

PHASE III – Individual Case Studies

**Examination of the Costs of Homelessness and Issues
Related to Determining the Cost-Effectiveness of
Supportive Services and Housing in Washoe County, NV**

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Case Studies

Introduction

The purpose of this phase of investigation was to provide more qualitative data on what individuals in the County's homeless population tell us about what they face in-terms of survival, and the individual's perceived barriers to ending their current homeless condition. In addition the individual interviews were to explore the types and the amount of services the individuals accessed during their homeless episodes. Six participants were interviewed, with five meeting all of the inclusion criteria, and one being a staff member with one of the homeless services, but who had been homeless and received services in Washoe County.

The inclusion criteria for selecting participants included the following: (1) they had one or more episodes of being homeless in the last 12 months, (2) they speak English, (3) they volunteered to participate in the interviews, and (4) they were assessed by the service provider to be able to communicate effectively without any mental or physical impairments. The primary investigator followed the study's protocols for obtaining consents and maintaining confidentiality of the participants. Four service sites were used for the interviews: Reno-Sparks Gospel Mission (RSGM) Timber Way location, Men's Drop In Center (MDIC) on Record Street, Family Promise office on Charles St., and the outside yard/waiting area between the Men's Drop In Center and the RSGM. The interviews were conducted in sites of the participants' choices including offices, a lobby, a kitchen, and outside the building sitting on a curb. Other local sites were not included for participant recruitment where the clients were known to have a mental illness diagnosis. The authors acknowledge that some of the events which contributed to participants' homelessness may no longer occur in Reno or Washoe County.

General demographic information of the 6 participants included the following:

- All considered Reno/Washoe County their choice of area to stay in for residence
- 4 men and 2 women
- Ages 29 - 68
- 5 Caucasian, 1 African American
- Their length of time of being homeless ranged from 1 episode of 8 months, to multiple episodes over 10 years

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- None had living family members who could/would assist them
 - Educational levels ranged from some high school – completion of high school
 - 2 veterans
 - 2 participants and 1 spouse experienced addictions which contributed to their homeless status
 - 1 confirmed a mental illness diagnosis
 - No one had their own transportation
 - No one was currently receiving ongoing healthcare or medications for mental or physical conditions
 - Each participant is discussed as an individual to reveal their unique "stories of homelessness." Each interview was conducted with the overall open ended questions of:
 - Will you please share some of your background earlier in your life?
 - What can you share about what has caused you to be homeless?
 - What types of services have you been able to use in the community?
 - What would you identify as barriers to getting the type of services and help you would like?
 - What do you feel has helped you during your time of being homeless?
 - What do you see as your future for being homeless?

Identified Patterns of the Participants' Experiences

- Sub-cultures of homeless individuals are acknowledged by the individuals themselves and include the cause of homelessness as: (1) those in a life crisis cause of homelessness, or (2) those whose homelessness is a recurring life condition.
- Sub-cultures also acknowledged as: (1) individuals willing to work, or (2) individuals who have no desire to work, and "play the system".

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- Individuals expressed desire for 1 place to register their homeless status and to receive "triage evaluation, referrals, and be assigned to 1 overall case manager as support".
 - Individuals need a centralized site for personal storage, a mail box, and to receive phone messages in order to secure jobs.
 - Individuals in a crisis situation need ongoing organizational support and reinforcement of referrals to handle this major life challenge (individuals in crisis do not remember much of the advice they are given in oral meetings, and lack organizational skills).
 - Referrals given by 1 agency/service to another are often confusing and the information is not remembered
 - Living in a shelter can be negative for securing employment: in order to secure a place in a shelter for the night, lines form mid afternoon, and individuals can't stay with a day job. Also day fatigue is common due to noise levels of shelters.
 - Night jobs can not be taken if sleeping in a shelter, as there is no place to sleep during the day
 - Local transportation to job sites is difficult.
 - Job competition exists for homeless individuals and persons they identify as "undocumented"
 - New jobs are hard to keep without transitional housing and easy access to laundry, showers, quiet places to sleep.
 - Most individuals expressed the desire to not live alone.
 - All are experiencing some level of mental illness ranging from chronic to personality disorders, depression and anxiety.

Participant One: "Don", Head of Household

Background

Don volunteered as a participant while being a current resident of the Reno-Sparks Family Promise program for homeless families. He is a 35 year old Caucasian male, and the head of a household which includes himself and he has custody of more than 2 children. He has been divorced, from a marriage of 20 years, for 12 months and has custody of the children. He is a local high school graduate, and has lived in the Reno area for 30+ years, and has been *continuously homeless since May, 2006*, when he was no longer able to

make the monthly rent payments. He states this is his only episode of being homeless. He denies that he has any alcohol or drug “problems.” He had some health insurance from his previous employer, which was lost when he lost his job, but now has none for himself and the children have been enrolled in Medicaid.

