

Caleb Klima
Rebecca McGuire
Angie Hanson

Homelessness in Madison:

The Correlation between Collective Perception and Relief Administration

Try this thought experiment. Imagine you worked for eight hours, and then you had to help a relative cut their lawn. At the end of the day you find yourself tired and hungry. Where do you go? For most individuals they will answer that they will go home for rest and recovery. Now imagine that you have no home to find repose, now what do you do? Unfortunately there are many individuals who do not own or rent a home. Shelter is a basic human need; often we can forget the importance our homes means to us, unless it is taken away. In this paper we will discuss the homeless problem in Madison, WI. Specifically we will look at how the aid offered by the city (both private and public) is directly related to the perception individuals have. First we will briefly discuss the definition of homelessness as well as the broad and diverse causes. Next we will connect perception to aid availability through previous academic research. After the connection is made apparent we will look at the collective Madison perception by analyzing individual perceptions we have obtained through personal interviews, participate observations, and a survey. Finally we will tie all of our individual perceptions together to discuss how they lead to the aid offered by Madison. Aid that is reliant on results, increasing funds, and

maintaining basic human needs, which we will show is less effective than an aid style of one-on-one case management.

Homelessness is difficult to define. It is associated with many factors, none of which will necessarily lead to homelessness. According to the Encyclopedia of Psychology, homelessness is defined as people without a permanent address. This group is further subdivided into three categories: displaced people, individuals living in a home where they are not the primary tenant; sheltered people, individuals living in a semi-institutional setting; and street people, individuals living in public domains not designated for housing. There are other individuals that do not fit into the above categories, who may own or rent a home, but remain at a high risk for becoming homeless (Ginzer, 2000).

The contributing factors that push or pull individuals toward a state of homelessness are diverse and complex. However, these factors can be broadly categorized into four groups, institutional disaffiliation, human capital deficiencies, personal disabilities, and acculturation to the "homeless lifestyle." Institutional disaffiliation refers to the weakening of an individual's bond to conventional society, including individuals who are socially withdrawn, never married, have a poor work record, and have poor or few family relations. Human capital deficiencies are individuals who lack education and training due to a lack of local social educational structures. Personal disabilities include individuals who have various physical and mental health conditions, as well as drug addictions that restrict job opportunities and increase poverty. Finally, acculturation is the process of acquiring the

knowledge, values, and friendships required for life within a society. For our purpose acculturation refers to individuals who are pulled toward a homeless lifestyle and find it difficult to leave (Piliavin et. al, 1996). These categories are personal factors that are affected by both the individual's life choice and behaviors, and the surrounding collective societal structure. Inadequacies in social infrastructure increase the likelihood of losing a home or becoming socially marginalized. Examples include a lack of low-income housing, a lack of living wage jobs, and a lack of affordable and quality education. In effect then there are two broad types of perceptions of homelessness causality, individual and structural. However, these two perceptions are not mutually exclusive.

Structural perception of homelessness further divides into the belief homelessness is an experience that can yield societal rehabilitation or not. Emergency shelters and permanent assisted housing fall under the categories of aid that do not assume rehabilitation is possible for those experiencing homelessness. They are solely meeting their basic human needs. Rehabilitation programs, mental health services and transitional housing assume that homelessness can be overcome or improved upon by actions those experiencing homelessness can take personally. Such programs teach pertinent skills and delve into life problems that can be alleviated (Ginzer, 2000).

In their article "Are the Homeless to Blame? A Test of Two Theories," Barrett Lee and David Lewis discuss the link between perception and the willingness of individuals to offer help. If people perceive homelessness to be caused by structural

ineffectiveness then they will be more likely to offer help, in many different forms; as opposed to those who believe homelessness is caused by individual traits who will be less likely to offer help (Lee and Lewis, 1992). But what causes people to perceive homeless in various forms? According to the author's, personal status such as gender, political orientation, and party affiliation significantly influence such causal beliefs. The single strongest determinate is the perceived presence of or exposure to homeless people in one's own community (Lee and Lewis, 1992). This coincides with the research conducted by Tom Knecht and Lisa Martinez in their article "Humanizing the Homeless: Does contact erode stereotypes?" In the article they tested the hypothesis created by Gordon Allport in his 1954 book, The Nature of Prejudice, arguing simply that getting to know someone presumed to be different can spark the realization that they are "just like me," and it breaks down the idea of "other." Knecht and Martinez conducted a longitude survey looking at student's perception of homeless before and after they volunteered to help the homeless. The results showed that after contact with the homeless they were more likely to change their perception toward societal cause, leading them to be more willing to offer help and support aid.

In the article "Homelessness in the United States: Assessing Changes in Prevalence and Public Opinion, 1993-2001" Tompsett et. al further discuss additional trends of characteristics that effect perception, including whether an individual is female or male, young or old, more educated or less, more liberal or more conservative, and their ethnic background. These characteristics were found to have an impact on the opinions held by such groups of people and the researchers

were thus able to lump them all together into broad categories. For example the researchers found that “older people were less likely to support increased federal spending on homelessness in 1993-1994,” and “female respondents being more concerned about homelessness and having more compassionate views towards homeless people demonstrate less stereotyped views of homeless people” (Tompsett et. al, 2006). The article also made a link between the economies health and people’s perception of homelessness as a social concern. When the economy is doing poorly people may be less supportive of programs to help the homeless and prioritize other social concerns such as security. The authors admitted that public perception of homelessness can and does alter over time with new or different factors (Tompsett et. al, 2006).

