

City of Seattle Navigation Team Overview

Background:

The City of Seattle's Navigation Team conducts daily outreach to unsanctioned encampments with the primary goal of assisting unsheltered individuals in relocating to alternative and safer living arrangements. In some cases, individuals accept the offer to relocate from what at times are conditions which pose significant health and safety risks to the unsheltered individuals. This is an intricate process that is largely dependent on the ability to provide alternative living options that meet the diverse and multicultural needs of those living unsheltered. In collaboration with the City of Seattle's Human Services Department (HSD), the Navigation Team was able to relocate 675 unique individuals to alternative living arrangements from 2/20/17 to 12/31/17. Even when alternate living options are not available or undesirable, the Navigation Team works with people living unsheltered to make the appropriate referrals for services that they may be interested in such as case management, employment support and mental health support. In addition, individuals who express interest in moving to a location that is at capacity, have the option of being placed on the waitlist for that site with the goal that they will be referred in once a spot becomes available.

Team configuration:

-  9 Police officers including one Sergeant
 - Conduct outreach
 - Provide security
 - Make appropriate referrals
-  8 contracted outreach workers including one supervisor
 - Conduct outreach
 - Provide light case management
 - Make referrals for supportive services
-  4 Field Coordinators
 - Inspect sites
 - Prioritize sites for clean
 - Provide storage
-  1 Outreach Coordinator
 - Collect, store and disseminate data
 - Program design and development
 - Coordinate human services
 - Stakeholder engagement
-  1 Encampment Response Manager
 - Assign sites

- Program development
- Coordinate and oversee field coordinator activities
- ✚ Supportive City Agencies:
 - Seattle Public Utilities
 - Parks and Recreations
 - Seattle department of Transportation
 - Department of Neighborhoods
- ✚ Non-City contractors
 - Cascadia
 - Bio Clean Northwest

The Role of Law Enforcement:

The combination of law enforcement and social service providers is increasingly common throughout the U.S. and an emerging best practice. Police, due to their roles as first responders, often come in close contact with the community experiencing homelessness. Traditionally, law enforcement has not been able to refer to services which help move homeless individuals along the continuum toward permanent housing. In the past, police have only had two options to address situations that arise with people living unsheltered: arresting an individual or leaving them on the street without resources. Under the Navigation Team model, Seattle Police officers work alongside their human service counterparts in providing more intensive resources to people living unsheltered. Pairing social workers with police officers empowers the police to continue acting as first responders in the community, while also allowing them to connect people with the services they need. This practice not only avoids the time-consuming and costly procedures to process someone in jail, but also helps break the cycle of arrest-and-release, many times resulting in individuals returning to homelessness.

There are over 20 mid- to large- size cities that employ similar models; two particular Law Enforcement/Social Worker models worth noting include the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) in Houston, TX, and the Homeless Outreach Team in San Diego, CA.

The Houston Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) was founded in 2011 and is comprised of a Police Sergeant, Four Officers and three Mental Health Professionals. The primary focus of Houston’s HOT team is to work with chronically homeless individuals toward securing housing. Houston’s efforts are examined more closely in section 3.1 of this report.

The San Diego HOT Team combines police officers, psychiatric clinicians and mental health eligibility technicians. Similarly, San Diego’s Psychiatric Emergency Response Team (PERT) combines the expertise of Police Officers who are specially trained with a medical professional, psychologist, licensed social worker, and mental health clinician with a specific focus on providing non-custodial options for chronically mentally ill homeless individuals.

Following emerging best practices, the police officers on the Seattle Navigation Team were selected from a group of volunteers who explicitly applied for the opportunity to work directly with unsheltered individuals. The officers meet daily with the REACH outreach team and collaborate closely with other non-profit organizations to serve unsheltered individuals. Through close working relationships, the police officers are learning from their social service peers who have worked exclusively with these populations for an extended amount of time.

Preliminary findings from an upcoming evaluation of the Navigation Center also sheds some light on this question. People referred to the Navigation Center report said that they were initially concerned with interacting with the police while they were living unsheltered because they were in possession of illegal substances or held a general fear of the police. However, most people referred to the Navigation Center reported that their actual experiences with Navigation Team police officers were positive.