Don states he has “always worked”, but now realizes how close they were to becoming homeless, “just one or two paychecks away from it for years, but I never realized it could be true. I was proud that I was a baker and bakery manager for a local Wal Mart, and had recently received a raise to \$16/hour. I just didn’t realize how deeply my wife was “into meth”, and that ruined us, and then I couldn’t pay the monthly rent. When she was working, her hourly was \$10 and that helped out with mine.”

Don emphasized that his children’s “stability” was the most important aspect of his life now, and he is willing to do anything to give them a sense of family. In order to accomplish that, he “stepped down” from his section manager’s job “to have more time with the children and make sure their lives were not broken up anymore.” Don states he received custody of his children in April, 2006 after his daughter had initially lived with his ex-wife, but “her mom went to jail, and she needs the security to be with me.”

Family-Friends Support Availability

Don said they have no family able to help out, with housing or finances. He did identify a friend who was a pastor at a local church as someone who “helped by checking in often and arranged rides for us at times.” His friend has moved out of town, but states someone from that church does check with him at times. He did use several “church friends” to keep his children on the times he worked the night shift after giving up his day bakery position. “They were gracious, but it is hard to have kids not sleep in their own beds.”

Financial Status

Don acknowledges that the methamphetamine drug use of his ex-wife was a large financial burden on the family and was the fact that “pushed us over the edge.” “Until all of this, we had a home, vehicle, and got by on our own.” He spoke about his belief that “you work for what you earn.” Don stated that he was “laid off” in early November, 2006 as his employer “hired cheaper part time holiday workers.” Since he had requested a position that had more flexibility in order to be available for his children, it put him into a “limbo status that makes it hard for me to work and then they just hope I will quit, so they hire someone cheaper.” He has applied for unemployment, (hearing first week January, 2007) and is waiting for that process to progress to decide if his past employer is at fault. He has two interviews scheduled the second week in January, 2007, but acknowledges it is “tough” to find work that matches kids’ schedules and also his bus

transportation. Transportation was identified as a large financial burden for Don. Prior to November, 2006 he was able to keep a vehicle and make the scheduled payments, but now relies on the public bus system.

Child support is also identified as a financial burden. He stated he applied for a child support hearing in April, 2006 and that will happen in February, 2007. He is hoping that the court will direct his ex-wife to offer some of her earnings for child support. However, as part of the original divorce settlement, since he made more money per hour than his ex-wife (\$16. vs. \$10) he was to pay her \$445/month to have custody of their daughter. She was to pay him \$405/month in child support for their sons, and the judge “called it a wash” and no support was exchanged. Now that Don has all of his children, he is hoping to receive “anything that will help us” from his ex-wife.

Don states that he has spent “hours” at the “welfare office on King’s Row”, and has found the rules and regulations very cumbersome to understand. “As a single father and family of more than three, with my previous salary of \$16/hour, we only qualified for \$110/month. But a family with 2 adults only getting \$8/hour each would get \$500/month. Why? No one could explain this to me. So again, until you are knocked down farther, you can’t get the level of care you really need.”

Accessed Services

Don identified the following services that he accessed when he realized that “we needed help to keep us all together.” He stated that “I didn’t know what we could be eligible for from any service, or who to even ask. I just knew it was up to me to keep us together and I had to find out.” He voiced strong concerns that no agency provided him with any information about any other agencies or services that might help his family. “None of them seem connected, which makes it so hard to get information to help!”

Family Promise. “I found out about this by accident!” Don stated he found out about this program “by pure luck.....no one ever told me it was an option or that there was such a program for families. I was waiting in the Reno Housing Authority office and was bored and reading the bulletin board when I saw a program flyer. Why hadn’t anyone told me about this option in previous visits?” He also relayed that most of the other families he has met in the Family Promise program also found out about it “by accident, and usually from other families or people also looking for help.”

Don relayed how much the families in the program rely on each other to help out with child care and emotional support. “When I worked nights, one of the other parents watched my kids, and then I watched her kids during the day or weekends.” He talked about the movement of families in the program to a different church every week where they eat dinner and sleep, and then return to the Family Promise day residence. “With all that moving, most of

us make it as fun as we can for the kids...like a sleepover. The church people are so nice, giving, and gracious.” He discussed how this arrangement is more secure for his family than being homeless and depending on friends for a “place to stay.”

HUD and Reno Housing Authority (RHA). Don applied in July, 2006 for RHA subsidized housing. However, he states that his previous landlord of two years, was contacted as a reference and asked if he was a good tenant and reliable to pay the rent. Since the reason he lost his residence was that he couldn't continue paying the rent, the landlord said no, but he would have him as a tenant again when he had a reliable income. Otherwise his landlord said he was a good tenant. As a result, Don stated RHA classified him as a “bad risk” tenant and would not put him in RHA apartments at a sliding scale. So now he is waiting for other Section 8 housing to open after he has secured regular employment. His wish is to return to the Stead area so the children will remain in their schools with friends. He expressed concerns that "we needed help to pay the rent, but there was no place to help because I was still employed. That doesn't make sense to me.....I had to be 'more down' to get help and then it was too late to stay in our place."

