"MEET THEM WHERE THEY'RE AT"

REACHING OUT TO PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

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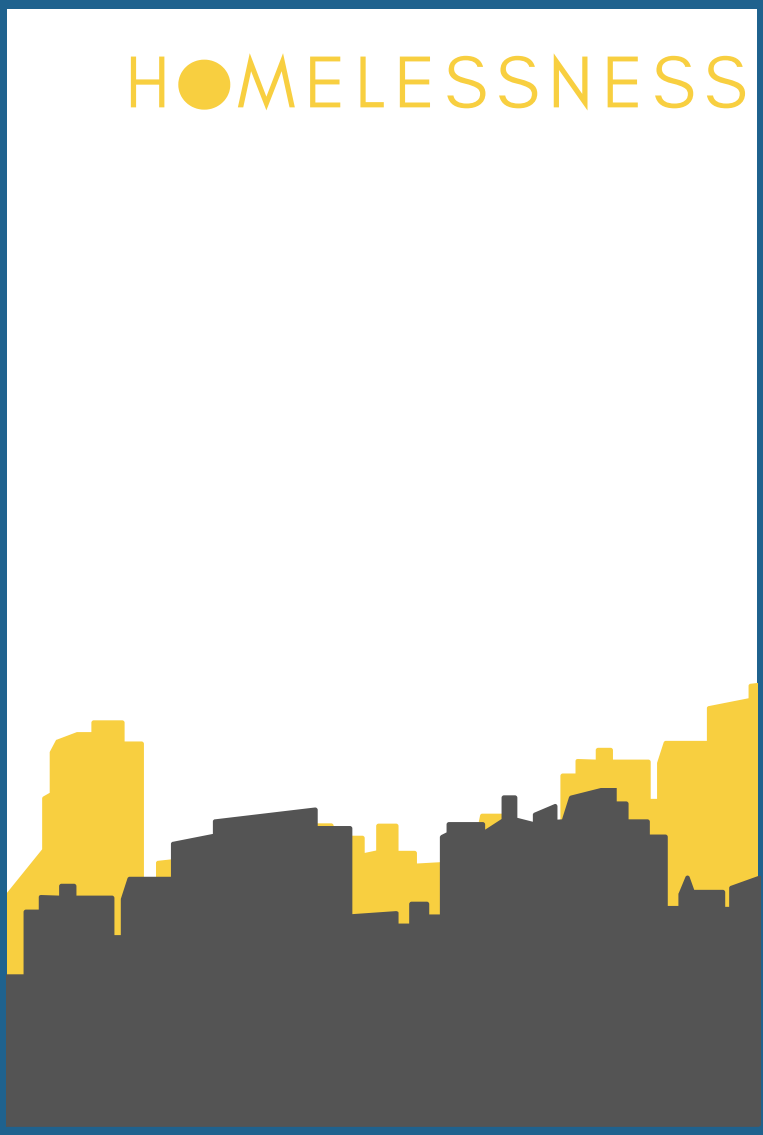

Homelessness **E**thnographic **R**esearch & **E**ducation [**HERE**] Lab

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OVERVIEW

This ethnographic report discusses the research findings from a two-year collaboration between California State University, Long Beach, Department of Anthropology and the City of Long Beach. The research was conducted with graduate and undergraduate students and designed to understand why some people experiencing homelessness do not take up the services offered to them. We worked with the Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services Homeless Outreach Team (or the street team), Long Beach Police Department Quality of Life Officers, Long Beach Fire Department Homelessness Education And Response Team (HEART), and a sampling of service partners to study staff and client perspectives on the acceptance and take of services. The project was also designed to strengthen the relationship between the university, students, and the City of Long Beach in addressing social issues and preparing the next generation for careers in the public and private sectors.

The report is meant to read as a whole to appreciate and understand the inner workings of the street team. We examine the professional qualities and approaches of the street team in creating the conditions for service acceptance and take up over time and the hurdles that must be negotiated to change one life.

To address the needs of individuals and families with complex needs and circumstances, the street team approaches each individual with the primary goals of:

- Building trust and rapport (immediately and over time)
- Assessing needs (immediate and longer term)
- Determining eligibility for various services
- Formulating service plans
- Acting as liaisons
- Guiding clients through obstacles to care

Most outreach encounters lead to at least one of these goals being accomplished.

The Long Beach Police Department Quality of Life (QoL) Officers and the Long Beach Fire Department HEART units are critical to the street team and the outreach encounter.

QoL Officers provides:

- Street team with safe conditions to conduct outreach in hard to reach locations
- Assistance to clients with legal problems
- Opportunities for clients to access high-barrier drug detoxification or rehabilitation programs
- Assistance, advice, and training to other police officers and units addressing homelessness in the City

The QoL officers use enforcement strategically during homeless outreach. Research findings from this study illustrated that out of 107 of outreach encounters with QoL officers, only 11% were enforcement related (page 9).

HEART unit paramedics respond to and address the immediate medical needs of people experiencing homelessness. They use their expertise to:

- Respond to calls specifically involving people experiencing homelessness
- Provide medical services sensitive to the needs of the homeless
- Assist in referrals and connecting individuals to services at the Multi-Service Center (MSC) and other agencies

The MSC plays a critical role as the hub for accessing essential services for the homeless population. During the study period, the street team designed a pilot project, the Golden Ticket, to expedite service take up. The Golden Ticket is given to individuals that show promise in accepting services.

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A key finding from this study is that service acceptance is continual and constant during outreach encounters. Over the course of the study, the acceptance and take up of services were described by clients as a matter of being ready, finding a program that fit their needs, and having the support of people such as the street team (see page 15, Figure 10).

Research findings from this study illustrate that acceptance and take up of services require overcoming systemic and personal hurdles. We outline eight hurdles in this report (pages 16–20). Faced with hurdles some people experiencing homelessness simply give up. The street team, however, "Never gives up on the possibility of yes". Each outreach encounter is another opportunity to negotiate and facilitate a service plan.

This research report provides a partial account of the strategies used by the street team to connect people experiencing homelessness to services and to the Continuum of Care partners in the City Long Beach. Further research is needed to identify how the factors that contribute to successful service acceptance can be adapted and how the hurdles to accessing services can be addressed.

