



RUTGERS-NEW BRUNSWICK

Edward J. Bloustein School
of Planning and Public Policy

Ralph W. Voorhees Center for Civic Engagement



BASIC NEEDS SERVICES FOR THE UNHOUSED



Ralph W. Voorhees
Public Service Fellows

**Janet Cazares, Hamza Choudhry, Marcelo Remond
Miyoshi, Aditi Rana, Adeel Yaqoob, and Adriana Zarza**

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Introduction

The 2023-24 Ralph W. Voorhees Public Service Fellows partnered with Unity Square Community Center, a community organization in New Brunswick, New Jersey, to research innovative practices for providing basic needs to unhoused and precariously housed populations. The project's objective is to identify creative ways that organizations across the country are supporting unhoused people with basic necessities related to selfcare and hygiene and to share those experiences with local groups. We sought to learn more about how organizations provide basic needs, what challenges they face in doing so, and how they resolve issues.

Background

Emergency service organizations that provide food, housing, and other services are serving more people than ever in the US where more than 580,000 people experience homelessness. There is a shortage of over 7 million affordable homes for the more than 10.8 million low-income families in America (National Low-Income Housing Coalition, n.d.). The COVID-19 pandemic increased unemployment rates making it difficult for many low-income families to pay housing costs leading to evictions (Benfer et al, 2021).

Since the onset of the pandemic, the number of unhoused individuals has risen in New Jersey. The state's unhoused population increased to more than 10,000 in 2023, a 15% increase from 2019. During this 5-year period, the number of people staying in emergency shelters grew by 36% (Monarch Housing Associates, 2023). In Middlesex County, New Jersey, 447 households with 660 individuals were homeless during a recent Point-In-Time Homeless Count. Also, more than 1,000 individuals were without a home in Middlesex County throughout the year (Coming Home, 2023). In 2022, the Point-In-Time Count found that approximately 28% of Middlesex County's total unhoused population was living in New Brunswick, NJ (Monarch Housing Associates, 2022).

The large number of unhoused individuals highlights the urgency of investigating ways to provide emergency services including ones that meet basic needs. Community organizations that provide services such as food are asking for assistance to meet the needs of people who are unhoused with shower and laundry facilities, hygiene kits and storage. This research was guided by the following question:

What are some innovative ways emergency service organizations are helping to support unhoused and precariously housed people with basic needs requests such as showers, storage, laundry, and hygiene services?

To explore this question, the Voorhees Fellows conducted 8 semi-structured non-confidential interviews via Zoom and 1 in-person, read newspapers and journal articles, conducted online searches, and attended a Dignity Summit hosted by Archangel Raphael's Mission in New Brunswick to learn more about how emergency service organizations meet the basic needs of people who are unhoused. We also conducted a literature review to better understand how basic needs and housing precarity are connected. In this report, we discuss our research methods and describe how organizations provide showers, laundry, storage and hygiene kits. Finally, we offer recommendations for next steps.

Figure 1. Unhoused encampment



Literature Review

The objective of this report is to better understand how emergency service organizations provide showers, laundry, storage and hygiene kits to those in need. Emergency service organizations are serving an increasing number of people who are unhoused or at-risk of becoming unhoused (Padgett et al 2016).

Though there are deep networks of care through the Continuum of Care, a federal effort to coordinate care for people experiencing homelessness at the county level, as well as through other organizations and governmental agencies, community leaders report challenges accessing services (Barile and Pruitt, 2019). These organizations can identify the challenges that they and their clients are experiencing as they attempt to access, or consider accessing, the existing service infrastructure and areas of unmet need (Wasserman and Clair, 2013). Greene et al., (2022) examined the current hygiene, storage, and waste management facilities in the City of Portland and Multnomah County to identify gaps and needs to aid the unhoused population. After conducting focus groups and interviews with service providers and government employees, the study found that the current level of services was insufficient to meet the needs of the unhoused population. More hygiene stations and centers that offer toilets, laundry, and showers were needed. Avelar Portillo et al. (2023) describe access to basic needs resources in unhoused communities in Los Angeles, California. A cross sectional study was done of persons experiencing homelessness on Skid Row (n= 263) to understand the level of access this population has to public hygiene and sanitation services. Researchers found that during the evening it was the most difficult to access public sanitation services. Drinking water sources included bottled water, public taps, and fire hydrants. The water was saved and used overnight. Additionally, laundry services and showers were among the top limited resources which contributed to poor rates for employment. The study recommended 24-hr access to basic services such as toilets, hygiene products, showers, and laundry services for communities living on Skid Row.