In October, 2006 Don said he was assigned to a new RHA case manager who told him to go to the HUD offices and give a new address of the Family Promise location for future contact. He said he went to the HUD office and waited to see someone in person and watched that clerk change his address in the computer. Then in mid December, 2006 his case manager told him he found out that HUD had sent materials to his old address and since it was not forwarded and Don did not respond, he was “kicked off” the list of people waiting for available housing. As a result Don said he re-applied, but was told “he had to start all over again in the waiting line.” He said his RHA new case manager is trying to figure out what happened, but “the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing!” Again, he is frustrated that no one in the “system” can tell him why this happened and be able to fix something that is “so stupid and makes no sense....no wonder people get so mad!”

Washoe County School District, Children in Transition. Don expressed frustration in the challenges he faced “understanding all the rules to get any help.” He said his goal was “to keep any stability he could in his children's lives, not disrupt them further, but disruption seemed to be the only way to get help from CIT.” He said initially, it was suggested to him that he pull his children out of their “home school in Stead” and put them in Reno schools while they were in Family Promise. He did not accept that plan and said, “it doesn't make any sense....yet, no one could tell me why it had to be that way.” He states now that they do qualify for CIT services and receive them, he knows his children are safe to be transported back and forth to school with the plans they have developed and oversee.

Washoe County Public School/Stead. Don had great praise for the school his children attend and the principal and teachers. He said that when they learned of his family's situation of being homeless, they offered to help. "The principal and 5th grade teacher were willing to pick my kids up and take them home themselves until we got transportation fixed!" He states that three of his children receive some percentage of special education services and that he was very concerned about their stability in school resulting from the family being homeless and their mother's bad situation. However, his ten year old received the school's student of the month in September, 2006 and his daughter received that same award in October, 2006. "I know I am doing the right thing to keep us together and the kids in their own schools....look what they are doing! I'm their father and knew what was best for them.....what if they had been separated or put in new schools just because we lost our place?? Rules and regulations are so hard and not always good." He also relayed a recent meeting with the school principal and the children's teachers where they told him that his kids seek each other out in school and are often seen giving each other hugs and support. They also told him that two of his sons wrote on essays that the person they most wanted to be like was "my dad."

Children's Cabinet. Don said he learned about this agency, "early on," but when he was working, he earned too much to access their services. He said he tried to find out why, and what their formula was to assign any help, but no one there was able to tell him that. "If I could just know what the rules are, I would be more at ease.....do I keep coming back as things get worse, or will I never get help as a single father?" Yet, he said he knows that "not every program can help or work for everyone."

Welfare. Don relayed that he had multiple visits trying to figure out "how the system works and what I can qualify for." Initially, he was assigned "a social or case worker" to work with, but found that experience frustrating and not helpful. "I was asked...what are you doing?", and told OK, keep doing that." He stated he received no useful guidance or mentorship. However, he stated how grateful he is that his children now qualify "for Medicaid and get physical and dental health care." One child is diagnosed with ADHD, and his medications "cost \$200/month without Medicaid....how could I have done that?"

Reno Parks and Recreation. Don has used the Reno Parks and Recreation programs for before and after school programs as his children attend a year round school and they attend a "North Valley program" that the children like. However, he expressed frustration with this program's system when he lost his job and could not honor the year long contract he had with them. He relayed that he told them of his job status and asked for some kind of assistance for the children to keep them in the programs they enjoyed and were familiar with. He found that a re-evaluation of his status would take 4-5 weeks and that in the mean time he needed to continue to pay his contracted fees. Or, he said he was told they could stop the contract, but

since his 1 son in kindergarten still required 4 hours/day without a contract he would pay the full amount of \$80/week. “Wow, that really didn’t make sense to me.....I don’t understand.....it takes so much paperwork to prove I am laid off...a small forest of trees have to die so many forms are made for many people to sign off and get something into effect to help my family.”

Don said he is planning for the future when he has another job, but that the kids will have to go back into before and after school programs. He is worried about the cost: “\$300/month when they are in school and \$600/month when their school is off track and they are in the program all day. Those are the rates for a sliding scale, level 8, based on my earning \$14-16/hour, and level 10 is the highest level!”

Company Sponsored Family Adoption for Christmas. Don said he didn’t know such a program existed, but was so grateful just to know that people cared. He said that he filled out the application about his children and what they might want, but also wrote a note on the application saying that “anything would be special.” He said that company who adopted them “was over the top” and that it brought such fun and relief to his kids, that “I cried on & off all day I was so emotional.” He talked about people in our community “who do nice things for people like us just because they want to.”