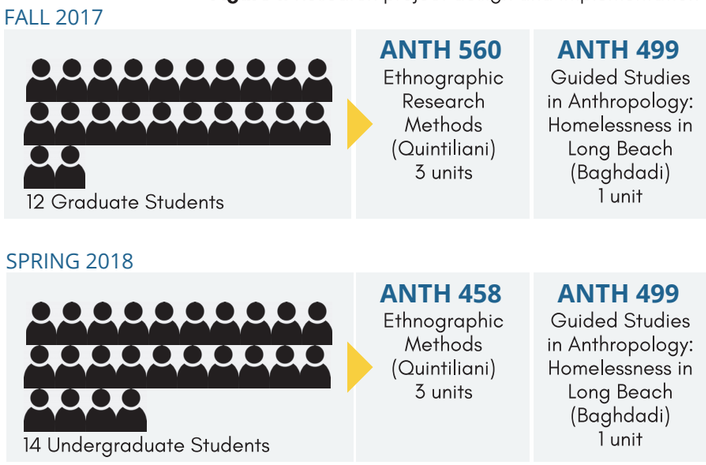
THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Graduate and undergraduate anthropology students conducted community-based research to study the experiences and approaches of the Homeless Services Outreach Team (commonly known as the Street Team) as they interact with people experiencing homelessness. To understand the complexity of homelessness and how the City of Long Beach addresses the issue, students enrolled in two courses-one was designed to train students in ethnographic research methods, while the other provided articles and policy reports to contextualize the issue locally. Before the class started and students entered the field, Dr. Karen Quintiliani and Mitra Baghdadi spent 3 months working with the street team, attending outreach network work group meetings, and going out on outreach with the various team members.

REASONS FOR DESIGNING A RESEARCH PROJECT THAT INVOLVED STUDENTS

1. Cultivate understanding of social realities and social justice
2. Build problem-solving, team work and communication skills
3. Enables students to explore ways to effect change
4. Strengthen bond between students-university-community

Figure 1. Research project design and implementation



The main goal of the research project is to contribute to understanding and addressing homelessness through person-centered research approaches. Based on the preparatory research, the research project focused on understanding **why some people experiencing homelessness do not take up services offered to them.**

We examined this question from multiple perspectives
a) clients who are currently receiving services;
b) clients who pass on services;
and c) the street team members who attempt to address and assess each client's unique circumstances. In the process of analyzing outreach encounters, we also explored what types of services exist and do not exist that create opportunities and barriers to receiving or accepting services.

Figure 2. Some of the state and local policies impacting homeless services studied in ANTH 499 (Los Angeles Registrar-Recorder/City Clerk)

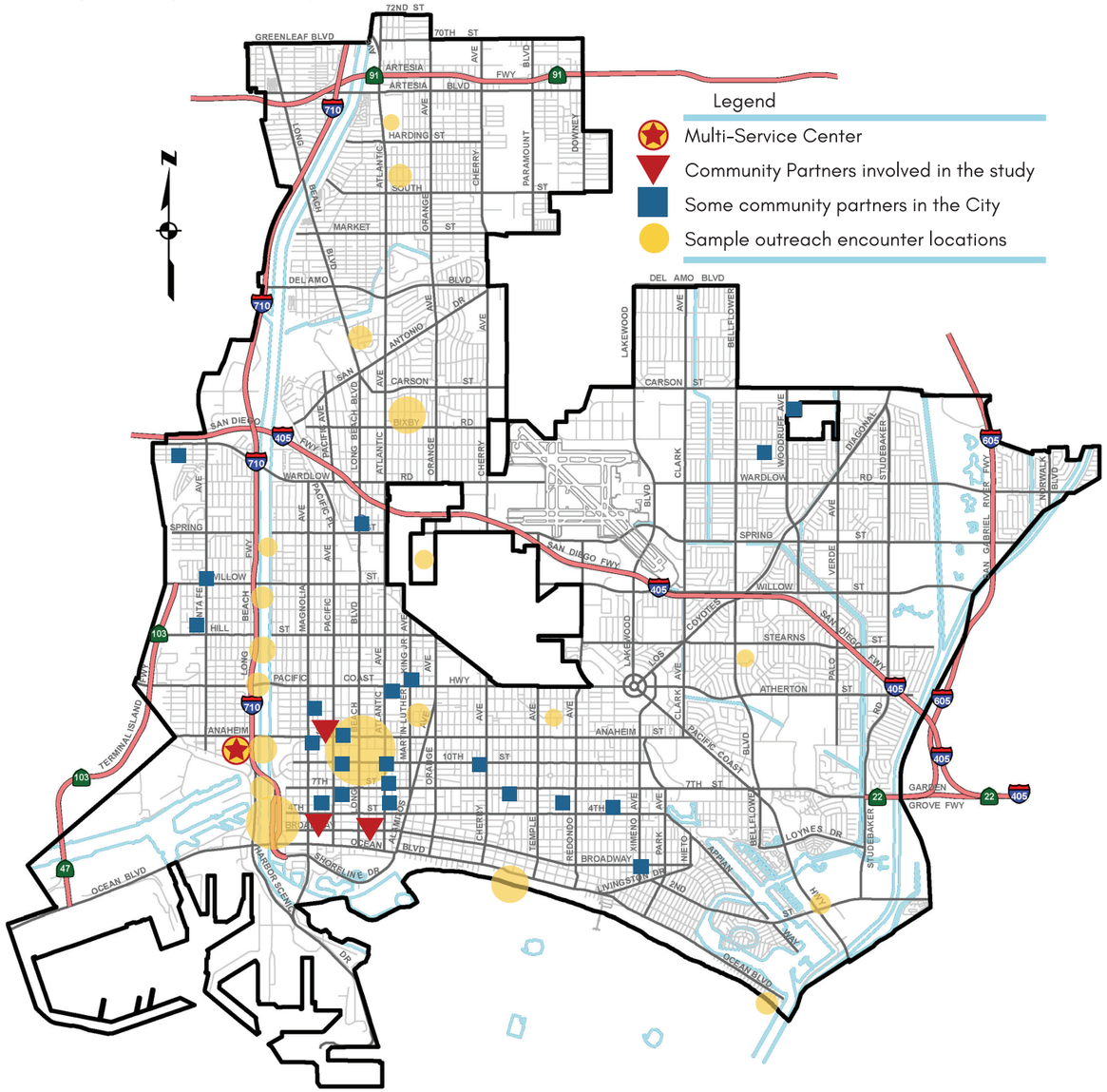
Proposition 47
Initiative that reduces "nonserious and nonviolent property and drug crimes" from felonies to misdemeanors. [2014]

Proposition 57
Initiative which offers more parole opportunities for nonviolent offenders to emphasize rehabilitation. [2016]

Prop HHH
Bond measure to promote safe, clean affordable housing for individuals experiencing homelessness, and also to increase access to facilities for mental health care, drug and alcohol treatment, and other services. [2016]

Measure H
A sales tax increase to fund the following services: mental health, substance abuse treatments, health care, education, job training, rental subsidies, emergency and affordable housing, transportation, outreach, prevention, and supportive services for individuals experiencing homelessness. [2017]

Figure 3. Map of research sites



In Fall 2017, graduate students conducted fieldwork closely with the outreach team and observed encounters in sites all around the City. The examples provided on the map are only a small sample of the number of outreach encounters observed. Although the research focus was on outreach at this time, some students conducted fieldwork at the MSC and the Long Beach Rescue Mission. These areas would continue to be explored by undergraduate students the following semester.