From these articles discussed above we see there is definite link between perception and the willingness to offer or support aid. How has this worked on the national scale? Before the 1980’s the federal government took most responsibility over the poverty issue, creating many social welfare programs. The collective perception of the nation, or at the very least the majority perception, was of empathy and support for poverty relief (Wolch, 1993). Deinstitutionalization, a neoconservative idea, began in the 1960’s and attempted to improve treatment within services, humanizing treatment facilities by creating community run programs rather than large facilities built to house masses. The government took a new perspective, a belief in non-governmental action in social problems such as poverty and homelessness, with the election of Ronald Regan and the emerging dominance of neo-conservatism in the federal arena (Wolch, 1993). Many social

welfare programs were either cut or heavily underfunded and by the 1990's America's flirtation with poverty relief was almost completely dead. As the perceived responsibility for poverty welfare shifted away from the federal government, more of the burden was placed on states and communities (Wolch, 1993), communities such as Madison, Wisconsin.

With the retrenchment of federal government involvement in poverty relief the responsibility of aid fell to individual communities. In 1997, under pressure from its citizens, the city of Madison began to take a leading role in homelessness relief. The community developed its own unique aid programs that developed out of the city's collective perception. Before we analyze Madison's perception of homelessness and its relation to aid let us get a better understanding of the state of homelessness in Madison. In 1997, the first year the city of Madison collected and analyzed homeless statistics, there were 8,554 individuals who stayed at least one night at a shelter or were turned away. By 2007 that number dropped to 6,410 individuals. Of the homeless served in 2007 45% were single men, 38% were families with children, 15% were single women, 1% were unaccompanied minors, and less than 1% were couples. 70% of individuals who stayed in a shelter described themselves as non-white, African-American being the largest group. Most of the populations have been in Madison area for less than one year, including 55% of individuals in families and 51% of single men (2007 Annual Report on Homelessness in Madison).

To understand the City of Madison's perception of homelessness we conducted several interviews with people who are familiar with homelessness in Madison, participated in volunteer work, and conducted a student survey in classes at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

By far the largest portion of our research was interviewing. To prepare we first developed interview questions for particular groups of people, and had these questions critiqued and reviewed by our professor. The groups were: homeless aid workers, police officers, community members, and a specific set of questions for a University of Wisconsin-Madison professor. In the meantime we contacted our potential interviewees, where we introduced ourselves, explained our project to them; including the goals of the project and asked them if they would be willing to do an interview with us.

We understood that in-depth interviewing would bring the greatest potential for obtaining information about the inner workings of an individual's action and more importantly their perception of homelessness. We knew going into this process that there were obvious limits to interviewing. For example, even though our questions were thoroughly thought out with the intention of getting the information we were seeking, we acknowledged the fact that on any particular question the subject may decide to exclude pertinent information for personal reasons or otherwise. To marginalize this problem we did not give questions to the interviewees before hand, all our questions were framed to be non-offensive and allow for flexibility in their responses and follow up questions.

All interviews were conducted between mid-November and early December 2009. All interviews were in person, and all but one (Karla Jameson), were conducted by one group member asking questions and taking down notes. The only difference to the interview with Karla Jameson was that there were two group members present.

In addition to this data we developed a student survey to better understand a generalized student-body perception of homelessness. We devised questions highlighting factors we believed would indicate specific perceptions about who the homeless are, what the causations of homelessness are, who should administer homeless programs, and to understand their experiences and interactions with the homeless are. The survey also gathered demographics about the surveyors including, gender, year in school, and if they were from urban, suburban, or rural areas. Next we tested how clear our questions were using our classmates in Geography 565 as a test group. The test group gave us feedback in evaluating its clarity. With this information we reorganized our survey. Finally, we obtained permission from University of Wisconsin-Madison professors to hand out surveys ten minutes before class and collect them during class. Before handing out the surveys we made it clear what the survey was for and that participation was completely voluntary. We handed out survey in class rather than sending out an online survey because we knew it would yield a higher response rate. In total we administered 124 surveys.

Finally we volunteered for various homeless aid organizations, which we used as a form of participate observation. By forging common relationships, either for mutual beneficiation or personal, with the subjects, evoking basic human needs of sociability, much information that otherwise may have been overlooked, ignored, or never seen can be acquired. In the article “Ethnography and Fieldwork” from Questioning Geography circa 2005, Garth Myers looks specifically at this method in his research. His article sought to signify the importance in human geographic fieldwork of relationships. For Myers a relationship in his work is not just about the utility he can drag out of them. Instead relationships are much more, useful not just for the researcher. As Myers points out, “Sharing our lives with friends and walking around with our eyes open can teach us a world of things about places, in an incidental and yet profound way.” (pg. 236). Often times there can be mutually beneficial relationships when conducting fieldwork, both parties can obtain what they want (and not in just materialistic needs and wants). Myers research took him to Africa where he sought to understand urban processes. Myers entered a town with his own conceptualized ideas of urban processes, which Myers understands can lead to “blindness” and important information may seep through. Myers gave examples of times when his common relationships with the people of the towns lead him to a greater understanding than his actual fieldwork could produce. Collaboration with other people can have substantial effects. Myer’s idea of collaboration in fieldwork is not unique, but it points out the importance in western scientific approach to, if I may, think outside the box. Especially in cases of human studies, researchers cannot expect to completely isolate themselves from their research and expect positive results. Instead Myers would argue that researchers must become immersed in the area

they study and instead of lowering objectivity, somehow threatening the research, it would lead to a better understanding of the processes sought. For our project volunteerism was our way of “hanging out” and obtain vital information that otherwise we could overlook. Specifically at least one group member volunteered at the Porchlight kitchen program, Grace Church diner program for the men’s shelter, and Grace Church food pantry program. Other than doing the work that the volunteer positioned entailed the group member who volunteered took mental notes of how the aid was administered, how the homeless reacted and interacted with each other and the aid workers, and the overall atmosphere. Afterwards the group member wrote their mental notes down on a hard copy for later analysis.