Barriers Don Identified For Receiving Desired Services

Don identified areas that are barriers for him in receiving the services he hopes for in order to “get back on my feet and keep my family together.” “I had to keep falling backward to be more down trodden in order to get assistance! Why can’t anyone tell me, we *can* help you get over the hill? Instead, I kept being told they had rules and my family didn’t fit them. Oh, they offered to split us up, or take the kids away from their regular schools so we fit their plans and rules! Why couldn’t anyone see that I am trying to give my family security and stability? How can taking them away from their schools, friends, and teachers who know them be a help? “

Housing. Maintaining their rental residence after his divorce was very stressful and resulted in a lack of decreased family stability when Don could no longer make monthly rent payments. "I've never, ever not had a place to live." He expressed frustration at not knowing where he could go for assistance to keep their residence which he identified as a key to provide stability to the children. "It's really a big trauma to lose your place.....we were making it every month with my check and the ex's check, but not with just mine." He talked about the challenges of seeking help, but not knowing what that would look like or who exactly to approach. He also spoke of how important it was to the family to be able to live in the "familiar neighborhood with the kids' schools and friends. Why don't all these 'help' places support that?"

Transportation. Transportation for the children to get them back and forth to school has been a great challenge. Initially, Don had a vehicle, but that proved to be a barrier for the children to get supplemental transportation. He investigated programs such as the Children in Transition (CIT) for transportation for the children, but since he had a vehicle, he was told they could not assist the family. Yet, he felt frustrated when he asked why and no one could explain the rules and system to him. But when he lost the vehicle in November due to his inability to continue making the payments, he was able to get CIT transportation support. For two weeks, the children were transported in a van from their schools to Family Promise, and then a bus schedule was worked out for them all. Don described this challenge as, “very frustrating to realize that when you need help, you are told that you just aren’t down enough to get it!”

Participating in a private homeless program. The Family Promise program seemed to face multiple challenges and barriers to Don that “state or city homeless programs don’t have.” He questioned why even the private programs couldn’t be more connected to a “homeless service overseeing system.” He said that most of the families he has met really want help and will do what it takes, but that he thinks they are more cut off from services and networks in a private program. He expressed frustration that “it takes so much longer here to get on your feet!” He talked about meeting others receiving homeless services that were or had been in the Reno-Sparks Gospel Rescue Mission program. He said they “were so lucky that services to help them was right there: welfare health care, child care, help to get a job, a plan to get housing, and then they move on so fast!” Yet, he also knew that his family could not stay there and all be together. He praised the efforts of the Family Promise staff, but also expressed frustration for “new staff” and for “the homeless newbie families” all having to figure out the bigger systems and then not knowing people to call and get help for someone right away.

Don expressed frustration that” they can’t just refer us here to a bigger system where we could have a social worker type person who could expedite everything and tell us how to work the system. He repeatedly said that most families he meets, who are homeless for the first time really want to “be on their own feet.” He said that “very few really break the rules or just leave because they give up and don’t keep trying to let the systems work for them.” He also said that as he learns about services and how to “survive in the system” he relays that to the Family Promise staff and families so they can all help each other. “We know we have to help each other.....we are mostly different here as families.....we are not ‘milking the programs’, and that does happen a lot.”

Single male parent. Don was very clear in all aspects of his experiences that he feels it is much harder for a single father head of household to get homeless services than for two parent families and even a single mother

head of household. “It is so hard being a single homeless father in Nevada! I’ve talked with volunteer lawyers about how bad father’s rights are.....I didn’t know until I was the single homeless father that needs help! If things were reversed and my ex was the single parent trying to get help, divorced, and child custody she would pay \$250. But my costs are \$2,000 minimum and a ton of paper work to ‘prove’ I am a good parent.” He relayed that he now understands why single fathers have such a hard time, and “give up because it is cheaper to fight for only visitation....even if that is not best for the kids.....the moms have the rights here, and fathers are so discouraged and just give up.”

Don discussed how he has met other single mothers, and specifically “moms who are ex-felons,” and the way it seems to him that they get far more access to homeless services for families. “Those moms I’ve met get a *real* social worker that really meets with them and gives them guidance. They get them phenomenal services I can’t get: free bus passes, free child care, and ongoing supervision to keep them going in the right direction.” He expressed frustration that with a social worker’s assistance these moms appear to have easier access to job interviews and getting jobs “because employers know they are watched over by a social worker and aren’t just on their own.” He repeated multiple times, “I could use that kind of help too! Why isn’t there a place where I could register as homeless and get the same level of help? I am hardworking and trying to keep a family together, but I am less acceptable?!” As he expressed his frustrations, he also said that in the time his family has been homeless, “no one can give me the right answers....just tell me what I need to do and how.....who can help me without giving me ‘wishy-washy’ answers.....I don’t know where to put my energies!”

Children in Transition Program. “I wanted them to say that since I was having problems they would help get my kids back and forth to school.” Don said if they would just give him written information on what he could qualify for and when, he could understand their system better.

Don’s View For His Family’s Future Homeless Status

Don identified three areas as impacting his family’s future for leaving their homeless status. “I’m, thankful for what I have everyday. The worst case scenario is that I could really be on the street with my children, and anything is better than that.” He said he has two big goals for a job and a place to live in order to keep the family together.