In Spring 2018, undergraduate students conducted fieldwork at sites operated by selected community partners within the Continuum of Care. Some student teams observed programs within the Multi-Service Center, while other teams examined some of the faith-based services available in the City. One student team continued to look at outreach efforts that took place on the weekend as part of a pilot program spearheaded by the street team.

METHODS & PROCESS

Ethnography is a systemic process of understanding and interpreting cultural systems. Considered a qualitative method in scientific research, ethnography allows the researcher to interact with the world through hands-on, person-centered approaches. Ethnography is considered the main tool in an anthropologist's repertoire. Participant observation is an important cornerstone of ethnographic research as it attempts to connect researchers with their subject through an emic or insider perspective (Frankham and MacRae 2011, 36). By engaging and becoming a part of the outreach or homeless service experiences, students were able to leave behind assumptions and become receptive to the different perspectives they were observing.

Students also utilized semi-structured and in-context interviews to better understand their field experiences. Semi-structured interviews offered students an opportunity to craft questions that touch upon some of the complexities of their research focus, while in-context interviews provided students an opportunity to ask contextual questions that explored what they were experiencing at that very moment.

Furthermore, students had to create a social and physical map with at least one ethnographic encounter. They analyzed the encounter to unpack some of the cultural behaviors operating in the encounter. This method helps students to understand how group dynamics or relationships may interact with space.

Figure 4. Fieldwork statistics

- **550**+ hours of outreach fieldwork
  120+ hours of fieldwork with service partners
- **487** documented outreach encounters
- **179** individuals experiencing homelessness
- **43** semi-structured interviews
  19 with clients and **24** with staff
- **47** documented Golden Ticket interactions

Finally, ethnography is an *inductive*, *deductive*, and *reflexive* process. Students could only enter the field of homeless research once they had a grasp of some of the important theories and issues already explored by past scholarly works. Additionally, it was imperative for students to familiarize themselves with how the City of Long Beach approaches homelessness by reading and understanding the policies that impacts local practices (see Figure 2).

Although the students were given an overarching research question for guidance, they were encouraged to examine the many different perspectives and issues compounding homeless services. Weekly discussions allowed students to unpack their field experience, highlighting any shared experiences as possible topics for exploration during the next fieldwork session. Students were also tasked with producing a final ethnographic report that articulates their research findings. The final report, along with field notes, interviews, and other class assignments, made up the students' research portfolio. These portfolios were cataloged in a database by research assistants from the HERE (Homeless Ethnographic Research and Education) Lab over the summer.

Using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2014), participant experiences and narratives were analyzed to identify themes and cultural practices that are "grounded" in the data. Social processes and interactions were compared to examine any emergent, descriptive codes. These codes make up larger grounded themes and findings that were developed into short memos by the research students, synthesizing together literature and ethnographic data to form succinct data analysis.

THE "STREET SHARKS"

The street team is a interdepartmental team that is made up of outreach specialists such as social workers and medical clinicians from different service agencies within the Continuum of Care network. Drawing from professional training and personal experience, team members utilize a specialized set of skills in order to effectively connect individuals experiencing homelessness with services. They are experts in human relations and negotiation skills with a working knowledge of the vast array of services in the City. The street team works with individuals experiencing homelessness on their journey of service acceptance and utilization through rapport-building, assessment of needs, and negotiation.

The street team:

Are often the first point of contact. The street team is an essential part of the service process because they are often the ones to make initial contact with clients entering the service network.

Build trust and rapport. Maintaining relationships is key to breaking down barriers with individuals experiencing homelessness who have faced oppression, violence, and discrimination. It can take months, in some cases years, to establish rapport, and building trust requires frequent contact and consistent, positive interactions.

Figure 5. Qualities of a street team member

The street team must assess the needs and circumstances of engaged individuals in a short period of time when conducting outreach. To encourage individuals to accept services, the street team must build a relationship with the individuals.

During interviews, the street team discussed what qualities a street team member needs to possess in order to effectively perform the duties involved.

These attributes correspond with the empathic approach described by Lam and Rosenheck (1999). Members of the street team nurture these qualities in themselves and one another, which in turn enables them to help others.

Assess individual's needs. The street team practices a holistic approach, gauging individuals' wants, needs, and well-being to accurately connect them to services. For the team, a "one size fits all" model is not practical. It is important for outreach staff to acknowledge and respect a client's desires because failing to do so can negatively impact the staff-client relationship and hinders their ability to guide people into services.

Determine individual's eligibility for various services. Policies and their implementation frame the street team's ability to connect individuals experiencing homelessness to key services in the City. Depending on a client's specific situation or needs, the team will assess which services they are eligible for and which services are inaccessible.

Formulate a service plan. Once the street team has established a relationship and assessed the client's needs, staff must work in accordance with the policies and logistics to successfully connect clients to services.

Are flexible. Although the street team offers a variety of options, clients may not readily accept the services that outreach team provides or may decline services altogether. The team must overcome rejection-if a client says no, they must respect the client's motivation so that they do not "burn" the trust they've already built with the client.

Are patient, compassionate, firm. The street team must maintain this balance to "let [clients] get to that place" and be ready to connect the client to services whenever the client is "in a space to accept it."

Are the liaison between individuals experiencing homelessness and services. Many people experiencing homelessness are often unaware of available services or cannot navigate the service system themselves.

Guide clients through obstacles. The street team mentors and supports clients through the comprehensive array of services with the goal of transitioning people out of homelessness through service utilization.

The street team typically responds to complaints from various community sources that are funneled into input points such as police dispatch or the homeless services hotline (staff interview). These complaints can take the form of phone calls or emails that describe how and where individuals experiencing homelessness are living in Long Beach. The team records the call or email into an "outreach log" that details information such as the location of the individual, when they were spotted, and the source of the call or email. The records in the outreach log are categorized by location and prioritized by the Outreach Coordinator. They then coordinate with Quality of Life police officers to form the daily agenda for the street team.

> *"We never give up on the possibility of yes.*
> -Street team philosophy

An interaction between a street team member and an individual experiencing homelessness begins with the team member introducing themselves, the team, and their purpose for interaction. The street team will ask the individual if they have heard of or visited the Multi-Service Center (MSC), and if they are currently taking up any services. They will ask how long the individual has been experiencing homelessness, where they are from, and what their goals are: accessing shelters, housing, reaching out to a family member, traveling on, etc.

