

Engaging with Unsheltered/Service-Resistant Individuals Experiencing Homelessness: An Issue Brief from KnoxHMIS

Problem

Unsheltered community members experiencing homelessness who resist social services create a unique challenge to organizations attempting to engage and offer interventions on their behalf. An individual who is “street homeless” is defined by KnoxHMIS as someone who lives in a place not meant for human habitation such as sleeping in a public place, car, abandoned building, and/or camping outdoors. Between July 2016 and July 2017, among those clients newly added to KnoxHMIS, street homelessness increased 15%. Further, among the 9,243 active clients, a total of 13% (1,180) were classified as ‘street homeless.’ As the climate surrounding the *Mission District of the Broadway Corridor* intensifies, it is of critical importance to consider how agencies serving this subpopulation of homeless individuals can more effectively address their specific needs.

AVERAGE AGE	38.2
GENDER	
Male	734 (62%)
Female	445 (38%)
RACE	
White	777 (66%)
Black	370 (31%)
Other	28 (2%)
Null Race	5 (1%)
ETHNICITY	
Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino	1134 (96%)
Hispanic/Latino	31 (3%)
Null Ethnicity	15 (1%)

Purpose of Document

The purpose of this document is to describe the characteristics and challenges of this subpopulation and, in turn, suggest some potential best practices for engaging and assisting these individuals. The literature surveyed came from an array of sources including peer reviewed research (32%), trade-based training materials (28%), and academic as well as lay theology (39%). This document is intended as a cursory introduction rather than a detailed and comprehensive literature review. A full annotated bibliography is available upon request.

<p>Reasons Unsheltered Clients Choose to Resist Services &/or ‘Sleep Rough’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Infantilization and objectification ● Subject to arbitrary rules ● Treated disrespectfully by staff ● Maintenance of sense of dignity and self-respect ● Pervasive mistrust of outreach workers and the agencies that employ them ● Unavailable/inaccessible physical access to emergency shelters ● Inability to cohabitate with their partner or animal ● High financial costs associated with services (entry fees and potential loss of non-cash benefits)
<p>Characteristics of Unsheltered &/or Service Resistant Clients</p>	<p>More likely to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Older ● African American or Native American ● Current consumers of alcohol ● Armed service veterans ● Day labourers ● Experienced with court-ordered psychiatric treatment. <p>Not Significant Predictors for “Sleeping Rough”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Number of times experiencing homelessness ● Age ● Gender ● Incarceration history &/or medical history

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Law Enforcement Literature Findings & Recommendations:

- ★ **73%** of police interactions with unsheltered individuals were the result of either no criminal activity or the individual had “exhibited disorderly conduct.” **72%** of these interactions did not result in either police custody or referrals to social service¹
- 1. Create, maintain, and train Homeless Outreach Teams (**H.O.T.**) which include a focus on creating appropriate and accurate **referrals to service providers, increasing rapport, and strengthening community relationships**. Established H.O.T. programs have identified **case management and community buy-in** as two of the greatest needs for success.²
- 2. Practice **procedural justice** through the implementation and use of the **LEED model** which trains officers “to take the time to *listen* to people, *explain* what is going to happen and how the process works, explain why that decision was made so the *equity* of the decision is transparent, and leave the participants with their *dignity* intact.”³

Communities of Faith Literature Findings & Recommendations:

- ★ **Incarnational ministry** is a dominant form of engagement that is defined by a move “beyond ministry of a distance and to ‘incarnate’ and immerse into local cultures.”⁴
- 1. Practice from a point of view that privileges individual’s internal **self-sovereignty**. This is done in an attempt to **liberate both the oppressed and the oppressor** from the “false absolutes which inhibit both from acting for the good of all.”⁵
- 2. Engage service within the framework of **guests** which underscores **cultural humility** and individual **personal autonomy**.

Social Service Agencies Literature Findings & Recommendations:

- ★ An estimated **37%** of individuals experiencing homelessness are unsheltered. Clients’ decisions to “opt-out” are not due to personality failings or a desire to remain unsheltered but rather “**a result of the power relations and social inequities in the provider-client relationship.**”⁶
- 1. Remind service providers to be aware of **class talk** and **cultural capital** and the ways in which their unintentional use reinforces “rhetorical and physical barriers [of] class boundaries and create an othered status for clients who are being served.”⁷
- 2. Reframe services from “**short-term**” solutions (such as food and clothes) for “**long-term**” problems (lack of affordable housing or employment)

Final Community Recommendation:

- ★ The most critical element in regards to serving unsheltered individuals is the positive strength of the **rapport** between client and worker.
- 1. **Motivational Interviewing (MI)** trains workers to structure assessment around 1. *Collaboration* 2. *Acceptance* 3. *Compassion* and 4. *Evocation*.
- 2. MI is a brief **person-centered** clinical method for strengthening client **motivation for and commitment to change**. Indicated for clients who are **reluctant, ambivalent or defensive about change**.
- 3. Approaches across professions differ in their specifics, but an emphasis on human dignity, cultural humility, and interagency collaboration emerges from the research literature as necessary intervention modalities.

¹ Reuland, M., Schwarzfeld, M., & Draper, L. (2009). *Law enforcement responses to people with mental illnesses: A guide to research-informed*

² Iverson, B., McCormack, D., & Thomson, M.J. (2010). Colorado Springs police department’s H.O.T. program - Providing Outreach to the Homeless. *CALEA Update Magazine*, 107.

³ Rahr, S. & Rice, S. K. (2015). From warriors to guardians: Recommitting American police culture to democratic ideals. *New Perspectives in Policing Bulletin*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.

⁴ Billings, J. T. (2014, December). The problem with 'Incarnational ministry'. *Christianity Today*.

⁵ Sunderland, R. H. (2003). The dignity of servanthood in pastoral care. *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 57(3).

⁶ Hoffman, L., & Coffey, B. (2008). Dignity and indignation: How people experiencing homelessness view services and providers. *The Social Science Journal*, 45, 207-222. doi:10.1016/j.soscij.2008.03.001

⁷ Rogers, L. E. (2017). "Helping the helpless help themselves": How volunteers and employees create a moral identity while sustaining symbolic boundaries within a homeless shelter. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 46(2), 230-260. doi:10.1177/089124165603450