In 2016, San Diego State University conducted a qualitative inquiry of downtown San Diego homeless residents to determine their perceptions of service accessibility. One of the areas assessed was the perception of the role of police. The study found similar levels of positive and negative perceptions of the police:

- Negative: 44% of respondents perceived police as not being helpful; 49% reported feeling “a little” to “very” harassed by police; and 41% of respondents denied feeling safe as a result of police presence;
- Positive: 45% of respondents perceived police as being somewhat or very helpful; 47% reported not feeling harassed by police; and 53% felt reported feeling somewhat or very safe as a result of police presence.

Data Collection

One of our initial realizations was the importance of a by-name list. Community Solutions, a results-oriented national organization which focuses on ending homelessness had this to say about by-name lists: *“A By-Name List is a critical component to reaching functional zero and understanding who in your community is experiencing homelessness at any given time. A strong By-Name List can be used to plan estimations of future rates of homelessness, including inflow and refining performance targets.”* Analysis of the by-name lists informs and shapes the evolution of the Navigation Team’s work, leading to changes that improve our practices and deliver better outcomes for those living outdoors.

Another important component of this by-name list is the facilitation of greater understanding of the racial dynamics at play within this population. Our data confirms findings from local and national studies: Native Americans and African Americans are more likely to be homeless than their Caucasian counterparts. Furthermore, analysis of Navigation Team data reveals that African Americans are more prone to accept service offers. Understanding our tendency to hold to implicit biases and assumptions, this information facilitates greater understanding about the

population, and furthermore, allows the Navigation Team to accurately tell the story of those living outdoors.

Collecting the right data allows us to have information that is factual, and which will better equip us to address this complex issue. Without this information in proper context in a system, it can be useless.

For reference, please note that the Navigation Team collects data for the following reasons:

1. To understand the needs of the people we contact, both through the history of the requests they make, the offers that they reject and our observations of their circumstances.
2. To be able to make a unique plan for each individual who is service-resistant.
3. To evaluate the work and make improvements/innovations.
 - a. From a racial equity perspective.
 - b. From a policy and procedure perspective.
 - c. To tell the story of the work we are doing.
 - d. For accountability
4. This data must be verifiable
5. The Data sets that need to be collected:
 - a. Who:
 - i. Individual name, Date of Birth, Gender, Race, Ethnicity
 - b. Where:
 - i. The location where the individual was contacted and by who
 - c. When:
 - i. The date of the contact
 - d. What:
 - i. Document the services offered to the individual
 - ii. Were services accepted or declined
 - iii. Reason for decline
 - iv. A brief description of the contact and whether follow-up has been assigned (next steps)
 - v. Disposition at time of last contact
 - e. Alternative Housing data:
 - i. What alternative housing arrangement did they go to
 - ii. When did they complete the intake
 - iii. Are they still at the alternative housing location
 - iv. If discharged:
 1. Administrative?
 2. Permanent Housing?
 3. Transitional Housing?
 4. Other alternative living arrangement

5. Rule violation
6. AWOL
7. Poor fit
8. Medical
9. Legal

Data Collection Categories

1. Name: Write in
2. Date of Birth: Write in
3. Gender – Male, Female, Transgender, non-Binary, Data Not Collected
4. Race – Black/African American, Native American/Indian/First Nation, White/Caucasian, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Asian, Multi-Racial, Bi-Racial, Data Not collected
5. Ethnicity – Hispanic/Latinx, Non-Hispanic/Latinx
6. Date of Contact: Write in
7. Location of Contact: Write-in
8. Services Requested: Shelter, Sanctioned Encampment, Basic Needs, Clothing, Food & Water, Hygiene Items, Medical Support, Legal Support, Case Management, Benefits Activation, ID Support, Employment Support, Reentry Support, Educational Support, Mental Health Support, Substance Use Recovery Support
9. Services Offered: Shelter, Sanctioned Encampment, Basic Needs, Clothing, Food & Water, Hygiene Items, Medical Support, Legal Support, Case Management, Benefits Activation, ID Support, Employment Support, Reentry Support, Educational Support, Mental Health Support, Substance Use Recovery Support
10. Services Accepted: Shelter, Sanctioned Encampment, Basic Needs, Clothing, Food & Water, Hygiene Items, Medical Support, Legal Support, Case Management, Benefits Activation, ID Support, Employment Support, Reentry Support, Educational Support, Mental Health Support, Substance Use Recovery Support
11. Alternative Living Arrangement Referral: Licton Springs Village, Peter’s Place, Blaine Center, DESC-Main, DESC-Queen Anne, UGM Hope Place, UGM Kent Hope, UGM Main Shelter, UGM Men’s Recovery Program, Georgetown Tiny house Village, Othello Tiny House Village, Compass-First Presbyterian, Navigation Center, Camp Second Chance, Other Shelter, Other Sanctioned Encampment, Tent City, Bread of Life, Hammond House, William Booth Center, Salvation Army Recovery Program, Valley Cities Recovery Program, Other-Inpatient Recovery Program, Other-Men’s Shelter, Other-Women’s Shelter, Other-Shelter, Reunited with Family or Friends, City Hall Shelter, Zombie Building Shelter, Data Not Collected, Crisis Solutions Center, Other-Inpatient Mental Health
12. Date of Referral
13. Date of Intake completion
14. Date of Discharge