While no encounter will follow a precise script, it is about this time that the street team member will

> *"An outreach encounter is just when you meet someone, an engagement is when you're actually trying to develop a plan of action in regards to them accepting services. So that's the two main steps, which is encounter engage and after that, it's try to case manage and connect them to resources here in the City.*
> -Staff interview

begin to negotiate the types of services they feel will most benefit the individual. Their negotiation takes into account the specific needs of the individuals, while assessing their eligibility for services.

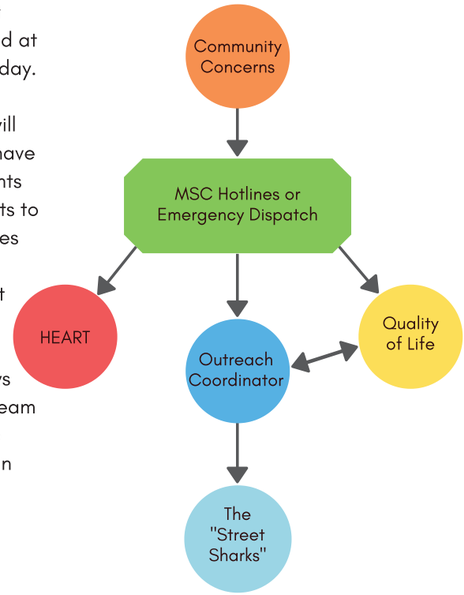
When applicable, they will refer the individual to the MSC, sometimes issuing the individual a "golden ticket" to bypass the waiting line in the lobby at the MSC and become connected to the outreach connect, a street team member who stays behind at the MSC that particular week day.

Additionally, the street team will "check in" on individuals they have previously encountered or clients who are still living on the streets to maintain rapport and sometimes performs another negotiation process. The street team visits locations they know the individuals frequent or contact someone who knows the individual. If needed, the team will also consult Quality of Life police officers to locate certain individuals.

In addition to outreach logs and check ins, the street team visits "hot spots," areas where individuals experiencing homelessness may temporarily congregate. They team also responds to encampments, which have a specific protocol maintained by the Department of Health and Human Services, Homeless Services Division. The protocol ensures the dignity of the people the street team encounters, while addressing community concerns. The street team operates with the purpose of building rapport and connecting individuals to services through assessment and negotiation.

Because the negotiation process takes time, it may appear that the street team does not do enough to address these complaints-maintaining the belief that the team can forcibly remove individuals from areas, which is not the case.

Figure 6. Example of outreach coordination with partners

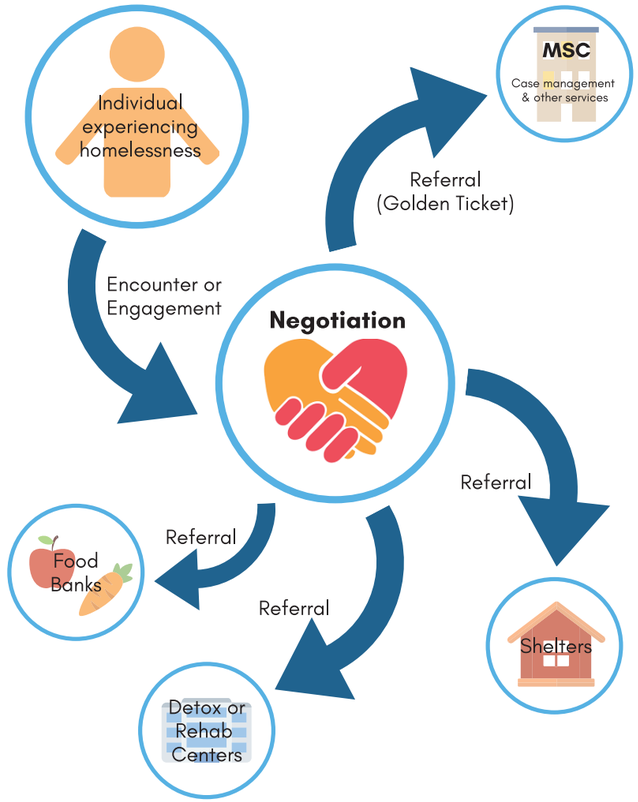


MULTI-**SERVICE** CENTER

Operated by the Long Beach Health Department, Homeless Services Division, the Multi Service Center (MSC) plays a fundamental role in providing assistance to individuals experiencing homelessness within the City of Long Beach. The MSC offers a variety of immediate relief services such as mail, showers, and clothing to individuals who are accepting or in the process of accepting services. The MSC is the central access point for individuals experiencing homelessness to connect with services in the City. It also acts as a vital basecamp for the street team and partnering agencies, as they coordinate with one another to assist their clients.

Every weekday, one street team member stays behind and takes on the role of **outreach connect**, who will help coordinate and support the rest of the street team while also answering community concerns sent in through the hotline and working on their clients' cases. Once an individual has decided to accept services, they are referred to the MSC by the street team (sometimes with a golden ticket), QoL officers, HEART units, or other partner representatives (such as US Vets or Mental Health America). Upon arrival, the individual is guided through an intake process by the outreach connect and privately interviewed in order for the team to get a better sense of what services are appropriate.

Figure 7. The negotiation process



If applicable, the outreach connect will search for an open spot in a shelter or offer to place the individual in a motel room for a couple of days. They may offer bus tokens or other means of transportation to meet the individual's needs. The outreach connect will often juggle multiple tasks at once, such as recording information from a hotline call, attempting to identify an individual through a photo sent by another outreach team member, and preparing a client for intake.

Individuals who have previously taken up services or already connected with a case manager may visit the MSC for assistance in receiving documentation (i.e. ID services), filling out an application for government services (i.e. General Relief or Section 8), or accessing on-site services (i.e. Goodwill Life Skills training course or mail).

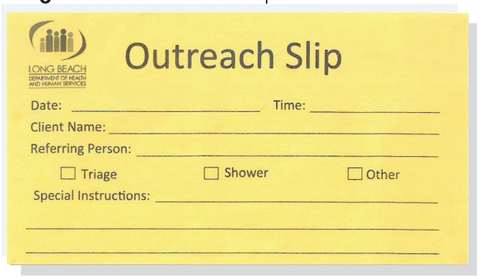
Amidst shifts in policies and approaches, the MSC staff, outreach members and partnering organizations continue to demonstrate flexibility, patience, and compassion as they engage with and advocate for individuals experiencing homelessness.