Now that we have gone over how we gathered information let us move onto what we gathered. To understand the collective Madison perspective on homelessness, which will affect the aid offered, we looked at individual perspectives of particular community members, which added together form the collective whole. Each community member shares space. Each community member has a role in addressing the homeless issue. Their perspective affects their role and their interactions within their role affect their perspective. In order for us to best convey this information our story will gather our research as individual voices into “one room, at one table, at one time, for an open dialogue on the homelessness issues.” Our table then consists of aid workers, students, individuals experiencing homelessness, a University of Wisconsin professor, police officers, and other community members. Members have an equal time to share their role and perspective on the homelessness issue. Our role is that of moderator, over viewing, analyzing, and integrating the individual voices with previous research. Our dialogue will

show how the collective perspective has played a part in shaping the aid offered by the City of Madison.

First to speak at our table is Porchlight Inc. Porchlight makes a logical introduction to the state of Homelessness and aid in Madison. ‘It is the largest provider of housing for the homeless in Dane County’ (Karla Jameson¹, Personal Interview, 20 November 2009). Karla Jameson is the director of services and supervises housing, Safe Haven, writes grants and develops programs. She works part-time at Porchlight, leaving her job to three days a week. As a teenager, she was introduced to the problem of Homelessness in a great revelation. On a trip to a city in High School she was told not to talk to anyone on the street. When a man asked her for money she ignored him as she had been told. Another person on the street gave the man money and he bought food with it. This showed her first hand that all this man wanted was an innocent, basic human need. From there Karla knew she wanted to help and she studied social work in college, interned at the men’s shelter in Madison, became a social worker within the Transitional Housing Initiative and moved on to her role in Porchlight when THI and the men’s shelter integrated in 2003. Homelessness has been a consistent part of Karla’s adult life, and she was led to it by realizing that she had misjudged the population. This reaction is one caused by contact, with interaction Karla came to better understanding the who the homeless are and what they need. Karla cares, but she acknowledges that, “Porchlight is nothing fancy, just a place to sleep”.

Porchlight is not concerned with luxury, as spending on each individual increase, available funding for more shelters decreases. As of November 2009 150 individuals and

¹ For Karl Jameson Interview Questions, see Appendix F

families are on the waiting list for receiving a home. There are many ways to house and aid homeless and Porchlight works to create a diverse group of programs. Four emergency night shelters and one day shelter, Hospitality House, offer emergency aid. Hospitality House also provides haircuts and basic hygiene products. Safe Haven is a program for mentally ill individuals, currently fourteen, is open all day, and has in-house support services and disability. The bulk of Porchlight's operation is the 250 housing units around Madison for single individuals and families. These facilities each have one case manager and receive rent from tenants. In addition, Dwelling Intervention Grants and Sustenance (DIGS) is an eviction prevention program. There are two new housing facilities in the works currently, one for Veterans and two more housing units for single men. Veterans are easier to take care of since there is assistance available from the veteran's hospital for substance abuse and mental health problems. The housing first idea is another project that Porchlight hopes to introduce to the area. It started in NYC and offers housing and stability, then works to rectify illnesses and obtain employment. Instead of finding temporary shelter for homeless individuals, while trying to put them through support services, housing first gives them decent housing immediately. This highlights the idea that having an insecure environment is a stress on the individual.

As much as Porchlight sees the need for more housing and projects, they also have to battle with placement of their programs. Each of the new units in progress are in buildings that were previously used for social service. It helps that Porchlight has a good reputation in the area and offers case management, which demonstrates commitment. Still individuals commonly argue that they have enough low-income people in their neighborhood and do not need more. This is one of the most frequent "Not in my

Backyard statements.” Porchlight commonly sees people react in fear, which confines them into the same areas where they are welcome or not noticed and rent is cheaper. Some of these neighborhoods are heavily involved in crime and drugs at the moment. These areas are highly problematic for recovering addicts. Karla hopes to create shelters in other areas, but money is as big a limit as the resident resistance is.

Budget cuts due to economic turbulence can endanger the existing programs at Porchlight. Though they avoided moving backwards, it is largely due to unexpectedly large donations from the general population. Since Porchlight is a non-profit organization, they constantly need to seek further funds just to maintain what they already have, let alone what they seek to provide. As a supervisor Karla is given less opportunity to interact with residents and the people she works to help, and spends more time obtaining grants and supervising.

While residents are dwelling in permanent housing volunteers and workers are able to monitor medications and see when something is wrong, another benefit to structured residence. However, the drop-in men’s shelter on Washington Ave, individuals come and go, which has led to excessive rules and a “tough love” strategy. The drop-in men’s shelter is primarily overseen by one manager and occasionally by regular groups of volunteers that have been involved with the shelter for years. The volunteers are not formally trained. Technically the only things that can get someone kicked out of the shelter for a night are violence, substance use, and drunken behavior. Of these only violence generally results in a ban from the shelter. Those who get kicked out are the ones to complain, most who use the shelter are grateful though. Karla fields complaints from the homeless as best she can and recently installed cameras as a way of

providing objective evidence to support or dispute complaints. Porchlight obtains periodic surveys to evaluate the level of satisfaction from those staying in the shelter.