Secure employment. He talked about the fact that he has always been able to work, and that because of that he knows he can be successful and not be homeless again. “When I get a job that will fit with my kids’ schedules, we will be pretty good.”

Permanent affordable residence. “Getting our own place is a priority now, and that will keep our family together and stable.” He spoke of helping other homeless families in the future because, “I have learned so much on my own about all of this and could help others.”

Hope for the future and faith in God. Don identified his personal philosophy of life, the helping actions of strangers, and his belief in God as foundations for his hope for his family to leave their homeless status. “There are people who are willing to do something nice for us just because they want to, and that is what gives me hope to plug away. I have patience and faith, ‘OK, God, give me courage to move forward.’”

Participant Two: “Mark,” Single Male and Recent Washoe County Detention Facility Inmate

Background

Mark is a 49 year old Caucasian male who volunteered as a participant while staying at the Reno Homeless Men’s Drop In Center (MDIC). He stated that he has been homeless “most of the time for four years,” and has been in Reno over three years. He said he has been divorced “for a long time now” after a marriage of 12 years. He is the father of two grown children who live in New York and “are healthy and safe.” He was employed for 22 years in construction hanging sheet rock. He states he “almost finished high school.”

Mark considers the reasons he is homeless are due to his use of alcohol and drugs (a variety, but including meth). Mark is proud of the fact that he has “been clean for several months.” He has been arrested “my share of it,” but never for a felony. He said he is “healthy most of the time,” but has not had health insurance for most of his life. His time in Reno has been spent primarily living in the downtown area including some of the motels, along the river, and about 70% of the time at the Men’s Drop In Center (the old “Bug House”).

Family-Friends Support Availability

Mark freely talked about “burning my bridges with my living brother.” He has no family in the Reno area, but his brother lives in southern California and doesn’t want to be involved with him anymore. His children are “far away from here and from my troubles.” Mark talked about being raised in a “dysfunctional family....fighting all the time.....knives and chairs were thrown at us kids and through windows.” He refers to his mother as “a saint” and his father as “bad news...a real Arian maniac.” He also reflected on the fact that “I guess all of us here, are pretty much alone.....no family are left that want anything to do with us.” He states that he has “lived with friends” in the motels when we have been working in day labor and have the money.

He can't identify anyone he could contact for any further support or that would want to help him.

Financial Status

Mark has no type of income at this time, and has not maintained any routine employment in four years. He said that "it is impossible for a man to go hungry around here.....I have everything I need." He has frequently worked for day labor jobs or volunteers at the Men's Drop In Center to "pay back what they have given me."

However, he is proud of the fact that he "does not play the system for a check" as he says others who are homeless do on a routine basis. He talked about those men who receive "nut checks" for being "crazy," and yet doesn't feel the majority of them should get the money....."Just watch them when they are not impressing people who make decisions and they act real different. Come by and watch them watching 'Jeopardy' sometime.....they know a lot and use that to 'work the system'.....a lot are cheating the government and that isn't fair! Why don't all those smart people know what they are doing to cheat?!" Arrests/Incarcerations Mark talked about being incarcerated at the Washoe County Jail within the last year for 10 days on a charge of trespassing. "I crawled into a spot I shouldn't have as a place to crash and I got caught." He did not refer to other arrests as resulting in having any jail time, but that "99% of my problems and others' are due to alcohol. There are always other drugs around, but it is that the booze bone is connected to the 'gambling bone' and then there are other problems with the law. The cops will pick you up and take you to the shelter when it is really cold just to keep you alive.....but you know, cops have better things to do."

He said that being homeless didn't matter while he was in jail, rather "you learn in jail to be normal and polite.....and keep your mouth shut!" He said that he was not lined up for any services to help him when he was released.....it didn't matter that I am homeless...I just got moved on to some place else." He said he was released from the jail at four o'clock in the morning and given a city bus pass to get back to town. He then went to the gospel mission to eat. "I survived fine because I was good enough in there to get out and then I have to try on my own to put my best foot forward."

Accessed Services

Reno-Sparks Gospel Rescue Mission Men's Drop In Center. Mark praised the new center and the homeless campus. He compared homeless services in Reno to Las Vegas where he lived and was homeless for about one year, "they are 50% better here.....people wait in line in Las Vegas forever to get a bowl of soup that was inedible." He spoke positively about the men's center saying, "they are here to take care of you when times are

rough.....they know that some of us do see the glass as ½ full and that we aren't always this way." He said that about 70% of his time in the past four years has been associated with this center. He stated, "I have walked in their door hundreds of times and am asked: 'Do you need help?'" He was adamant that he will not sleep outside during the winter, but that 50% of guys that come here will sleep outside until it is just too cold, and 50% will stay some in motels when they have money from day labor.