GOLDEN TICKETS

Golden tickets are referrals to the MSC provided by the street team to individuals experiencing homelessness (see Image 1). When an individual receives a golden ticket, they are instructed that the slip of paper allows them to immediately become connected with the outreach connect at the MSC, bypassing any wait times that may discourage individuals from accessing services. The golden ticket may contain specific instructions for the outreach connect, so the individual receiving the golden ticket will be provided with the appropriate services. Golden tickets also allow the street team to understand what type of client or individual is more likely to visit the MSC. During the fieldwork period, golden tickets were a new outreach strategy implemented by the street team.

As a part of the research project, golden tickets emerged as an important form of outreach practice that represents one of the ways the street team innovates their outreach approaches. Golden tickets are usually given to individuals once the street team assesses the specific kinds of services that the individual experiencing homelessness needs, whether or not the individual is likely to visit the MSC, and their willingness to work with case managers. Some individuals who received golden tickets do not fit these requirements and were given one because the street team hoped the individual would take the leap and visit the MSC for services. Additionally, some individuals encountered on the streets may have been connected to services at one point, but stopped due to circumstances. The street team will issue a golden ticket in hopes that they will visit the MSC and reconnect with services.

Image 1. Golden ticket example



As often repeated by street team members, one of the most difficult parts of the service process is getting clients to take the first step and ask for help. Rather than telling clients to visit the MSC for services, golden tickets are symbols of trust, reassurance, and the street team's confidence that the client will access services. Thus, golden tickets are an innovative way for the street team to engage individuals experiencing homelessness to take the next step and obtain services.

During this particular outreach activity, the outreach team handed out three golden tickets to the people that they interacted with that showed interest in getting services... This is already a step forward because they were provided golden tickets, which means that they will not only have access to the services they requested but they will also have the opportunity to speak to a case worker that can further assist in their situations.

- Field notes

He was issued a golden ticket and was given directions to the MSC. [He] said would go to the MSC the next day and thanked us for waking him up.

- Field notes

If they feel that the person has a real desire for change, they offer them a golden ticket: a slip of paper that allows [the individual experiencing homelessness] to bypass the waiting line and get services.

- Field notes

She said she was going into the MSC to shower, get a change of clothes, get snacks and start the process to get her ID. [She was given] a golden ticket. After she received her golden ticket from [the outreach workers], she hugged [them].

- Field notes

She offers him a golden ticket: a fastpass for services at the MSC in which the recipient will bypass the waiting lines.

-Field notes

Image 2 (above). The street team is made up of people from different service agencies and works collaboratively with Quality of Life police officers, HEART unit firefighter paramedics, and specialists from other partner organizations. Pictured are some of the members that make up the street team.

Image 3 (right). Two members of the street team (pictured left and right) are conducting outreach with an individual experiencing homelessness (middle). The team builds rapport to develop a working relationship with their clients in order to understand their situation better and then will negotiate the kinds of services the individual will need.

OUTREACH PARTNERS

LONG BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT

Police officers engaged in the City's homeless outreach efforts are called "Quality of Life" (QoL).

> *"We are responsible for locating, identifying, offering assistance, and conducting enforcement within the homeless population as a portion of law enforcement.*
>
> -QoL officer

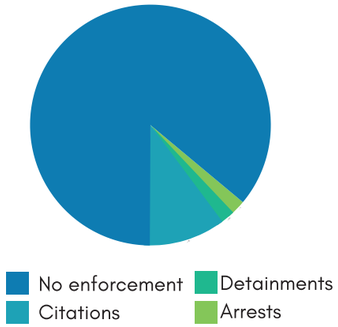
QoL is a special role in the department with some divisions of the City having their own QoL officer. To meet the needs of their division, some patrol officers will adopt QoL responsibilities. Since QoL is a specialized position, they assist other police units by taking on calls specifically regarding homelessness, allowing them to focus on other aspects of community protection. The outreach coordination between QoL officers and the street team helps meet the "impossible mandate" of reducing crime, while providing services to individuals experiencing homelessness (Simpson 2015).

When asked about their duties on street outreach, QoL officers can describe themselves as protectors that ensure the safety of the street team. They engage with individuals first, assessing any potential dangers before signaling to the street team that they can safely approach. The QoL officers' involvement in outreach allows the street team to engage with people experiencing homelessness that live in unsafe areas that the team would not be able to access on their own.

Additionally, QoL officers adopt practices that emphasize rapport-building and service connection. In a sample size of 107 QoL outreach encounters, only 15 included some form of enforcement coded as detainments, citations, or arrests (see Figure 8). The rest of the interactions revolves assessing the situation to ensure the safety of the street team and rapport building with clients. Enforcement is used strategically as ways to get clients connected to the services negotiated by the street team.

QoL officers are also instrumental in connecting individuals with quality drug detox or rehabilitation services that are essential, but high-barrier. In most cases, individuals cannot access rehabilitation services without undergoing a detoxification process at the proper facilities that require money, clinical referrals, and medication. Accessible detox services are limited in the City, so QoL officers build rapport and make weekly presentations in order to get clients sponsored. Due to their position in the criminal justice system, QoL officers have the ability to assist clients with any outstanding warrants or cases to increase the clients' likelihood of sponsorship. Between 2015 and 2018, over 150 people experiencing homelessness were connected and sponsored at a drug detox or rehab center.

Figure 8. Percentage of QoL practices in outreach encounters



LONG BEACH FIRE DEPARTMENT

A HEART (Homeless Education and Response Team) unit is a specialized outreach team that consists of two paramedics that respond to 911 calls concerning individuals experiencing homelessness. HEART units receives calls through a separate dispatch system, thus they do not always coordinate outreach with the street team. During the study period, there were limited opportunities to observe HEART interactions, but their involvement was described as critical components of homeless outreach because of their ability to assess medical needs and offer emergency medical services.

> *"Because you're human and you matter.*
>
> - HEART paramedic to a client

SERVICE ACCEPTANCE

At the start of the research project, service acceptance was understood by the research team as individuals experiencing homelessness accessing long-term services that led towards the goal of permanent housing. However, this idea needed to be re-conceptualized over the course of the study period, as service acceptance also meant clients accessing and receiving short-term services or immediate services.

Short-term service acceptance is an integral part of building a trusting relationship between individuals experiencing homelessness and the street team. In some cases, their clients are dependent on these services for survival. The street team facilitates long-term service acceptance by using immediate services as possible points of entry.