According to Steve Schooler, the executive director of Porchlight, there is an 85% satisfaction rate from such evaluations. It is just that the shelter houses 100 men a night and is unable to make everyone happy. Serious complaints are taken in writing and assessed. Schooler was first involved with homelessness as a volunteer at the men's shelter and he readily accepted his current position. Though this work he learned, "what the human spirit can do with an opportunity combined with [a desire] to change and someone who cares (Steve Schooler², Personal Interview, November 24)." Schooler is primarily responsible for funding Porchlight. Though this is a stressful responsibility, Schooler remains proud of the operation, specifically Safe Haven and Porchlight Products. Porchlight Products provides work for its residents in their kitchen where they use local ingredients. In this way the residents, formally homeless individuals, are given responsibility and a way to support themselves as a step toward reintegration into society. Still Schooler wants more for Porchlight, more support services in particular that fit right in with the shelters. At the moment support services come from outside, but ideally Porchlight would house it all. In the end, Schooler's soft spot for the homeless is evident in his desire to create more support for the homeless. Schooler believes the largest misconception is that "mental illness, leads to violence and thus mentally ill are not worthy of help, this myth has gotten worse over the years (Steve Schooler, Personal Interview, November 24, 2009)."

² For interview questions see Appendix G

Next to speak is another aid worker, a female who works at the Y.W.C.A.³ as a case manager. The shelter is a family shelter, which requires that families looking for services must have at least one child under 18 years old or at least one child enrolled in Madison Public Schools. It is not a shelter for single adults. She has been in this position since last January and sees homelessness as a complex issue. To understand homelessness she believes people need a greater understanding of poverty and racism etc. Additionally people need an understanding of how the capitalist system works; how and why people are driven into particular situations under the capitalist economy. She does not see homelessness as an individual problem but rather as a social problem. The Y.W.C.A. motto is *Empowering Women, Eliminating Racism*; this is one way she believes society can help in solving social issues such as homelessness. As case manager she first interviews the homeless to discuss their needs. She next looks to see if their basic needs are met, such as food and clothing. Then she looks to help them obtain transportation needs, bus passes, medical care, information services, information on how to write a resume or getting in touch with W2-services. Another important part of her job is referrals. Most of the referrals are for social services including referrals for housing or into housing programs such as *Rapid Rehousing*. At the shelter people experiencing homelessness are free to use the laundry facilities, free to take the donated foods in the lobby, and free to take from the open food pantry. Her observations within the shelter suggest that the residents often provide help to each other and even hold Holiday dinners.

³ For interview questions see Appendix A

However, people in the shelter are also often competing for the same limited services so sometimes there is tension among the residents.

As we move around the table we meet Professor Susan Webster, a University of Wisconsin-Madison professor who has no shortage of knowledge of the Madison homeless population. That's because Professor Webster spent five years teaching a class in the Social-work department on the subject, titled Homelessness: A Service Learning Class. The origins of the class shed some light on some student's perception of homelessness. Around 1995 there were some homeless individuals sleeping near library mall on heating grates. The university administration and police decided to prohibit this activity from occurring and forced them off campus property. Some students heard of the University's policy and decided to protest in favor of the homeless. The students held a sit-in at the Chancellors office. They were eventually removed by the police and punished with volunteer work. The students did not give in however. After further dialogues between the students and the administration the University decided that they still could not allow the homeless to sleep on their property but they did decide to fund a course about homelessness and also fund an outreach worker for the campus region for three years. The course continued on after the three years expired because it was picked up by the Social-work Department. The class helped students understand the complexity of the homeless situation. To help facilitate students' understanding the course was a service learning class, which meant that each student was assigned to do 30-60 hours of volunteer work with any organization involved with homelessness relief. The volunteer work was pivotal for altering student's perception of homelessness and it was always the student's favorite aspect of the class. Professor Webster taught many eager young

students who were very interested in being part of the solution to the homelessness problem in Madison, however, while she saw great commitment by the students while they were here the student's always graduated and moved on, a big hurdle for continued student involvement.

Professor Webster became interested in the homelessness issue while a member of Grace Church. At the church Professor Webster volunteered at the men's emergency shelter, which is located in the church but run by Porchlight. While Professor Webster remains optimistic about solving the homelessness issue she admits, "we haven't been really successful yet" (Professor Susan Webster⁴, Personal Interview, November 10th, 2009). She does see some positive trends recently in the cities management of the issue, including evidence based practices instead of just throwing money at the problem and the "housing first" movement, which provides those experiencing homelessness a home first followed by case work. Professor Webster would also like to see more interdisciplinary work on the issue by the University because it is a bigger issue and involves more than just social work. Economics, health-care, housing markets, and psychology are just a few examples of the forces affecting homelessness and larger involvement by a diverse set of University departments can better understand all these forces acting upon individuals, causing some to become homeless.

Who better to follow the teacher then the student? Our next speaker is that of the University of Wisconsin-Madison student body. The students are a large population in the downtown region, where most individuals experiencing homeless hang out and where most aid resources are located. With the large population the impact the students can

⁴ For questions see Appendix D

have on the situation is immense. But how do students perceive homelessness? How do they share space with them? According to our survey⁵ most students believe homelessness is caused by either mental illness (37%) or unemployment (32%). Much less believe the problem to be caused by a lack of low-income housing (9%) and substance abuse (13%). No matter what the students perceive to be the cause of homelessness, a vast majority (78%) believes that society in some form, mainly government, should administer homelessness relief. But do the students understand demographics of Madison homelessness? 90% were right in supposing males to be a majority of the homeless population, and 63% were right in supposing a majority of homeless is non-white. This indicates a level of awareness. In addition, about half of the student body volunteered their time in a homelessness aid organization. With these numbers we can conclude that a majority of students hold sympathetic perceptions of the homeless population, which increases the likelihood for aid support.