This raises the importance of offering mobile shower stations at multiple locations on a consistent basis. A hot shower provides a mental reset and creates private time for self-care which is rare for people who are unhoused (Hodgins 2022). Mobile laundry services are equally as important for clean clothes to wear after showering. Hence, it is ideal to have shower and laundry station services in one place. Moncks Corner created a mobile laundry trailer that can be taken to shower stations so that clients have a one-stop shop (Floyd 2022).

Services are often in difficult to reach locations and many members of unhoused population do not have access to transit. A research project conducted in Denver, Colorado created a smartphone-accessible digital app that showed the location of all the wash facilities in the city. However, the app was only accessible for those who had a smartphone and were digitally literate (Polson et al. 2022).

Ballard et al (2021) found partnerships with higher education, organizations, and businesses helped to create awareness of basic needs service locations and generate funding, products, and services. For example, graduate students at Emory University started The Dignity Pack Project at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and created hygiene kits for unhoused people (Ballard et al. 2021).

Meeting basic needs can improve physical and mental well-being and improve opportunities for employment, as well as create agency. One study conducted in Los Angeles found that access to wash stations, including showers and laundry, led to improved personal image and chances for employment (Avelar Portillo 2023). Lacking access to effective systems, or being discouraged from accessing those services due to uncertainty about eligibility and requirements, may increase housing precarity with a variety of negative impacts on health (O'Toole et al. 2007). The Dignity Pack Project in Atlanta, Georgia found that the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the need for wash stations for unhoused populations to prevent the spread of infection (Leibler 2017, Ballard 2021). This same study also found that it beneficial for unhoused individuals to choose their own products. This created a sense of respect and dignity and agency for individuals who were unhoused (Ballard et al. 2022). The use of local public art to decorate wash stations was viewed as a method of ownership and encouraged unhoused individuals to use the stations. Public art was also used to provide information about the stations and educate about Covid-19 (Diguseppi et al. 2021, Ha et al. 2021).

Methodology

Unity Square, our community partner, asked us to learn more about how organizations provide showers, laundry, storage and hygiene kits. They wanted to learn more about how these services are provided and what challenges providers have faced. Using online search engines and social media outlets we found US-based nonprofit emergency service organizations that had programs and services that addressed at least one of these needs. We reached out to these organizations through email and phone to ask for interviews. We organized a time and day to conduct the interview and sent a consent form beforehand. Between September and November of 2023, we conducted eight 45-minute interviews via Zoom and one interview in person in New Brunswick. We used a semi-structured interview instrument that asked questions about the organization, services provided, their networks, and housing and service needs in their community. Below is a list of the organizations that we interviewed.

Table 1. List of Organizations Interviewed

| Organization | Basic Needs Service | Location |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Friends of the State Street Family | Storage | Madison, Wisconsin |
| Keys to Change | Showers, Storage | Phoenix, Arizona |
| The Dignity Pack Project | Hygiene Kits | Atlanta, Georgia |
| Montclair Emergency Services for Hope (M.E.S.H) | Hygiene Kits, Laundry | Montclair, New Jersey |
| New Brunswick Laundry Love @ Handy Street Laundromat | Laundry | New Brunswick, New Jersey |
| Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship | Storage | Fort Collins, Colorado |
| Lighter Loads ATX | Showers, Laundry, Barbershop | Austin, Texas |
| Mr. Bob's Under the Bridge | Showers | Milwaukee, Wisconsin |
| Archangel Raphael's Mission (ARM) | Showers, Barbershop | New Brunswick, New Jersey |

Findings

We found that emergency service organizations provided showers, lockers, laundry and hygiene kits in different ways. Some provided multiple services while others focused on just one. Some used mobile facilities; others had a bricks and mortar establishment or a set location where people would come to use the service. The following section details how some emergency service organizations provided basic needs such as lockers, laundry, showers and hygiene kits and challenges they faced doing so.

Showers

Mobile Shower Units

Mobile shower units are an effective way to provide wash services to populations experiencing homelessness. Manufacturers offer different models of mobile shower units. Some can have as few as 2 stalls that include a standing shower, sink and toilet, while other units can have up to 10 shower stalls. The mobile shower unit requires a water source (internal or external water tank), mobile generator to power the whole unit, and a water heater (through propane or tankless heater). A pick-up truck is also essential to haul the unit around. Mr. Bob's Under the Bridge in Milwaukee, Wisconsin found a manufacturer to construct a mobile shower unit with four showers and purchased a used pick-up truck to drive the trailer to different sites.