> *"The thing we need to do with folks that are on the street that aren't willing to go right [into services] now is keep offering them different things [and] keep building that relationship. Start small. One step at a time.*
>
> -Staff interview

> *"Services can be as simple as what we call basic services (immediate services), such as a shower, clean socks, maybe a clean pair of pants and a shirt to go about your day with a snack, maybe water, and a breakfast bar because you haven't eaten all night.*
>
> -Staff interview

Figure 9. Examples of short-term and long-term services

- Hygiene kits
- An appointment made in the field for the individual experiencing homelessness
- Bus tokens or transportation
- ID vouchers
- Golden Tickets
- Life skills and vocational training
- Case management
- Clothing, hot meals, or food from various organizations in the city- including Christian Outreach in Action, LB Rescue Mission, Salvation Army, and Urban Community Outreach
- Hotel vouchers
- Mailboxes
- Expungement clinics
- Educational flyers given by the street team and Health Department staff on infectious disease outbreaks-like shigella and typhus
- Vaccinations provided by the street team and nurses to individuals on the street, such as HEP-A
- General medical services
- Referrals to other agencies, such as rehabilitation or detoxification centers

As everyone has their own story, each individual who accepts services does so for different reasons. When individuals experiencing homelessness express little to no interest in accepting long-term services the street team continues to visit the individual, building rapport, offering immediate or basic services.

> *"Immediate relief gives the homeless hope.*
>
> -Staff interview

Like the name infers, immediate services are the fastest way to connect an individual to something they may need. Continuous offering of immediate or basic services by the street team assists in the building of that relationship with the individual experiencing homelessness and displays the street teams' dedication to the individual's well-being.

Although, immediate services are necessary to facilitate trust and rapport that often leads to longer-term service acceptance, one of the most prominent reasons individuals accept long-term services is because they have gotten "to that place," where they physically or emotionally cannot live on the streets anymore, they "want to stop feeling the way they're feeling" and make a change in their substance use, and for those who haven't been on the streets very long, "they are scared to death" (staff interview).

> *"It's like, you start getting this feeling inside like you're dreading tomorrow. It's like... I don't want to do this again.*
>
> -Client interview

Often times, an individual gets to that place of wanting long-term services because "they just made that decision themselves... for some of the people, they're just ready" (staff interview).

> *"On the streets, immediate relief could be...just setting up an appointment in the field, so that they know they have an appointment already set up and we'll be there with an open hand waiting for them when they come to the Multi-Service Center.*
>
> -Staff interview

> *"You have people who are just completely fed up with what they have been doing. Those are the best ones because that way, it is a willful thing instead of a forceful thing.*
>
> -Staff interview

> *"The hardest part was... well really, I wasn't ready to take that step, but I knew I had to take that step because I had nowhere else to turn. I took a chance... when you are in a situation that you don't know where to go to get help, and someone sends you there, you will take that chance. Some people give up, but I was determined to go through and I wasn't going to give up. I wanted to see what this process was gonna end up being.*
>
> -Client interview

Image 4. The street team visits individuals experiencing homelessness wherever they may be to build rapport and offer services.

SHELTERS

During the study period, discourses on shelters became a reoccurring theme. While the research project did not focus on analyzing shelter services, the topic was repeated in the narratives and lived experiences of clients and street team members. The street team attempts to negotiate shelter services with their clients because the shelter environment is relatively stable for service collaboration between clients and the street team. More research must be conducted to get a richer perspective on shelter services, but the data being represented suggest that shelters are an important service in assisting individuals experiencing homelessness and structural limitations are areas of concern for clients and the street team.

CLIENT NARRATIVES

It's just an unnatural living situation. For instance, you're up and out the door by 7 am, but you have to be back in by 5 to take a shower and then you are taking a shower with a bunch of dudes... it felt unsanitary...

They've got a lot of things that are not up to code to operate legally... I don't blame the people, but they got to bring up their standards.

I felt the people there were rude and pushy and I just got a bad vibe from the start. There were some sketchy people there and honestly, I felt less safe there than on the streets.

A friend of mine stayed there and got bed bugs... I have a phobia of bed bugs, so we stay in the car. This way, we have a little privacy and keep it clean.

You get to stay there for 30 days, but the thing is... 7 o'clock in the morning you gotta leave and you have to be back by 6 o'clock at night, and you can't hang around there.

You get kicked out in the morning and have to stay gone all day, I mean, what are you going to do all day? Get high.

The shelter doesn't have ramps for wheelchairs... there's very little wheelchair access to anything there.

STAFF NARRATIVES

I had a client who uses the restroom at night a lot. She was staying at a shelter and she's a 73 year old woman. They couldn't turn on the lights when using the restroom... and one time she forgot and turned on the light and she got kicked out, and so she was back in her car.

A lot of the clients aren't really shelter appropriate because they can't be around people, or they're too sick or they have mental health issues or PTSD or they've been in jail or prison before and all those rules are too much to handle.

We don't have enough shelters and if they are full that's it, there's nowhere else for people to go.

One of my biggest challenges is getting my clients stable and into a shelter so I could start working with them. I know where they are staying at night and I can go pick up them up in the morning. But, if there isn't a bed available, they'll say 'okay, well, give me a call when a bed opens up,' but they don't have a phone or their phone gets disconnected... and then I don't see them anymore...

There are a few emergency shelters, however there are a lot of rules that go along with them, like you can't be intoxicated or you can't use while you're in there, you can't bring your animals, you are separated from your boyfriend or girlfriend. If you leave, you can't get back in... to have that sort of strict structure immediately coming in from off the streets is a very overwhelming experience...

CASE STUDIES OF SERVICES

Service acceptance should not be measured solely by whether or not an individual ends up in permanent housing. Individuals have complex needs that will typically require taking up different types of services. Undergraduate students studied services that were being accessed by individuals experiencing homelessness or in danger of experiencing homelessness in order to understand the roles of some partner agencies.

CHRISTIAN OUTREACH IN ACTION

COA is a faith-based service organization that offers free meals, clothing, a legal clinic, and a mobile health clinic to individuals experiencing homelessness. The undergraduate students participated during breakfast meal services and the clothing drive. They learned that COA operates on donations and volunteers, with some of the volunteers being individuals who had previously experienced homelessness themselves. These volunteers promote their "positive energy" by building rapport with people who utilize the services which helps nurture an environment of generosity and friendliness for staff and clients. COA specializes in immediate relief services to help individuals endure the hardships of living on the streets.