Another voice we happen to discover associated with the University was that of a former UW-Madison Ph.D. student. He gave our group advice on how to conduct our project and many resources that we could use. For example he suggested that we use the NAEH or National Alliance to End Homelessness website to understand what people are doing about the issue in other parts of the nation. Since he knew we were not familiar with some of the jargon he defined AODA and CDBG for us, which mean Alcohol or Drug Addiction and Community Development Building Grants. His Ph.D. research was not completed but it was specifically focused on former convicts who are homeless in Madison who at least during that time did not get a lot of attention. He worked with the

⁵ For survey see Appendix I

homeless for four years during his academic research and has continued to work with them for four and a half years as an outreach worker. He thinks the City of Madison tries to address the problem of homelessness but needs to focus more on affordable housing and SRO's (Single Resident Only Rooms). He believes, "No one has the right to be homeless and people are not homeless by choice" (Outreach worker⁶, November 19th, 2009). As an outreach worker, his perception is shaped by his interactions with people experiencing homelessness. His perception is further influenced by his own academic research into the subject.

Our next member at the table spends a great deal of her time interacting with the homeless population. As the officer for the Capital area and State Street, interacting with the transient population is a big part of Officer Dolsen's job. Homeless can be found all over the city, but there is a larger population in the State Street area around most of the services. Since street people are commonly found in this area, Officer Dolsen sees it as her responsibility to know as much as she can about where they hang out and common problems they experience. She is on a first name basis with a lot of people on the street, knows the different personalities and finds that the transient population reacts similarly to officers. They are both groups of individuals, what one officer does is not indicative of the entire force. So if an officer makes an arrest Officer Dolsen need only remind said person that it wasn't her and they calm down. There is little need for physical action in her job as long as there is good communication. "As long as situations are diffused, you may as well do it

⁶ For interview questions see Appendix B

verbally (Chandra Dolsen⁷, Personal Interview, December 4, 2009).” Officer Dolsen sees her job as a liaison between the transient population and her command staff. Her job gives her a great deal of freedom to respond to the needs of the community, anywhere from investigating crimes, to attending public meetings. Knowing the area well is a benefit the MPD takes seriously. The supervisors are all senior officers that have been in charge of their neighborhood for a great deal of time. Officers are all adults that have had some of their own life experiences that have required them to develop good communication skills. Though they receive no special training for interacting with homeless they do get some training at the police academy, where they act out scenarios for all different people they may encounter on the job, including various disabled individuals. Senior officers that know personalities well introduce new officers to the character and individuals in their area. Otherwise strategies are picked up through trial and error. Many officers seek work on State Street since it is an area of great diversity. In the course of a day the environment changes drastically, from business, to dining, and bar hours when the students take over. After about 10 or 11 PM the transient population really disappears, though this is partially due to shelter hours, Officer Dolsen also thinks it has to do with the population choosing to avoid the students. “It just isn’t their scene (Officer Dolsen, Personal Interview, December 4, 2009).” In general businesses get along with the transient population outside of specific incidents. At times someone will sleep in front of store and even defecate, at these times people are asked to move. Businesses are tolerant as long as their livelihood is unaffected. The only people

⁷ For interview questions see Appendix H

that seem really bothered are people from out of town who are not used to the being asked for money. Some officers are better than others at dealing with the transient population. Many think that all officers just want to arrest people, but this couldn't be further from the truth. Many of the officers are compassionate and see an arrest as a chance to cool off when it is really needed. They try to use reserve and distinguish between when it is appropriate to ticket or make an arrest. In reality the majority of the transient population is never a problem, there is just a few that suffers from alcohol or mental health problems that need extra police attention.

The population that hangs out on State Street cannot be generalized; it is a group of diverse individuals. In fact, not even all of the people who panhandle are homeless. When forced to guess Officer Dolsen knew some were but assumed it was on the order of half. Panhandling is a way to socialize and make money for some. Whether they join this career because they can make more on the street or because they can't find another job, they create their own social network. If someone new shows up, by the end of the day he will absolutely know where to sleep and where he can get food, either by watching the group or with help. It is a group that knows how to survive. As with any social group they have trials and tribulations and emotional days and problems. All crimes are contained within the group, just people reacting to each other. Most crimes in the population are centered on panhandling for too long of a time, it is customary to keep it under an hour. There are some special laws against criminal behavior toward someone with a disability or intoxication, but by and large there is no targeting of homeless, it's within the community.

When homeless are having problems, Officer Dolsen attempts to contact case managers if she can. Often strange behavior can indicate a need to change medication or a new problem otherwise. In one case, a man 'acted out' for several weeks. Officer Dolsen discovered that he was best friends with two men that died over the summer of 2009. He was only in pain and wanted to go home, so she helped get him a bus ticket for him to go to his family. The police force also distributes gift cards to the transient population for haircuts and coffee, this is funded by a private donor that was especially touched by pan-handling. Officer Dolsen just finished helping a man who lost his hearing aid. She found him one replacement and is still working on obtaining a backup. "I've arrested him a dozen times, but he still cries when he sees me (Chandra Dolsen, Personal Interview, December 4, 2009)." Sometimes arrests are made for the individual's benefit, as a chance for them to cool off and take a time out. Other times they bring a man before a judge and ask specifically for him to be evaluated for a mental illness. They keep complete records of any behavior indicative of mental illness and send them on to Dane County Mental Health. 'The thing is police can't do everything and not everything is a police issue, they are social issues (Chandra Dolsen, Personal Interview, December 4, 2009).' The officers in the area are involved and help when they can, but they also need to treat everybody the same. There are no special rules for individuals experiencing homelessness. Everyone has the same ordinances; no one can sleep in an abandoned building, only as a safety issue.