Figure 2. Mr. Bob's Under the Bridge mobile shower unit



Source: Mr. Bob's Under the Bridge, 2024

There is also the option to create a custom mobile shower unit. Lighter Loads ATX in Austin, Texas, provided showers for the unhoused since 2019 and closed their doors in December 2023. The organization created a custom unit that included 16-foot combination trailer with 2 stackable washer/dryer machines and 2 shower units with a sink and toilet as well as a tankless water heater. People could have their clothes washed as they were taking a shower. Initially they had a 300-gallon water tank but removed that after they were given permission to use water from the YMCA or church where they were parked. The biggest advantage of having a mobile shower unit is the ability to meet people where they are. This allows the service to be accessible to communities in need and increases opportunities for engagement and usage. Mobile units can be paired with other services which increases chances for collaboration with other organizations. It may be difficult though to find a location to park and use the unit. Some organizations described difficulty obtaining permits, permissions, and locations to employ their service. Furthermore, discarding water and waste produced by the shower unit added another regulatory layer. The mobile shower unit also needs to be placed somewhere when not in service. This was a challenge for many organizations since storage space for a large vehicle was difficult to find. Lastly, the cost to purchase and maintain a unit with proper staffing is a large financial investment. Organizations may need substantial financial assistance and grants to purchase a mobile trailer.

Figure 3. Mobile Shower Unit Requirements



Supplies

To provide this service, organizations describe needing specific supplies such as hygiene kits. These kits typically hold items like soap or body wash, disposable razors, shaving cream, deodorant, shampoo and conditioner, body spray, and female hygiene products. To allow clients to dry after the shower, items like fresh towels and portable hair dryers are also used. Supplies to clean the units are also needed such as gloves, sponges, cleaning sprays and other items. Storage for all these supplies and equipment as well as the mobile unit itself are required. Mr. Bob's Under the Bridge stores the mobile shower at their warehouse while Lighter Loads ATX parks at their office building.

Staffing

All of the emergency service organizations that provide showers were staffed with a driver, security guard, and cleaning crew. These essential staff members are trained according to their roles. Drivers are licensed to move the mobile unit, and security guards are trained in crisis management and have taken courses like Mental Health First Aid Training. Volunteers register clients, oversee operations, and sanitize showers after every use. The number of staff members and requirements varies based on location, community, and number of clients expected.

Figure 4. Mr. Bob's Under the Bridge Pick-up Truck



Source: Mr. Bob's Under the Bridge, 2024

Permits, Permissions, and Insurance

Organizations need to obtain permits and licenses to park and provide their services in most locations, especially public areas. Mobile showers produce two types of waste water: grey water and black water. Grey water is water runoff from shower usage. Black water contains human waste and fecal matter from toilet usage. Grey water might be able to be discarded through any drain. Black water disposal is regulated and needs to be discarded through proper channels. Grey and black water must follow guidelines for disposal. Organizations can be charged for incorrect disposal practices.

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Organizations like Mr. Bobs Under the Bridge obtained and paid for annual parking permits to provide their service at the parking lot of a local park. Lighter Loads ATX parked in the parking lot of the local YMCA which means they didn't need a permit and were granted permission by the organization to attach their mobile unit to the building's water supply. They were also able to dispose of grey water in sewer drains on the YMCA property and black water at the City dump.

Stationary Shower Units

Some organizations provide showers in a stationary location, but not all members of the community are able to access the service. Key Campus, formerly known as the Human Services Campus, has a mobile shower with 10 stalls permanently located on their campus. To access this shower station, people to travel to the site located outside of Phoenix with an identification card that grants permission to be on the campus.

Laundry

Mobile Shower Units

Like mobile showers, a mobile laundry unit is an effective way of providing clean clothes. Some organizations provide mobile laundry and shower services as the services have similar requirements. A mobile laundry unit is a truck capable of hauling the mobile unit and a water connection for a stackable washer dryer. A mobile laundry can include one washer/dryer or several units. There are associated costs including gasoline, automobile insurance, maintenance, and parking. One interviewee recalled paying approximately \$40,000 for a trailer with shower and laundry units. A mobile laundry station requires supplies such as laundry detergent, fabric softener and laundry baskets. Mobile laundry services have a low barrier of entry. As long as someone requests their clothes to be laundered during the operational hours of the organization they are. People queue in line during operational hours to have their clothes cleaned. Some organizations have volunteers who launder the clothes while the client showers. Others have clients use the machines themselves.