Mark was proud that he volunteers at MDIC but that "it is a lot like working in a hospital without any equipment trying to manage and clean up after these guys. We even need bedpans! It is packed in here at dinner time, but the place is a well oiled machine. The gentlemen who work here are great.....it is hard to get people to work here....people who care about us." He talked about the population of men who come to the MDIC on a regular basis. "There can be 200-250+ guys here everyday.....more by the 10th of the month when folks who get checks have blown through that money. 50% of us are good guys and grateful for the help. 50% are in 'another group' of ungrateful and guys who can't live on their own. 10% of all of us have had 2nd and 3rd chances, but have 'burned all bridges' for normal life. Some of those have to be forced to shower....some can't even control their BMs, and boy, is that hard to deal with. There is no place for some of these guys and they end up here with 'the rest of us.'"

Mark also praised this program and it's availability. "This place has always done me justice.....it helps you keep the faith and not surrender." He discussed the staff as "good gentlemen who show us we are good too." He gave examples of staff who spent their "own money to help out someone or even buy razors. Bud knows what a difference it makes if a man can look decent." Mark said he has not participated in any "longer programs" offered with this program, but "I believe that you should give back when you are helped out, and I do that....I do a good job, too as a volunteer!"

Mark talked about being a volunteer on a cleaning crew, and that it "saved my butt...I had something to do and proved I could!" He talked about volunteers who clean up behind people who stay there as their way to "help the men get back on their feet." He talked about how hard the physical clean up is, but how important..."if it weren't for this place and all the work people do to keep it going, in winter there would be dead people all over! Last night it was frigid (16 degrees) and no one could survive outside even with a bottle of whiskey! Here, they go to the effort to find space for anyone."

HAWC Clinic, Outreach Center. Mark denies needing any regular healthcare or getting any routine care. He feels "I have become immune to being sick.....this life makes you tough and able to handle it." He said that the HAWC clinic staff are always helpful and everyone he knows is always grateful for their help. However, he did state that is probably "depressed-down about 20% of the time" but will not seek professional care and doesn't see the need to take medications. He states that he has been "thinking about

suicide sometimes,” but denied that he has ever had a plan to commit suicide or that he has sought professional care. He contributes some of his depression to his knowledge of being homeless and knowing so many other homeless people....”the more you know, the more grief you have.” He denied that he has told anyone about his depression, or that he receives any annual preventive care.

After talking about his depression, Mark also gave his insight into other homeless men who do receive mental health services. "A lot of the guys who get 'nut checks' have just surrendered to life and need baby-sitting. They get their checks at the beginning of every month and then go gamble or drink it away and then are back here for more help. I wish some of the folks who make decisions about who gets a 'nut check' would see how they really act when they leave their office."

Mark's Barriers For Receiving Desired Services

Employment Mark stated that "we all know we can get a day job" but expressed that "when I am ready again, it is hard to keep going.....the cold weather gets me down." He said that "booze" is a constant issue and he implied that he has to deal with that by himself. He was proud that he had been a good worker earlier in life, but doesn't know what he could do now for a "regular job." He said he has never spoken to anyone who could help him with that direction, other than telling him to go to day labor.....and "that is work ok, but not always very good." He talked about his skills that he has developed working with the overnight centers, "I will work 10+ hours a day cleaning up behind people here.....it would be easier to do this work some place that had real equipment." However, no further exploration of employment was offered other than, "I need a full time job and be able to keep it."

Booze and drugs". Mark acknowledged that his "problems" stemmed from his use of both, but stated that he is "getting it under control now." He was very proud that he has "been clean for several months, because I am determined." He did not acknowledge that he has been in any treatment programs, or that he would enter a program. He did deny that gambling is a problem for him.

Mark's View of His Future Homeless Status

Mark was vague about his future, but very positive about the support he continues to receive from the homeless services "that are all together now." He doesn't want to leave the Reno area and specifically, the "downtown mission area."

Participant Three: "James," An Elderly Individual

Background

James volunteered as a participant while he was checking into the MDIC in order to "get a bed tonight because it is so cold." James is a 68 year old Caucasian man who walks with a cane, and states he has been homeless "this time for about 5 months." He states he just returned to Reno yesterday after a couple of weeks living with a friend in a Las Vegas half-way house. "That was a mistake, and I am back in Reno where it is better for me." James is a Viet Nam veteran (82nd Airborne with 38 jumps!) and a retired conductor from the Pennsylvania Rail Road, and then as a welder. He states that his physical health is good except for arthritis and scoliosis. However, he did say that walking can be hard and that "I used to have an automatic chair I could use, but it has been broken for weeks and is in a shop. I am doing pretty good anyway." He denies taking any medications, except aspirin, but that he hasn't taken his medications for being "bi-polar" for a year or more. "I don't need those pills, and do just fine anyway." He denies any addictions, but "I drink some". He works "about 4 or more days every Christmas" as a Santa Claus for stores. James carries an identification card as Santa Claus, and referred to himself as "James Claus."

James states he is now single, but that he has been married 11 times without any children. He was an only child in West Virginia and has no living relatives. He said his level of education is "about high school...that was a long time ago." He has lived in Nevada for 12 months, 11 of those in Reno. He stated that he receives no Veteran's Administration Services (VA services) because his "records burned in a fire in St. Louis in 1971." Since that time he said he "has tried", but hasn't been able to get his service records verified.

