

Executive Summary of the Siouxland Street Project:

Interviewing poor people who spend their time in public spaces

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Purpose: To better understand the characteristics and explore experiences of homeless and very poor people that spend the majority of their time in public places in Sioux City.

Design: Semi-structured confidential interviews consisting of 37 quantitative and 23 open-ended questions conducted from February 26-March 1, 2016. Ten volunteers, all with human services experience and training, interviewed 100 people. Measures to reduce duplication resulted in 97 usable interviews. The Wilbur Aalfs Library was the center for operations. About 50% (n=49) of the total participant sample was collected at the library. Other locations were the Warming Shelter (32), Gospel Mission (8), skywalks (2), sidewalks near bus stations (4), and Hard Rock Casino (2).

Findings

- **Demographics:** Majority of participants were Native American (47.4%) and male (71%). Average age was 43.94. (*Table with more detail found on reverse.*)
- **Desire to change situation:** 68.4% wanted to change their current situation. Primary changes desired were housing, employment, stop using alcohol or drugs, improve relationships with family and friends, and increase stability in their lives.
- **Housing status and sleeping and daytime locations:** 10 people were housed, 74 were in shelters (primarily Warming Shelter), 6 with family or friends, and 7 on the street, under a bridge, or in other public spaces.
 - 74% were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with where they slept.
 - 72% said it was easy or somewhat easy to find a place to sleep.
 - 36% spent 1-6 hours looking for a place to sleep; 19.7% spent more than 6 hours looking.
 - Warming Shelter was warm, caring, helpful, open to all, but also crowded, dirty, and unsafe, particularly because those who are high or intoxicated are allowed to stay there. Many were worried about what would happen when the Warming Shelter closed for the year.
 - Gospel Mission was too strict and participants felt disrespected.
 - 62% said where they spent the day met their needs. Typical routine: 8 am – leave shelter, go to bus station; 9 am – go to Wilbur Aalfs Library; 11:30 am – lunch at Gospel Mission; afternoon – Library; 4 pm – check in at Warming Shelter. 16% spent the day looking for work.
 - Decent quality, affordable housing extremely limited, and public housing assistance process complex, onerous, and out of financial reach for many.
- **Services desired:**

69.5% - Transportation	46.4% - Medical/health insurance
64.9% - Funding deposits/financial assistance	45.8% - Mental health
62.9% - Housing/rental	36.5% - Substance abuse/addiction
59.4% - Job training or educational advancement	24.7% - Parenting
- **Work and financial status.** 21 were employed.
 - Weekly income: 36 had \$0, 17 had \$1-50, and 14 had \$51-150. 29 had \$151-351+.
 - Sources of income (other than paid labor): Family and friends, SNAP and EBT benefits, recycling, tribal funds, selling plasma. 10 panhandled.
 - Employment barriers: Transportation, disability, mental health/substance abuse issues, racism, criminal history, being homeless.

- Mental Health/Substance Abuse Services:
 - 34.4% had a mental health diagnosis; 24.7% were involved with services; 59.8% could adequately access services, 7.2% could sometimes access services, and 19.6% could not.
 - 21.6% said substance abuse interfered with daily life; 74% were not involved with substance abuse services; 15.6% were, and 6.3% said they sometimes were; 68.8% could access services, 13.5% could not, and 9.4% could sometimes. Detox services are strongly needed.
 - Respondents desired street outreach services for both mental health and substance abuse services and support in navigating complicated systems.
- Arrest experiences: 85.4% had been arrested at least one time. 19.8% had been arrested in last 30 days; 43.2% had not had an arrest in more than one year. 34% had last been arrested for public intoxication.
 - 44.2% were bothered a lot by arrest, and 28.4% were bothered a little or not at all.
 - Most said the arrest experience went “okay,” with 11 feeling disrespected and 7 felt they were “roughed up.”
- Treatment from downtown Sioux City businesses: 46.9% felt treated well or pretty well. 28.1% felt treated badly.
 - The Library, Walgreens, and Subway were noted as friendly.
 - There are “rules” to being homeless and being accepted in the downtown, such as “not looking homeless.” Others avoided downtown altogether.
 - 26 people felt they were “looked down on” and ten had been “told to leave.” Expressed frustration that there was so much money in the downtown area, and little concern for homeless people.
 - Several mentioned being treated badly because of their race, or because they were LGBTQ.

SSP Participant Demographic Data

Variable	n	%
Age – Mean: 43.94, ±SD 10.99, Range 18-65	96	
18-29	13	13.5%
30-39	16	16.7%
40-49	35	36.5%
50-59	26	27.1%
60-65	6	6.3%
Sex	97	
Male	69	71.1%
Female	26	26.8%
Transgender	1	1.0%
Other	1	1.0%
Ethnicity	96	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	46	47.4%
White/Caucasian	29	29.9%
African American/Black	11	11.3%
Hispanic/Latino	5	5.2%
Multiracial/Other	5	5.2%
Served in Military	96	
No	84	86.5%
Yes	13	13.5%

Recommendations from Participants:

- Create affordable and accessible housing, perhaps in vacant floors of downtown buildings.
- Respect, communicate with, and better understand homeless and very poor people.
- Establish a year-round shelter with services AND structure. This is especially important given the recent increase in homeless people in Sioux City. Consider turning the YMCA into a shelter with day time hours and one-stop shopping for education, job training, and other services.
- Increase social work outreach services to people on streets and in public spaces. Provide bus passes.
- Change public intoxication laws; Have a detox center plus a continuum of related sobriety support services, including sober housing.
- Support living wage job creation and job readiness/job finding services.
- Address racism, and discrimination toward LGBTQ people.
- Decrease talk, increase action; Increase awareness of homeless and poor people as people.

“(The City should) reconsider their thought process; get an understanding of what it’s like to be homeless. They pour so much money into other things. If they put more money into homeless work, they wouldn’t turn to so many drugs, etc. Pay more attention to that, and then that would benefit the city in the end. Deal with the conditions that lead to homelessness so that you can prevent it. Be more positive about what we (homeless people) can do. Don’t criticize so much. Get to know the people. Don’t judge them. Find what’s right with them.” SSP Interview Participant