Stationary Laundry

Laundry Love is a national organization that partners with local organizations that want to provide clean laundry for people in need. Laundry Love assists local organizations by providing them with logos, a website, and advice for program management. Laundry Love partners with Earth Breeze, an environmentally friendly industrial grade laundry detergent company. Through this partnership, Earth Breeze ships organizational partners detergent free for clients. This reduces some of the financial burden of buying laundry detergent. It is up to each local organization to decide on the day/time and duration they will be providing the service (ie. once a week or three times a month). There is a low barrier of entry to receive this service. Christ Church in New Brunswick, New Jersey worked with a local laundromat to set up their Laundry Love program. Once a month, at a specific day and time, participants arrive at the laundromat with clothes, and register with volunteers for laundromat cards and free detergent. The organization purchases 40 cards for each month. Each \$20 laundromat card can wash and dry up to four loads of laundry. The money for these cards comes from donations. If all the cards are not distributed, they are saved for the next month.

Storage

Unhoused individuals need a place to store personal items including identification documents such as birth certificates, Social Security cards, and driver’s licenses. Losing these documents can mean delays in accessing much needed social services and housing. We found that emergency service organizations provide storage in a variety of ways.

Types of Containers

Storage includes repurposed plastic bins traditionally used for waste as well as conventional lockers. Plastic bins provide flexibility since the bins can be moved around and configured to fit a space. They are also less expensive. Traditional lockers are more expensive but can withstand harsh weather conditions. Traditional lockers are available in various sizes and have locks built into them or space for a lock to be added.

Location and Security

Key Campus uses an enclosed gravel lot with around the clock security guards as a permanent location for their plastic bin storage containers. They use zip ties to secure the bins which eliminates the need for people to remember lock combinations or hold onto a key. They provide a new zip tie after each use and allow people to access their bins at certain times of the day.

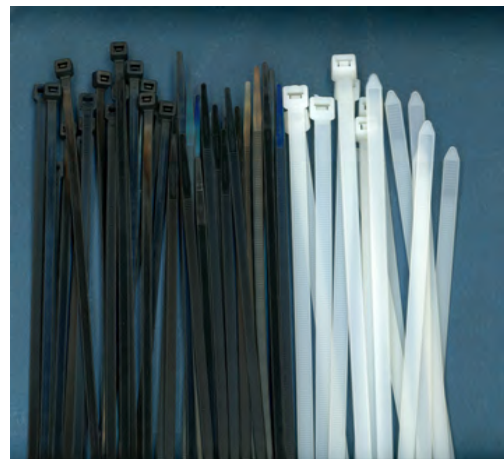
Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship uses traditional lockers and locks which are located on the exterior wall of their church building. They do not provide on-site security. An individual who oversees the locker program is accessible via phone if any issues arise. Friends of the State Street Family's Keys to Dignity locker program partnered with local businesses to set up storage lockers on their property for the unhoused.

Figure 5. Plastic storage bin



Source: Canva

Figure 6. Zip ties used to close storage bins



Source: Canva

They installed 20-25 lockers but have had difficulty with purchasing building materials and finding contractors as well as partners for the program. Public support is also difficult particularly in the downtown area. Friends of State Street Family also distributes backpacks for the unhoused to store their belongings through the CITYPAK program. CITYPAK is a national nonprofit organization that provides backpacks for unhoused individuals to carry their belongings.

Accessibility

There are some restrictions on what individuals can store in the lockers. Drugs and weapons are not permitted. Facility intervention is required if a user loses a key or forgets a lock combination. Some organizations limit how long an individual can keep a locker while others have no time limit.

Zoning Restrictions

Some organizations faced challenges with zoning regulations. In some cases, adding lockers to a property required a zoning amendment because lockers were viewed as “storage,” and this changed the land use to include a “storage facility.” Changing the zoning code required permissions and conversations with the local municipality who were reluctant to amend the regulation.

Figure 7. Lockers



Source: Friends of the State Street Family, 2024

Figure 8. CITYPAK Backpack



Source: CITYPAK, 2024

Hygiene Kits

Unhoused and precariously housed people are also in need of hygiene kits. Organizations that provide this service usually include products such as soap, deodorant, toothpaste, toothbrushes, razors, shaving cream, menstrual products, condoms, hand lotion, and Vaseline in their kits. Non-hygiene related products are sometimes also included and can include personal protective equipment, socks and medical products. This service can be provided in a mobile or stationary setting. With a mobile setting, products are loaded into a car and taken to where the unhoused population can be found. In a stationary setting, products are set up on a shelf or table in a room. Organizations distribute hygiene kits in different ways. Some organizations create prepacked bags with items. Other organizations emphasize the importance of people choosing their own items. Items are set up on a table with products for individuals to decide what they need. It assures that products go to people who need them and avoids waste.