Financial Status

James states he receive a monthly railroad retirement check at the beginning of each month. He declined to state the amount but said, "it is something that helps me get by, but I get money as Santa too." He talked about "pooling his money with someone else so we can get more together." His monthly checks are automatically deposited into a Wells Fargo account, and "I can get to it no matter where I am."

Accessed Services

MDIC. James has been coming to the MDIC "for a year or two, more in the winter." He said that "if I get here early enough I may get a bed assigned so it is easier for me to manage.....I have a hard time getting off of the mats on the floor."

Washoe County Senior Services. James states that he usually eats lunch at their 9th street center, and likes to talk with people there. He said that they "know what is what" and offer guidance for him. He went to the center for lunch the same day after arriving back in town on Greyhound and they gave him "some good help." He didn't go back to MDIC, but since he had a city bus pass from the center, "I rode the buses all night to keep warm. That works, you know....when the drivers start checking you out, you just get on another bus." James was also given contact information for a contact with the Veteran's of Foreign Wars (VFW) who he called from the center about his military records. He relays that "maybe they can help me get those records straightened out." He denies that anyone has ever done that for him before, but that he is now wearing a veteran's ball cap and that got him attention at the senior center.

HAWC clinic. James states he has been to the clinic "sometimes and they are real nice." However, he refuses to have any referrals for a psychiatric evaluation because, "I am doing fine."

Barriers to Receiving Services

James has very clear ideas about what he needs for services. He puts himself in a category that is separate from "people who have been homeless for a long time.....they know exactly how to get what they want." He refers to himself as "being too naive and trusting of people who say they will help and then they don't.....or they take advantage of me and take my money." He said he wished there was just 1 or 2 people "who know about everything that I could talk to and trust them."

Barriers for Receiving Desired Services

"A place to live, maybe with other folks." "Where are these places? If you get a place to live you have a starting point to get other help." James talked about his preference to live with someone else or others versus living alone and constantly figuring out where to live, "it gets hard to do this on my own". He relayed that he left Reno after his "Santa work" to go to Las Vegas with a "fellow vet who told me I could live with him in a half-way house." James thought this was an appealing arrangement because "I do better when I am with someone.....that is why I have been married so many times!" However, within three weeks at that house, he felt he was being taken advantage of for his monthly check because only 2 of the 5 people in the house received any monthly income. So, he used some of the money left to buy a bus ticket back to Reno, "where it is safer."

James pulled some papers out of his pocket that had the name of a man who has a room to rent in his house. He was very proud that "I found this myself on the bulletin board at the senior center." However, his discussion also revealed that he "would feel better if someone else could tell me that it is OK."

Storage for my things. James said finding storage for his belongings is difficult and stressful for him. "I have my clothes, Santa pictures, and all my military swamp bags." Since his return from Las Vegas, he has his items "stored in the back room of a bar downtown.....it costs \$8/day for storage at the bus depot."

My personality is a problem. James feels that he is "more stable when I am in a relationship." He feels that he is frequently taken advantage of by others who say they are friends or can help him. He denied that he uses behaviors that he sees others use, "just to get services." He talked about veterans who "check into the VA hospital and say their pills don't work, when they are just fine and only want to 'rest up' for a few days." He talked about how many people who "are homeless so much, and really work the system.....but I am not like that." He said his numerous marriages were to be with someone else, and that didn't work.

"I liked living in a rooming house on Ralston street, because other guys were there." He also spoke of being in a Salvation Army residential program in Flint, MI prior to 1997, "when I needed to take pills". Then he relayed that he inherited \$18,000 from his parents' estate and then he "traveled the country" for 6 years (1997 – 2003). He came to Reno to find an ex-wife who worked in a casino, but that did not work out.

James' View of His Future Homeless Status

James is clear that "I want to live in a regular place, but not alone." He credits his philosophy of looking at life as, "I pick myself up and just start over again when things are bad. Every month I will get another check." He is proud that he doesn't use up his check by "drinking or gambling it up in 1-2 weeks." He is hopeful that he can secure a residence, and get his status verified with the VA through support he has found in Reno from the "senior center".

Participant Four, "Jason", Single Male

Background

Jason is a single, 36 year old Caucasian man who volunteered as a participant while staying nightly at the MDIC for two weeks while he works day labor jobs. He states he has been homeless "on and off for a couple of years" Jason states that he has no family he could receive any support from, and has no children. He has a GED certificate for his educational level. He states his only addiction is smoking and only gambles if he is sure he can afford to lose his \$2 limit. He served "almost two years" in the Army but does not qualify for any veterans services. He came to Reno about 4 months ago from Salt Lake City because "Reno is affordable even if you get minimum wage.....you can get ham and eggs for 1 dollar!" He states he

is a semi-skilled laborer and was told by people he met in Salt Lake City that Reno has better opportunities than other states. Jason is registered in "Casual Labor and three other temporary employment agencies".