In addition to Madison Police the University Police are represented at our table. Officer Patty has been at the job for five years and communicates regularly with other

police officers, including new information about people experiencing homelessness in Madison. Much like Officer Dolsen, the type of interactions she has with the homeless is highly variable and depends upon the individual, what mood that person may be in, and the situation. Therefore, Officer Patty made it clear that some people talk with her and depend on her, while others leave when they see her coming up the road. On one hand, she makes the effort to develop a relationship with them, getting to know them and understand their specific situation. On the other hand she has a responsibility to uphold the law and if she sees someone drunk or high, she will arrest them. Despite this she attempts to gain their trust by keeping her word. She understands homelessness as a state anyone could experience. Talks with individuals experiencing homeless allow her to understand where they come from and how they came to be homeless. As opposed to Officer Dolsen, Officer Patty does not trust people experiencing homelessness, but that does not stop her from attempting to help them. She allows them to use her office phone so they can get reconnected with their family or friends and also provided transportation for them. She even takes pictures of some of the homeless in town that she has a report with; 'it's a nice thing to do for people who don't have pictures of themselves other than a mug shot (UWPD⁸, personal interview, December 3rd, 2009)' She then shows them how good they looking as a way of motivating them when they are struggling. Despite the fact that the homeless are in a more vulnerable situation, Officer Patty is more focused on ending homeless than offering them special protection. Homeless individuals have the same rights as everyone else, but they have to come to her when they are robbed or in trouble, there is no one else. There is great amount of fear since the Police are not popular within the rest of the homeless population. She admits that she was criticized for

⁸ For interview questions see Appendix C

the way she works with the homeless, but she tries to remain compassionate with the homeless and understand their vulnerability. According to Officer Patty, everyone should recognize that, “most people are not homeless by choice, the issue is multifaceted and it’s hard to get out of the situation (UWPD, personal interview, December 3rd, 2009).”

We have heard a lot of perspectives of individuals who are outside the problem looking in, but what about the individuals who are suffering homelessness? How do they perceive the problem? How effective do they believe aid is? It is first admitted by people experiencing homelessness that the problem is not an easy one, and there are many diverse reasons why people become homeless. They understand that some individuals do have serious personal problems, such as mental health issues, handicaps, and drug addictions; however many do not and have experienced homelessness for other reasons such as job loss. The latter individuals do not understand why the uniform policies by aid organizations do not recognize the diversity within the group. Many individuals showed extreme displeasure with the way the men’s emergency shelter is run. They gave examples of situations when the entire group was punished because one individual entered the shelter intoxicated. They also indicated that they often feel that they are treated like children, not equal adults. This feeling of disenfranchisement and estrangement we saw in multiple individuals experiencing homelessness. The number one suggestion we heard for improving homeless aid is to allow the individuals using the services to have a larger voice in the decision-making process (Dialogues on Homelessness, Participant observation and discussion, November 14 and December 5).

Last to speak at our dialogue is Donna Asif⁹. Donna noticed homelessness immediately when she moved to Madison. She wanted to help and did so the moment she was done with her job in adult development disorders. In 2006 Donna organized the Dialogues on Homelessness, a monthly gathering to bring community members together for an open discussion on homelessness in Madison and what each community member can do to help. Donna also was a neighborhood outreach worker and now works on PLUG, a group that attains showers and laundry for the homeless. As an outreach worker Donna works for herself, which gives her freedom to proceed as she sees fit and can communicate with whomever she chooses. Donna makes sure she is around areas where individuals experiencing homelessness tend to hang out like the capital basement, the men's-drop-in shelter, and the streets. She does everything from getting basic health appointments, holding onto belongings, and going to the movies. Donna provides whatever the person needs, not just essentials. Donna convinced one individual to re-establish relationships with family and friends. Donna just sat with the individual and reminded him of the good things in life. The individual was thrown out of the shelter for having hair lice and eventually just gave up on humanity. "Mainly homeless are often not treated like humans and [they] need to be treated like you would anyone else (Donna Asif, Personal Interview, November 16, 2009)."

According to Donna the biggest contributing factors to homelessness are society and the system. "Everyone should have housing and healthcare (Donna Asif, Personal Interview, November 16, 2009)." Donna hears some people argue that

⁹ For interview questions see Appendix E

homeless are not worth helping, that homeless individuals are disgusting, dangerous and not worthy of trust. “They are really just paying for bad decisions, everybody makes bad decisions (Donna Asif, Personal Interview, November 16, 2009).” Beyond combating the stress of not having basic needs, Donna brings humanity to care. She hopes to spread her caring, she even specifically informed Porchlight of ways they can improve their care, yet they reacted in defensive, uninterested and even weird ways. ‘The thing is it is a large organization and it does a lot of good, but they really need to maintain funding. Without it the whole operation can fall apart, they can’t risk complaints. Those who complain can easily be thrown out, they are considered less reliable than those working there. The workers at the shelter are all friends and want to protect each other.’ While Donna sees homelessness as a highly stressful problem, others think of the basics. ‘There needs to be more case management, when you are one on one you can really help people.’ For this reason Donna approves of the operation at the YWCA. Case Management is everything.