Emergency service organizations receive products in a variety of ways. Donations are one of the ways organizations get products and even funding. Donations are received in the form of physical products, cash, or individuals purchasing items through an Amazon Wishlist. Some organizations use government grants to fund their operations and received money during the Covid-19 pandemic. They are unsure if they will continue to receive funding as those federal programs were not renewed. Some organizations rely on partnerships with manufacturers and distributors but this is not a reliable source for donations.

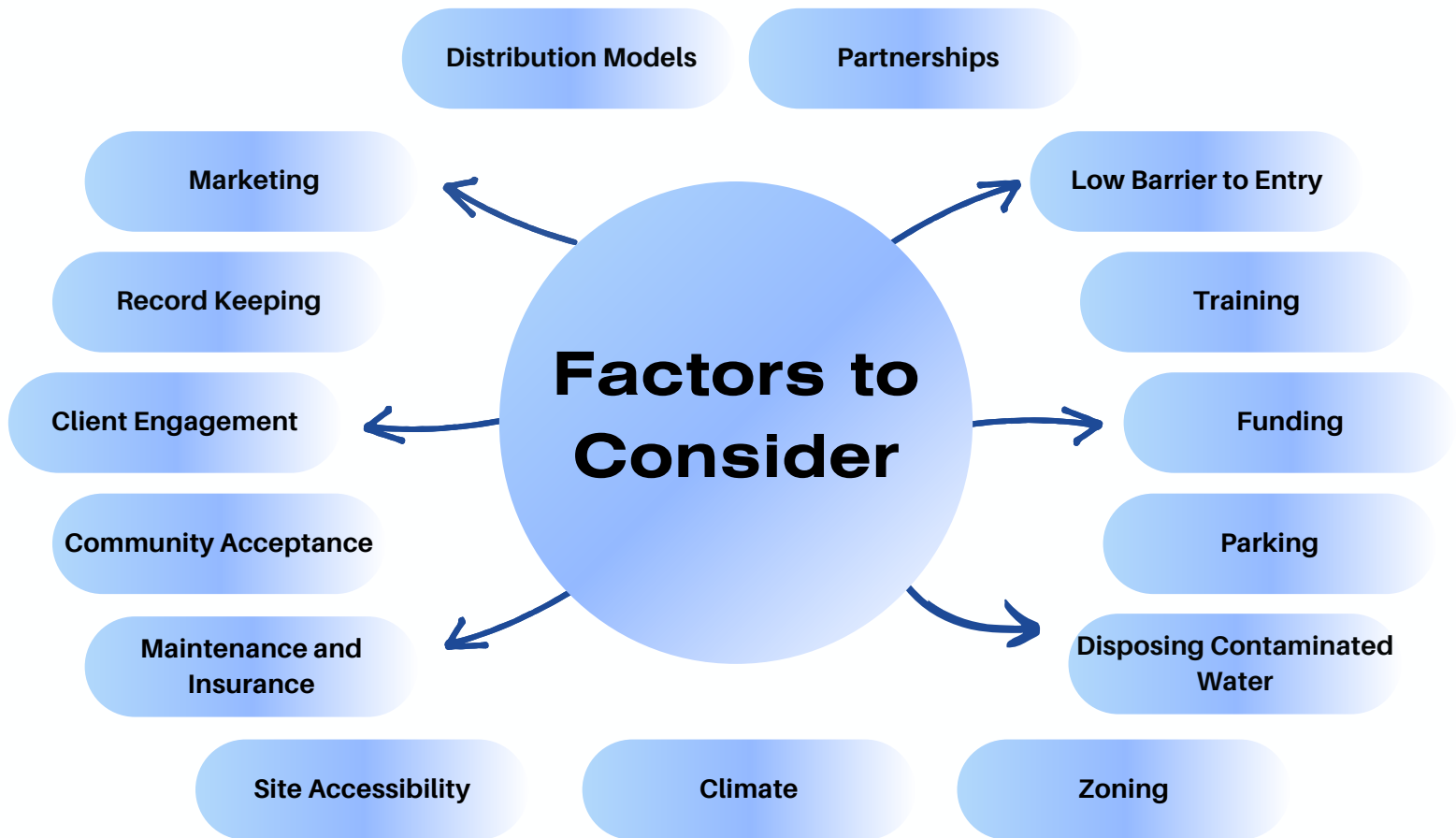
Figure 9. The Dignity Pack Project's hygiene product set up in the choice model