15. Reason for Discharge: Permanent housing, Transitional Housing, Shelter, Sanctioned Encampment, AWOL, Administrative, Violence, Arrest, Mental Health, Level of Care, Theft, Time Expired, Data Not Collected
16. Notes: Write in (QUALITATIVE)

Navigation Team Engagement Rate:

Robust data collection and analysis is a major component of the Navigation Team's work. In collaboration with the HSD and Office for Civil Rights, the Navigation Team collects individual level data on demographics, interactions, offers made, and offers accepted.

Collection of this data allows the Navigation Team to:

- Understand emergent patterns and trends in the population the Team seeks to serve and tailor its program model accordingly;
- Report on the Team's effectiveness in making offers for relocation and services that are both accepted and utilized; and
- Assess the race and social justice impacts of their work to ensure that equitable service is provided to unsheltered individuals regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, or other factors.

The Navigation team tracks the following to assess the engagement rate:

- the number of contacts made by the Team
- the number unique individuals those contacts are made with
- the number of unique individuals accepting some service
- the number of unique individuals accepting a referral to a safer alternative location (defined as shelter at traditional emergency shelters, enhanced shelters, sanctioned encampments, family/friend)

In 2017, the Navigation Team made 7,342 contacts with 1,842 unique individuals. These contacts resulted in 1,179 people (64%) accepting some kind of service, including 675 people (36% of the total contacted) who accepted a referral to a safer living alternative. On average, it takes four engagements between the Navigation Team members and a person living unsheltered before the individual accepts some form of service and/or shelter.

Factors Influencing Acceptance Rate:

New Shelter and Encampment Options:

In 2017, the City of Seattle, led by the Human Services Department, opened five new sites designed to respond specifically to the needs of the individuals being contacted by the Navigation team. Camp Second Chance, a clean and sober tent city encampment with capacity for 50 people, was opened in March 2017 at the Myers Way site owned by the City. In April, Licton Springs Village, a low-barrier tiny house village Aurora Ave N., added capacity for 70 people. The Georgetown tiny house village opened in April 2017 and added an additional 70 spaces. The Navigation Center enhanced shelter opened in July 2017 with capacity for 75 people. Similarly, the Compass First Presbyterian enhanced shelter opened in July 2017 adding capacity for 100 people. In total, 365 tiny houses/beds were added in 2017.

HSD's data team conducted an analysis focused on identifying individuals who had touched both the Navigation Team by-name-list system and HMIS database. The objective of this inquiry was to gain greater insight as to what happens with clients following the referrals to alternative living arrangements. As it is currently structured, contacts with clients end if they accept referral to an alternative living arrangement. The inquiry revealed that 40% of the individuals from the by-name-list who had been referred to an alternative living arrangement were identified in the HMIS system, confirming not only acceptance of the referral, but completion of intake. More specifically: of the 9,987 referrals in the by name list, 1,355 were unique referral numbers, 545 of them had a name that matched to a name in HMIS (40%).

Conclusion:

The Navigation Team's engagement rate continues to be the best tool for analyzing the team's effectiveness in the field. The data trend has shown enhanced shelters and tiny house villages have and continue to be an attractive option for people the team contacts living in unsanctioned encampments when compared to more traditional forms of emergency shelter.