Now that our round table dialogue is complete, let us resume our role as moderator and analyze what we heard. In the dialogue with Karla, Schooler and Donna the need for more aid can translate to needing more funding. Porchlight has to focus on raising money in order to continue with their programs and expand. Unfortunately, the necessity of attaining funding undermines the quality of aid. For Porchlight to continue obtaining funds they need to prove results, they choose to preserve their reputation over addressing concerns and complaints. Even maintaining a program that looks good in the public’s eye can take away from the

quality of service provided. Porchlight operates under the assumption that more money yields faster progress, while Donna proves that compassionate care yields better results. Professor Webster also touches on this point when she discusses the implications of evidenced based practice instead of just throwing money at the problem. The difference of opinion is best illustrated in a case management philosophy of homeless aid. For Donna it should be one on one, the only way to truly help someone is to fully understand their specific situation. The YWCA case manager illustrated a breadth of services she aids with, from writing a resume to obtaining transportation. This indicates her perception that people are able to take care of themselves in some ways and just need a guiding hand. The fact that her services cause tension only indicates the need for one on one interaction and how valuable they are to those staying at the YWCA. Porchlight prioritizing immediate care and offers only one case manager per building. Porchlight needs results, quickly, which undermine the quality of their care, and in effect undermine positive results. At the same time, Porchlight attempts to create new programs based on the idea of case management. This indicates that Porchlight knows their role but also understands their limitations.

From the dialogue we come to understand the largest complaint by the homeless is not the lack of aid, but the quality of aid. They are frequently not treated as equals and consistently left out of the aid decision process. Shoveling homeless into aid to keep them alive may “clear the streets” but it may not be the aid they need and may make that worse. The following is an example of how effective one on one management is compared to Porchlight’s bureaucratic operation. Donna greets

everyone with a hug and quickly offers a coat or whatever she has on hand. She sat with that man for days until he acknowledged her presence and then brought him home made food. Once she convinced “Tim” to reenter society, she asked him at every step of the way if he was comfortable. She organized doctor’s appointments and held onto his belongings during them. She took him to get ice cream and went with him when he saw his daughter for the first time in decades. A man from the dialouges talked about his tenancy at Porchlight as a constant battle to maintain housing. He pays rent to Porchlight but felt he was being pushed out so they could say the building he lives in showed more results. Though he paid rent regularly and succeeded in responsibly caring for his apartment they attempted to throw him and his fellow tenants out for reasons including, owning a pet, alcohol consumption on the property and minor violations of their tenant code. Donna is a friend and while it is difficult for everyone to aid in such a compassionate style being a friend yields better results.

The student population was generally sympathetic in opinion and half the population even volunteered. In general, we would like to do further research to understand the link between volunteerism and perception. Professor Webster indicated that students enjoyed the volunteerism portion of the class best, if this is the case for the wider student population this would be an excellent way for students to get involved, as well as other community members. In this instance student volunteering was directed by her and allowed for analysis, training and reflection. By having both education and contact students in Professor Webster’s class experience homelessness both personally and with general knowledge free

from potentially negative encounters. In this way the contact hypothesis may be aided by facilitated reflection. This connects with the homeless complaints about the staff treating them like children. The staff members get little organized training and are in contact with a stressed population they do not fully understand. A huge factor leading to homelessness is the disintegration of social support networks. Realizing this and acknowledging the trauma endured by losing a stable environment is as much an educating experience as volunteering is.

In the future this research could be greatly expanded and focused. For one thing a wider range and amount of student surveys would strengthen the student perception. There were far more female participants and no freshmen represented at all. A wider variety of classes, such as including a math class would also add validity. In fact, if the entire student population would respond we could have a complete perception. On top of this, the student survey was very complicated and needs to be simplified. The questions on encounters and what students have done for the homeless led to fairly useless responses. Confused responses may have partially been due to the fact that they were completed in the few minutes before class instruction began, a calmer setting would be ideal. Beyond the students, the entire community is involved and should be surveyed. Even going to neighborhood meetings could have revealed a Geography to the public opinion and allowed for NIMBY research. More statistical analysis should be done on the surveys as well, once a wide and valid pool is attained. We would also have liked more interviews, for within the aid organizations and including government officials.

Originally we also wanted to have more information about the history of and demographic trends of homelessness in general and within Madison. All of this information adds to the possible understanding of homelessness and is valuable for constructing perceptions. Most importantly, we need in depth interviews with individuals experiencing homelessness. This will indicate how well all aid workers and police understand what the homeless experience and what the homeless think of them. In addition, we will be able to see what they need, who they know best and can best create suggestions and critiques for aid.

The general sympathy of the population has led Madison to invest a great deal of money in Homelessness aid, but a lack of time-investment per person has undermined the results. As homelessness is made of and caused by many complicated factors, perception is highly variable. Aid stems off the perception, taking all shapes and sizes. To affect perception, the wide range of causes needs to be presented and experienced by the community, in a structured way. Madison's aid for homelessness is directly related to the collective perception of the city. The collective perception is a conglomerate of individual perception. Individual perception on homelessness is diverse, but a common sympatric view was held by most of our interviewees. The common view has lead to no shortage of aid offered, but many disagree on the type of aid. Problematic encounters by the police officers and shelter managers have lead to a "tough love" aid policy, maintaining basic human needs. Conversely community members such as Donna Asif use an aid style of one-on-one case management, which has lead to more positive results. Porchlight, the largest provider of homelessness aid, understands the importance of case management, but is constantly underfunded, which leads to more time providing quick

statistical results and finding funds. Shelter is a basic human need, which everyone in our community deserves a chance to have. While Madisonians understand the importance of homelessness aid, our perceptions are diverse, which has led to the system we have today.