Factors to Consider

While each organization has different ways of meeting basic needs, there are common elements that each organization has to consider when setting up services. These include:

Figure 10. Factors to Consider



Distribution Models

We found that client choice approaches are popular among emergency service organizations. Providing clients with the ability to choose is important. The client choice approach invites individuals to select the items they need and helps reduce waste. The Dignity Pack Project saved 30% of their budget after implementing the client choice model, which they refer to as their “store model.” The Dignity Pack Project’s approach centers autonomy and dignity. Guests receive a draw string bag so that they can carry the personal hygiene items that they select. MESH follows a similar client choice approach at their MESH Café. During their dinner service, guests can select clothing and other personal items. This process is set up as a store.

Partnerships

Partnerships with other organizations allow for emergency service organization to have external support. Some organizations partner with national organizations that promote basic needs like laundry detergent and clothing for free to the emergency service organization. This external support relieves some of the financial burden on the organization. Partnerships are also important to receive donations for goods for hygiene kits, laundry detergent and other items. Some organizations partner with large corporations to receive these items. Some emergency service organizations partner with one another to provide multiple services at one time.

Mr. Bob's Under the Bridge worked with Friends of State Street Family to provide showers and distribute backpacks. Some emergency service organizations also work closely with local government officials. This creates trust and lets local officials learn more about the needs of the unhoused community but also makes it easier to park in public places and receive permits for mobile services.

Laundry Love

Laundry Love is a national organization that assists local organizations providing low or no-cost laundry services to those in need with administrative and structural support such as management and outreach advice, website set up and logos. Laundry Love also partners with Earth Breeze, an environmentally friendly industrial grade laundry detergent company to ship detergent free to their local partners.

Low Barrier to Entry

All the emergency service providers we spoke with had a low barrier to entry for their services. The emergency service organizations mentioned that if someone was physically present and in need of services then that was enough and they would not ask for documentation or identification. They would not turn people away who requested assistance.

Training

Some organizations mentioned de-escalation, mental health and first aid training as common requirements they provide and/or require for staff and volunteers. De-escalation training is important so that a participant does not harm themselves, staff, or each other. For example, MESH has safety officers at the welcome intake center who create a safe environment and use de-escalation strategies as necessary. At all times, there is one safety officer with a security certification. As part of their staff training, some organizations also emphasize creating awareness through the use of language ("unhoused" vs. "homeless") to create empathy and dignity for clients being serviced.

Funding

Funding is a challenge for all of the organizations interviewed. Most organizations use a mixture of funding sources. Some received funding through the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) or American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). This funding has since ended or been reduced which significantly impacts the services organizations can provide. Others receive money from grants. Still others receive cash and goods donations from other organizations, people in the community, and corporations. Some created an Amazon Wishlist. Additionally, if an organization is not a 501(c)(3) then funding is difficult to receive.

The Dignity Pack Project received funding through the 2020 Ingenuity Fund as part of the William H. Gates Sr. Institute for Population and Reproductive Health (formerly known as the Bill and Melinda Gates Institute) and Bayer program "120 under 40: New Generation of Family Planning Leader." This fund supplied most of the products and supplies needed for the project as it was purchased in bulk from stores such as Costco. Additionally, a local university's clubs provided donations to the project. The Dignity Pack Project found it difficult to receive funding because they were not a 501(c)(3) and believed the project was a stopgap measure and not a long-term solution for providing the unhoused with basic hygiene needs. Montclair Emergency Services for Hope (M.E.S.H) uses an Amazon Wishlist to request products when they are running low. M.E.S.H. accepts limited clothing donations to focus on providing new products to the unhoused population recognizing the importance of dignity. Additionally, there is not enough manpower to sort through clothing donations.

Parking

Parking regulations are a constant issue for mobile services. Mobile services often end up receiving tickets when they are unable to find spaces to park. Obtaining permits for mobile services can be time-consuming and cost money. Some emergency service organizations have a good relationship with city government and are able to easily receive permits to park in public places. Parking on private property to provide mobile showers or laundry services makes providing these services easier. Permits may not be needed if the private property owner agrees to the use of their property for emergency service organizations to provide basic needs such as showers or laundry and they have the proper physical infrastructure.