> *"We're pushing a lot of positive energy if you come here. We feed you, we clothe you, we just want you to have a positive day... we're just trying to help people any way we can.*
>
> - Staff interviews

HELP ME HELP YOU

> *"You're spending so much time with the client and you're their advocates basically, and its heartbreaking to see the case getting denied because we all, including the client, invested so much effort into building the case up.*
>
> - Staff interview

Help Me Help You (HMHY) is a service entry provider operating within the MSC that is responsible for conducting new client intake, assessment services, and casework for individuals to have access to services such as Social Security Income, General Relief, etc. Students observed the staff as they worked on their cases and consulted their clients. They reported findings that highlight how employees in homeless services practice high levels of empathy with their clients. The HMHY staff works closely with their clients in building cases for access to homeless services. They attempt to cultivate a sense of well-being in their clients by embodying it themselves, although it can be difficult at moments when their clients face rejection. HMHY's location within the MSC provides clients an opportunity to access other services while collaborating with their case worker.

Image 5. The Multi-Service Center

GOODWILL LIFE SKILLS TRAINING COURSE

The Goodwill Life Skills training class provides skills development such as conflict resolution or interviewing skills for clients who wish to enter the workforce. Undergraduate students attended class sessions and participated in the lessons to observe what kinds of skills are being developed in the program. In addition to skills development, the class provides individuals an opportunity to network. The instructor creates an interactive class because they understand that clients may not have anybody to talk to about their needs and personal struggles. The students communicate with one another and develop friendships that nurture positive mental health. The instructor provides students time to adjust, communicate their personal needs, and encourages students to complete the course. As the clients' situation in stabilizes, they have the opportunity to create "positive social networks" with each other in order to share information (Glasser and Bridgman 1999, 74). During the study period, Zinnia offered advice to another client, Ayana, after learning that they had been looking for a job for some time. The social setting of the class allows participants to feel safe, hang out, make friends, help one another through their issues, and establish social networks built on positive interactions and social support that motivate them to transition towards permanent housing.

> *"I don't want to miss class because I don't want to let myself down. I like the interactions... I still have things to do, but I work around them because this class has helped with my motivations.*
>
> - Client interview

LONG BEACH RESCUE MISSION

> *"I'm learning that there is a way out of homelessness and drug addiction - through God, through peers, through staff.*
>
> - NLP member

The Long Beach Rescue Mission (LBRM) offers both immediate and long-term services for people experiencing homelessness. Students volunteered at the Samaritan House during meal services and interacted with clients in services like the year-long New Life Program (NLP). Student findings highlight how LBRM services incorporate faith-based values to attempt to heal and motivate individuals. The LBRM offers peer mentors and develops a sense of spirituality within them. Additionally, the employees and volunteers at the LBRM are examples of success stories, which can act as sources of hope and motivation for clients. Rowen describes how hearing and witnessing the experiences of NLP graduates and peers motivated him to work through his own addiction at the LBRM. Clients express how building and sustaining a sense of community connects them to the program and cultivates a drive for success. The stories told by NLP members and graduates vary, but many share a similar belief in salvation and redemption. When people come to the LBRM for meal services, they hear these stories that can motivate them to participate in LBRM homeless services.

URBAN COMMUNITY OUTREACH

A weekend drop-in center, Urban Community Outreach provides assistance for individuals experiencing homelessness by tackling some of the compounding barriers they might face. Located in a church, the center offers meal services, a computer lab for resume building and job seeking, a healthcare clinic, and affordable housing casework. One student conducted fieldwork at this site during lunch meal services. Research findings center on how UCO utilizes food services as an opportunity to connect their clients with other services. Clients that utilize meal services mentioned how they were unaware of the other services UCO provided, until they learned about them on-site.

> *"If someone hands out only food to someone that is homeless, it doesn't do much besides feed them a meal. If you truly want to help, then send them to a place where they can get services in finding them a permanent home.*
>
> - Staff interview

Figure 10.

Figure 11.

HURDLES ON THE ROAD TO ACCEPTING SERVICES

1

Building trust is a process

"It's possible to reach them on their level, just by kind of being their friend. If you go straight in, they're going to run like a horse, but if you offer them water or stuff, they're going to say, 'this guy's actually trying to help'" (staff interview).

"There's people out here, no identification, no ID... even though we get access to free IDs from the county. But you gotta take your time to get up there in a bus... wait in line... and then get it. And you have to have an address for it to go to" (client interview).

4

Lack of documentation

3

Substance Use

"There are so many people out there on the streets that are good people that are in a bad situation and dealing with a really sick disease [addiction] that most people just don't understand" (client interview).

Health and Well-being

2

"Some people are too mentally ill to make decisions that would lead them to housing. For example, we have people out there that are flordily psychotic and cannot be reached without medical intervention. This is only a minority of individuals, but it's difficult" (staff interview).

Strict rules and regulations

"Some of the barriers for folks are things like, so for an emergency shelter, it is really rule heavy, 'you have to come in at this time, you can't leave once you're in, you have to leave by this time, some of them require prayer'" (staff interview).

7

8

Previous service experiences

"I don't believe in the system, honestly, I don't. I don't go to COA, I don't go to the Mission, I don't go to shelters. I've been out here 5 years, I take care of myself" (client interview).

6

Transportation

"Because you guys aren't in one location- there's one here, there's one on the west side, there's one on the east side... they're all scattered everywhere" (client interview).

5

Limited services

"I'm really lucky to be here. There are a lot of people that need help and I don't really think there is enough people or facilities to handle it" (client interview).

Obstacles to obtaining services are not independent from one another; they are often layered together, complicating the ability for individuals experiencing homelessness and outreach workers to navigate homeless services. The hurdles provided are the most prominent obstacles grounded in the lived experiences of people as they discuss homeless services. Individuals may not face all or any of the hurdles listed, nor do they experience the hurdles in the same order or ways as other individuals do. Each individual has a unique set of needs that unfold into their own story.

"Between the programs and the apartment, and the team's help, I **cherish** it. I really do and appreciate it with all my heart, that you guys are around and willing to work with someone like me" (client interview).

EXAMPLES OF **HURDLES**

1 Building trust is a process

People on the street often lack trust in people and the system. The street team needs to build trust with each person where they are at. Working through mistrust requires sustained effort in maintaining a positive relationship as the street team and individual experiencing homelessness need to address situations that may arise during the rapport-building process (Kryda and Compton 2007). For example, the street team member or client may "drop the ball" and fail to show up to a promised meeting. The street team often mediates and assists in facilitating communication when a client and case manager experience difficulties in moving forward with a service plan. Trust is a process and team effort.

"For some people, I feel that they want to go, but they don't trust. You have to think about how much rejection and failure that somebody who ends up experiencing homeless has known, whether it's their own doing or other people's doing" (staff interview).

"It's possible to reach them on their level, just by kind of being their friend. If you go straight in, they're going to run like a horse, but if you offer them water or stuff, they're going to say, 'this guy's actually trying to help'" (staff interview).

Successful client outcomes can be achieved when individuals actively participate in their own recovery and rehabilitation, thus the service process should be seen as a partnership and collaboration between the staff and client.