Appendix A

Y.W.C.A. Shelter Case Manager Interview Questions: December 7th, 2009

1. As the Shelter Case Manager can you tell me what services you provide?
2. What are the requirements to get into the shelter?
3. If you could convince the public one thing about homelessness what would it be?
4. How did you get into this line of work?
5. Within the Y.W.C.A. how did was this shelter program developed?

Appendix B

Former Ph. D. student in Geography Program, UW-Madison Interview Questions:

November 19th 2009

1. What were you researching for you Ph.D.?
2. Why did you choose this topic?
3. How long have you worked with the homeless?
4. How well do you think the City of Madison addresses the homelessness issue?
5. What would you like the public to understand about people who are
“Experiencing Homelessness”?

Appendix C

Lower Campus Community Officer Interview Questions: December 3rd, 2009

1. How long have you been a police officer?
2. How long have you had this position?
3. How do the homeless respond to your presence?
4. How would you categorize the interactions you have had with the homeless?
5. Do you think the homeless should be protected under hate crime laws?
6. What would you like the public to understand about people who are
“Experiencing Homelessness”?

Appendix D

Interview: Professor Susan Webster, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Date: Tuesday November 10th, 2009

1. Basic class information?
2. What made you teach this class?
3. What did you have to do to get it started?
4. What is the purpose of the class?
5. What happened to your class?
6. How important do you believe student involvement is for both learning and toward improving the homeless situation?
7. What problems do you run into when teaching the class?
8. How did students react to your class?
9. What other things have you seen students do for homeless?
10. How effective do you believe Madison has been on the Homeless issue?

Appendix E

Donna Asif Interview Questions: November 16th, 2009

1. How did you get involved with the homeless?
2. What do you do exactly?
3. How do you make yourself available to the homeless?
4. What are the major factors contributing to Homelessness?
5. How effective do you think the city of Madison's policies are?
6. What arguments do you run into against helping the homeless?
7. What would you change about Public Policy?
8. Are there any organizations you think are doing an exemplary job?
9. How do organizations (Porchlight) react to your suggestions?
10. Can you talk about a memorable experience helping someone get off the streets?

Appendix F

Karla Jameson Interview Questions: November 20, 2009

1. How did you start working with the Homeless?
2. What services does Porchlight provide?
3. What is your role within Porchlight?
4. Is Porchlight in the process of creating any new programs?
5. What is the biggest problem you encounter at Porchlight?
6. Do you encounter any problems with Not in Our Backyard?
7. Do you have a memorable story you'd like to share from working with the homeless?
8. Are there any common trends for clients who are more likely to relapse or succeed?
9. How are volunteers trained?
10. How do you see students get involved with Porchlight?
11. Can you describe the history of Porchlight?
12. Are there any rules or guidelines for use of shelter services?

13. Does the shelter follow any protocol for ill individuals?

Appendix G

Steve Schooler Interview Questions: November, 24, 2009

1. How did you start working with the Homeless?
2. What do you actually do within Porchlight?
3. Have you learned anything in particular, since working with the Homeless?
4. Can you describe a memorable story about a time working with the homeless?
5. Is there a project at Porchlight that you are especially proud of?
6. If you could change one thing about operations at Porchlight, what would you change?
7. What are your observations of student interactions with homeless individuals?
8. What is the biggest misconception of homelessness?
9. Can you respond to complaint about the men's drop-in shelter?

Appendix H

Officer Chandra Dolsen: December 4, 2009

1. What interactions have you had with the Homeless?
2. What observations do you have between the student community and people experiencing homelessness?
3. As police there are stereotypes that can make people nervous around you is that a problem?
4. How are you advised or trained to interact with the Homeless?
5. Panhandling Laws
6. What do you think of the plan to renovate peace park?
7. What sort of proportion of panhandlers are Homeless?
8. What reasons have you heard other panhandlers give for Pan handling?
9. Have you seen an increase in pan handling since the economy has gotten worse?
10. What crimes have you observed between transients and students or other community members?
11. Do you think that homelessness should be protected under hate crimes?
12. Are there any places the transient population is not allowed?

Appendix I: Homelessness in Madison- Student Survey

1. What year are you in school?
 Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Grad
 Student

2. What is your gender? Female Male

3. Which type of area are you from? Rural Urban Suburban

4. In what ways have you encountered Homelessness in Madison? Check all that Apply:
 I have seen homeless Talked to homeless Friend
 Family
 Nothing Media School

5. Who do you think should administer homeless programs? Check all that Apply:
 Churches Government Family/ friends of the homeless
 Citizens
 Self-reliant Non-Governmental Aid
 Other _____

6. Who, in your opinion, represents the majority of homeless in Madison?
 Rank each line 1= highest proportion: Foreign Born__ U.S.
 Citizens__
 Single Women__ Single Men__ Families__ Unaccompanied
 Minors__
 White__ African- American__ Hispanic__ Other__
 Under 18__ Age 18-28__ Age 29-45__ 45+__

Veterans __ Women escaping abuse__ Disabled
individuals__

7. What do you think is the biggest cause of Homelessness? Rank the following :
Unemployment __ Insufficient low-income housing__ Substance
Abuse__
Mental Illness__ Other_____

8. Have you ever felt threatened by a homeless person? Ye N

9. Have you ever volunteered to help the homeless? Ye N

10. If so why? Check all that apply:
Mandatory for a group For class Personally motivated
Family/ Friend suggestio Other _____

11. Have you ever done the following with a homeless person? Check all that Apply:
Given someone food Given someone change
Talked to someone Let someone sleep in your home
Defended someone being verbally or physically attack I haven't done any of
the above

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Students Perceived Cause of Homelessness