Disposing Contaminated Water

Discarding wastewater in the form of gray water and black water for laundry and shower services is another issue to consider. Wastewater is defined as used water that has been used by a home, business, or industrial process. Graywater is defined as used water without fecal contamination from sinks, baths, washing machines, etc. Black water is defined as used water containing chemicals and fecal excrement. Regulations discarding these types of waste vary across states. Lighter Loads ATX was able to park their vehicle on the property of the local YMCA and utilize their storm drains to dispose of grey water. They disposed of black water at the local garbage dump.

Zoning

Some emergency service organizations required zoning amendments to add storage to their property. By adding lockers, they were deemed a “storage facility,” and needed approval from the zoning board to change the land use. Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship ran into problems with zoning when adding storage lockers onto their property for unhoused individuals. The Church eventually worked with the municipality for a resolution that included having a staff member available via phone if any issues were to arise with locker use.

Weather

Emergency service organizations that provide shower services need to be mindful of the weather. Shower mobile services are more difficult to provide in colder months as it is difficult to keep people warm after their showers. In colder months it can also be difficult to sanitize and clean the units and keep people warm outside while they wait to wash up. Lighter Loads ATX used a tankless water heater to provide hot showers and heated and air conditioned mobile shower units.

Accessibility

Basic needs such as laundry, shower, storage and hygiene kits need to be accessible to the unhoused and precariously housed populations. Whether the services are mobile or in a stationary location, these services should be accessible via public transit or walking. Services should also be accessible to those who have disabilities. At the Dignity Summit held by Archangel Raphael’s Mission, Shower Power, an emergency service organization described the popularity of their shower unit that was equipped with a ramp for those who used wheelchairs or for those who are not able to walk up steps.

Maintenance and Insurance

Our interview with Lighter Loads ATX highlights the importance of regular maintenance and insurance for mobile shower and laundry units. Lighter Loads ATX allocated an annual expenditure of \$7,000 specifically for vehicle insurance and coverage for their board members. As they routinely set up the mobile unit at two YMCA locations, liability insurance was mandatory to park at these sites. Insurance was also mandated by the Austin Board of Health.

Community Acceptance

Community acceptance is important when providing basic needs services. Organizations such as M.E.S.H in Montclair report positive support from the community. M.E.S.H receives support from the police department, which actively seeks to enhance its community outreach and strengthen its relationship with local organizations. Lack of community acceptance can hinder progress and create barriers to effective collaboration and cooperation. Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship provided lockers on their property with the approval of the City Planning and Zoning Board. The initial decision granted 24/7-hour access to the lockers (Hindi, 2018). Community members appealed this decision because they believed the lockers would compromise the neighborhood's safety. After a legal battle, the Fellowship was allowed to place the lockers on their property with input from the City on how the program would be managed. In addition, Friends of the State Street family encountered challenges partnering with businesses for their locker program because of a lack of public acceptance.

Client Engagement

Feedback from clients has been critical to service delivery. The Dignity Pack Project continually and systematically collects feedback and adjusts service delivery including products accordingly. They keep notes of heavily requested products which helps save money and resources. Treating the unhoused and precariously housed population with dignity is also important. Lighter Loads ATX offers their services in a block party event, where people can eat food, do their laundry, take a shower, and access other services in a communal social setting. Likewise, Montclair Emergency Services for Hope's dinner service is treated as a gathering where birthdays are celebrated and people are valued.

Record Keeping

Many emergency service organizations have an intake process and record client information. Key Campus is required to collect some information from clients because it receives federal funding through the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Record keeping is also important when applying for grant money to demonstrate that there is a need for the services that are being offered.

Marketing

Information about services is often spread through word of mouth. The use of social media is beneficial for collaborating with emergency service organizations to create collaborative events that offer multiple services. The Dignity Pack Project uses word of mouth to figure out when and where to set up their mobile unit. Archangel Raphael's Mission recently held a Dignity Summit and collaborated with multiple emergency service organizations to organize a panel and mixer event to discuss and share ideas and findings.

Recommendations

1. Implement a pilot/demonstration project

Pilot projects can demonstrate the future success of a project and provide a strong rationale for funding for a permanent project. The Dignity Pack Project began in response to the rapidly evolving Covid-19 pandemic before gaining additional funding and support.

2. Create Low Barrier to Entry Services

Locate services in central locations that are accessible by walking or public transit. Remove the need to provide documentation or identification. Many unhoused individuals do not have government issued documents.

3. Create an Accessible Directory for Basic Needs Services

Create a list of all of the emergency services in the community and surrounding communities. This list should be accessible and available online, printed and posted in common spaces like the library, and handed out by other service providers. This list should be available in multiple languages (See Appendix).

