: 46:35 When I look at it from an outside of the personal perspective, libraries are the hub of every community. They're one of the last public resources that are really open to all people, again, whether it's a six month old baby or a homeless person who's unemployed and looking for housing and a job. It's sort of that hub in the center of the community that holds us all together. I think they're a resource that people tend to forget about. And they shouldn't, libraries are wonderful.

Ken Harvey: 47:08 Well I also think that another resource that people should not forget about or only think about when they need to call 911 is the Sheriff's Office and all the men and women who are part of law enforcement everywhere. Just, unsung heroes. And appreciate, Shari, you representing them and to our audience through this podcast, thank you for the work you and they do every day.

Shari Ireton: 47:41 Obviously I get to go to work and work with heroes every day. A lot of heroes wear button down shirts and spend a lot of time in court and piling through evidence, but they're pretty amazing people.

Ken Harvey: 47:53 Agreed. Thanks so much for joining us.

Shari Ireton: 47:55 Thank you.

Speaker 5: 47:57 Did you know you could download some of the best business and finance magazines for free with your Sno-Isle Libraries card? Learn more online at Sno-Isle Libraries.

Speaker 5: 48:08 Enjoying this episode of the Check it Out podcast? Head over to the iTunes store, google play music store or most other podcast stores to subscribe, rate the podcast or leave a review. Your rating and review will make it easier for other to find the Check it Out podcast wherever it's available.

Ken Harvey: 48:37 Well that was a very interesting interview.

Cindy Tingley: 48:39 It really was.

Jim Hills: 48:40 Shari Ireton is a really, a skilled professional. What was interesting to me is how she came about those skills in very short order with the Oso landslide.

Ken Harvey: 48:54 Yeah, that was a tough story, I think, for her to retell, but also, really I think, informative of what was going on behind the scenes and hearing her talk about, essentially being propelled into or catapulted into it without that training. As I recall the coverage and the way that it was handled, I'm just really impressed.

Jim Hills: 49:29 Really. I think for those who haven't gone through emergency management training, FEMA's training programs are the standard. Agencies like Sno-Isle Libraries, like the Sheriff's Office, like-

Cindy Tingley: 49:47 Was I supposed to count that Sno-Isle? I'm sorry, I'm just, we're up to ten.

Jim Hills: 49:54 Follow those, so that when there's an incident, if there's an incident, everybody's following and using the same procedures. And in those emergency moments, being able to rely on that training and make sure that everything that's supposed to

happen in an event like that, does happen, and there's no confusion or reduced confusion.

Cindy Tingley: 50:18 Everybody knows their role.

Jim Hills: 50:19 Everybody knows their role and you stay and you do that role and you're assured that someone else is doing the other roles so you can just count on that as a team. It's really important for those who have not had that kind of training to hear Shari say that she had not yet gone through that and then did five days as the public information officer at the landslide is just mind boggling.

Cindy Tingley: 50:44 And just the time lapse before she really understood the magnitude of what had gone on.

Ken Harvey: 50:51 Well, as you said, the purpose and the benefits to that training is it helps minimize confusion, it helps minimize miscommunication and misinformation on the public and it really does help with reducing any conflicts as different agencies and organizations are busy responding to it so they don't get in each other's way and complicate the response and the recovery efforts. But beyond that, I was just fascinated to hear about her Husky Vandal Zag-

Cindy Tingley: 51:30 Wait, who are we forgetting?

Jim Hills: 51:32 That could be an emergency there.

Ken Harvey: 51:35 Yeah, so really interesting lady. And then to hear her, how her career took her through a number of different sectors including the University of Washington, the various areas within the U-dub that she worked and just, interesting person.

Jim Hills: 51:59 So, one last thing, my impression of Snohomish County Sheriff's Office as an innovative law enforcement agency working to address the kind of issues that are facing society in a way that is, perhaps, not a tradition, but potentially more effective, and then to hear Shari talk about that and have those examples and kind of confirm my impressions from reading the headlines. And Sno-Isle Libraries has had a couple of intersection points with the Sheriff's Office around those services. Is that 11, 12?

Cindy Tingley: 52:38 That's 11.

Jim Hills:	52:39	Ah, nice. I really appreciated that too. It's wonderful to live in a place where the law enforcement agency is trying to think of better way to address the things that are facing society.
Ken Harvey:	52:57	Well we will have a link on the show notes to a number of things that Shari spoke about, including the seven days of opioid epidemic that she talked about, the journal and the seven days of reality that they tracked. So, look for that link and the link to her favorite reads and other things on the show notes for this episode. Thanks everyone.
Cindy Tingley:	53:27	Thank you.
Jim Hills:	53:28	Thank you.
Ken Harvey:	53:28	Thanks for listening to the Check it Out! podcast. For free resources and materials connected to today's guest and topic, head over to the library's website and search for the word podcast. The library's website is <a href="http://sno-isle.org/podcast">sno-isle.org/podcast</a> .