2 Health and Well-being

Physical and mental health are other factors that impact an individual's ability to obtain services. Some individuals experiencing homelessness live with one or more mental illnesses ranging anywhere from anxiety to schizophrenia. It is important to note that these illnesses are often developed or exacerbated by their experiences while homeless. Individuals experiencing homelessness with mental health issues may perceive their needs differently than mental health providers as they often prioritize basic needs over clinical help (Barrow et al. 1991). Individuals living with mental illnesses, especially while untreated, can be unpredictable in their goals of accessing services. They may be feeling great and receptive towards services one day and the next day oppose those services. Negotiating eligible services that accommodate physical disabilities can be time consuming due to service requirements or restrictions. This can be draining and stressful for both the client and the street team worker, as the client's specific needs must be understood for the street team to negotiate their access to the appropriate services. This is exceptionally difficult if clients have contagious diseases from living on the streets.

"Some people are too mentally ill to make decisions that would lead them to housing. For example, we have people out there that are *flordily psychotic* and cannot be reached without medical intervention. This is only a minority of individuals, but it's difficult" (staff interview).

I asked the street team if there were any services for him, if he was going to give him a golden ticket, and they informed me they couldn't because "his condition [contagious skin infection] is too severe for him to go anywhere else except for a hospital. There could be 150 beds open for him at all the shelters, and no place will take him" (field notes).

There are no temporary housing options for those with viruses or diseases, leaving them with limited options. Although hospitals will hold patients for a few days while treating their illness, they inevitably return back to the streets.

3 Substance use

The use of substances such as drugs or alcohol can severely hinder an individual's ability to access services. The street team must negotiate a complex health care system that in many ways works for their clients, but also works against them (Turnbull et al. 2007). A majority of available services have requirements of individuals being clean or drug free before being approved, or maintaining sobriety while utilizing the service. If an individual relapses, they may be immediately removed from the program. Attempts to re-qualify to the same service are extremely difficult, if not impossible in some cases.

"I didn't want to think about life without dope and getting into services meant getting clean, so I guess I didn't want to or I wasn't ready yet. If someone is telling you you can't have that one thing that makes you feel okay, you're not going to listen. It honestly took me hitting rock bottom to even think about getting clean" (client interview).

"There are so many people out there on the streets that are good people that are in a bad situation and dealing with a really sick disease [addiction] that most people just don't understand" (client interview).

Tying in with the "one size fits all" model, it is unrealistic to expect an individual to be "perfect" throughout the process as the path from homelessness to housed looks different for everyone. Therefore, low-barrier services are becoming more prevalent and are the preferred route for outreach workers and their clients.

4 Lack of identification

A lack of "documents and paperwork" is a prevalent hurdle that individuals experiencing homelessness and street team members must negotiate. Identification paperwork is necessary to quality and receive many services, creating a significant hurdle to beginning a service plan.

The street team member told the client that he would need to bring along documentation like a birth certificate and some form of identification. But he had neither, and could not get one without the other. The team told him that they would work with him to get his documents and handed in a golden ticket (field notes).

"There's people out here, no identification, no ID... even though we get access to free IDs from the county. But you gotta take your time to get up there in a bus... wait in line... and then get it. And you have to have an address for it to go to" (client interview).

Additionally, it can be difficult and time-consuming for individuals to procure their documentation. Although identification is necessary in accessing services, it may be the last priority in a long list of client needs.

5 Some services are too "high-barrier"

Some services require insurance or payments, and have limited spaces for those who qualify for services and are ready to accept them. For example, detoxification facilities and rehabilitation centers require private insurance that are inaccessible to most individuals experiencing homelessness. Additionally, rehabilitation services have limited spots and can be extremely time sensitive. Therefore, these services are unable to accommodate the amount of people that need them.

"I'm really lucky to be here. There are a lot of people that need help and I don't really think there is enough people or facilities to handle it" (client interview).

"If I get help today, it will take 5 months? It is easier to live in a tent" (client interview).

If an individual does meet all the guidelines required for the service but does not accept or get to the place in time, most often the opportunity is lost.

6 Transportation to services

Individuals experiencing homelessness may not have access to a car or the funds to utilize public transportation. They may also have limited mobility that hinders their ability to move around without assistance. A lack of transportation makes it difficult for individuals to access location-based services. If they are unable to get to the MSC for case management, the health care facility for medical needs, the DMV for identification needs, or other important appointments, then they do not have access to those services. The street team recognizes this and may offer bus tokens or transportation services.

"Because you guys aren't in one location–there's one here, there's one on the west side, there's one on the east side... they're all scattered everywhere" (client interview).

The street team member asked her if she knew where the MSC is located. She told him that she knew where the center is, but could not get there because of her limited mobility (field notes).

Because many services are time-sensitive, the lack of transportation can cause some individuals to miss out on opportunities such as a bed in a shelter, meeting with their case manager, or getting to the MSC on a specific day for a program.

7 Strict service rules and regulations

Since every individual has their own story and expectations, they have unique needs that may clash with services that have strict rules. Individuals experiencing homelessness with pets, "too many belongings," a significant other, or children face more limitations to the services available to them. For example, shelters may split up families or couples and deny access to individuals unwilling to abandon their pets. Services that adopt a "one size fits all" model exclude individuals that do not fit their requirements.

"Some of the barriers for folks are things like, so for an emergency shelter, it is really rule heavy, 'you have to come in at this time, you can't leave once you're in, you have to leave by this time, some of them require prayer'" (staff interview).

I asked the street team members about the program they were talking about. They stress that it was very structured and warned if somebody happened to mess up, they will be kicked out of the program for two years (field notes).

The street team has to navigate through services with strict rules during the negotiation process to determine their client's eligibility which may be a timely process. A "low-barrier" service structure is more inclusive and is the "best practice" method of service delivery.

8 Previous service experiences

Interactions between individuals experiencing homelessness and the street team are shaped by previous service experiences. These experiences contribute to a client's likelihood of taking up services again. The street team will often ask individuals about their past service experiences to understand their lived experiences and provide context to the encounter. Effective service delivery and street team negotiations incorporate the client's past service experiences.

Senna was kicked out of a rehab shelter due to a mistake on their behalf. Although the shelter invited her back once they realized their mistake, Senna had already lost confidence in homeless services due to the possibility of repeating the traumatic situation (field notes).

"I don't believe in the system, honestly, I don't. I don't go to COA, I don't go to the Mission, I don't go to shelters. I've been out here 5 years, I take care of myself" (client interview).

Individuals will share their service experiences with one another, which can lead to the creation of rumors that will cause other individuals to not take up services.

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