4. Focus on One Basic Need at a Time

Focus energy, funding, and personnel on one service and project to leave room for problem solving, quality care, and allocation of resources.

5. Partner with Local Educational Institutions

Create partnerships between vocational schools, fraternities and sororities, and higher education departments to leverage volunteer, learning, and consulting opportunities for students. Students are at times required to volunteer. Using this need for service hours can create lasting partnerships between organizations and institutions. For example, vocational beauty schools can donate their time to emergency service organizations by providing beauty services that will help students practice their skills but also provide the unhoused population with haircuts. In another example, accept volunteers from student-led organizations to fundraise for mobile shower units or involve engineering students to create mobile shower units as part of their final project.

Conclusion

The purpose of this report is to share innovative and creative ways that emergency service organizations across the nation are providing basic needs such as showers, laundry services, storage and hygiene kits for people who are unhoused. While the report describes how basic needs are met, we also highlight that what makes many of these programs so successful is that they bring agency, empathy and kindness when providing services. Organizations like Lighter Loads ATX emphasized creating a communal atmosphere and Friends of State Street Family referred to the unhoused as “friends.” At the M.E.S.H Café, everyone is welcome and birthdays are celebrated. Our report also highlighted that many emergency service organizations did not work alone in providing basic needs. They were supported by and partnered with other organizations. They also required assistance from government in the form of permits, zoning amendments, and funding. Lastly, our research shows that the emergency service organizations we interviewed do not find their services to be a long-term or final solution but a stop-gap measure. Further research could focus on long-term solutions and implementation of such programs.

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Appendix

List of national organizations providing one or more basic needs such as showers, haircuts, laundry, storage and hygiene kits. This list is not inclusive of all the organizations that provide basic needs services in the US.

| Organization | Basic Needs Service | City, State |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| American Beauty Institute | Haircuts | San Diego, California |
| Archangel Raphael's Mission (ARM) | Showers and Haircuts | New Brunswick, New Jersey |
| Backpack Barber Foundation | Haircuts | Fort Lauderdale, Florida |
| Beauty 2 The Streetz | Showers and Beauty Services | Los Angeles, California |
| Chrysalis | Hygiene Kits and Career Services | Los Angeles, California |
| Clean the World Foundation | Showers and Hygiene Kits | Orlando, Florida |
| Dignity Pack Project | Hygiene kits | Atlanta, Georgia |
| Empowering Cuts | Haircuts | Nationwide |
| Episcopal Diocese of San Diego- Showers of Blessings | Showers | San Diego, California |
| Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship | Lockers | Fort Collins, Colorado |
| Friends of State Street Family | Lockers | Madison, Wisconsin |
| Haircuts for those in need | Haircuts | Buffalo, New York |
| Hope Vibes | Showers and Laundry | Harrisburg, North Carolina |
| Key Campus | Showers, Storage | Phoenix, Arizona |
| Hygiene 4 All | Showers and Hygiene Kits | Portland, Oregon |
| Laundry Love (Christ Church New Brunswick) | Laundry | New Brunswick, New Jersey |
| CityPAK | Backpacks | Nationwide |

| | | |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Love beyond walls | Hand Washing | College Park, Georgia |
| Montclair Emergency Services for Hope (M.E.S.H) | Hygiene kits and Laundry | Montclair, New Jersey |
| Mr. Bobs Under the Bridge | Showers | Milwaukee, Wisconsin |
| New York Common Pantry | Haircuts, Showers, Laundry | New York, New York |
| Project Beauty Share | Hygiene Kits | Spokane, Washington |
| R3 (Real Talk. Real Action. Real Results) -Laundry Matters | Laundry | Charleston, South Carolina |
| Shower Power | Showers | Ridgewood, New York |
| Shower Up | Showers | Springhill, Tennessee |
| The H.O.P.E. Lockers | Laundry | Murray, Utah |
| The Kind Cut | Haircuts | Los Angeles, California |
| The Laundry Stop | Laundry | Nashville, Tennessee |
| The Laundry Truck LA | Laundry | Los Angeles, California |
| The Red Chair Project | Haircuts | Minneapolis, Minnesota |
| The Shower of Hope | Showers | Los Angeles, California |
| Think Dignity- Transitional Storage Center | Storage | San Diego, California |
| Union County Fresh Start | Shower and Laundry | Elizabeth, New Jersey |
| Uplift All Foundation | Laundry and Hygiene Kits | Stockton, California |
| Vinny's Lockers | Lockers | Madison, Wisconsin |