Financial Status

Jason said "I work for what money I get!" He is proud of his "flexibility and willing to work attitude." However, he said that earning \$8/hour is "getting harder to survive" because jobs are slowing down. He keeps all of his possessions with him in a back pack because he can't afford any storage spaces. Currently, he does not earn enough money on a consistent basis to look for a permanent residence. His priorities for his earnings are: "getting into a weekly motel for part of the month, buying cigarettes, city bus tickets, and getting some more jeans."

Accessed Services

MDIC. Jason stated that he "uses this place as my central spot...I know I can come here and not worry about freezing if I haven't been working". He generally eats an evening meal here, even when he does not sleep here. He will often volunteer for the clean up crews to guarantee he gets a meal. However, he regards himself as "different" than most of the "'shelterly challenged' people here. There should be no whining allowed about how bad people have it.....we all have bad days that is why we come here!"

HAWC clinic. Jason has used the 4th street clinic "a few times, and it was cool". He received medications for a throat infection and then an eye infection, but was not given any referrals to get his several broken teeth fixed. He denies any dental pain at present and said he would go back if he was in pain to get more help.

Homeless Evaluation Liaison Program. The officers originally directed him to the MDIC which he had not learned about when he first arrived in town. He has returned to the program for an evaluation to see if he could qualify for a bus ticket, but said "I don't qualify because I can work." However, he didn't know where he would go with a bus ticket, but "I might want to move on since I only have myself to worry about."

Food Stamps. Jason said he has qualified for food stamps, but is not using them while he eats at the MDIC so often.

Library. Jason said he uses the library to search the internet and look for local jobs, to read a book, and just relax. He said that "since I have to take care of me, I have to look things up." He admits that there have been times when he falls asleep there, but that "the guards keep watching everyone."
Barriers to Access Services

Jason identified barriers that he feels impact him in the areas of securing employment and in getting temporary sleeping shelter when he can't afford a motel room. He was frustrated that the weekly motels "all have different rates, and that makes it hard to know how much money he needs to rent a room."

Competition for employment. Jason was very adamant that business owners are bypassing hiring men from casual labor and other agencies and because "they just pick up illegals standing on the corners. They think it is cheaper, and I guess they are greedy.....don't they know they have no liability coverage if something happens?" He says on several days in the past 2 weeks while he is waiting at a day labor agency, they "watch men picked up on the corner before the truck even reaches the temp office." He is concerned that winter work is slow and this type of picking up workers makes it more difficult for him. He expressed concerns that "the city doesn't seem to oversee this."

He also was concerned that in order to sleep at the MDIC, "you need to be in line by 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and that is hard if you are supposed to work all day." He also said that now in the severe winter weather if the shelter is full, men can be driven to the overflow site, but "if the roads are icy the van doesn't drive over there."

Working at night and then sleeping outside. Jason talked about job opportunities that want workers for the night shift, but how hard that is without a place to sleep during the day in town. He said he has been willing to work in those jobs and "did great", but that lack of sleep made it too hard to continue. He described trying to sleep in the downtown library and outside in an old building's doorway off Virginia street. He said he had enough blankets, but that neither place was good for sleeping. He also expressed fear about "the bad crazies out there and drug users.....it is bad here in Reno with those guys. I have heard how they could come by and start your blankets on fire just for fun." He did say that the MDIC has a 30 day registration level that can be used once a year, and "then you can sleep here during the day." Jason used his 30 day status earlier this year.

Having his own residence. Jason discussed how important he knows it is to have his own residence again if he "will really make it." He said that "having your own door to lock and not live with a bunch of people like an ant colony, really means something....you act differently." He also discussed the challenges of sleeping a showering in a shelter, "privacy really means something to a man....you know you are somebody. It is really bad with all the loud noises at night and is hard to sleep. Then I worry about getting in on time so I can at least lay down on a mat or else I have to sit up in a chair.....how's that: I am out working and I end up in the chair!" He also said that if you have a regular place to live you have your own address...." Do you realize how important that is? People look at you differently if you use a general delivery address.....that is like telling

them you live on the streets or in a shelter." He said he wished there was a place in town where you could register and have a real address, and get phone messages....."wow, then jobs would be easier to get and keep." He also emphasized that when you live around so many people, "it is hard to think.....you are often waiting in a line, or the noise is so loud you can't think clearly."

His ideal situation would be having a program where a homeless person could apply and then decide what they needed most: food stamps, a room, or transportations. "If you could just get about 2 weeks of some stability, I think a person could make it.....I bet I could."

Transportation. Jason expressed a good deal of frustration over the available transportation and his difficulties in being able to reach jobs on the other side of town. He wished there was some program that could offer subsidized bus passes, "even for a few weeks, so I could get set up in a job." He said he would rather have subsidized transportation than food stamps, "because it is so important to have a job and be seen as a good worker." He said that the current one way city bus ticket is "pricy and hard to have when you just start a new job." He said it is his experience that "workers who have reliable transportation are much better off and the bosses sure like them."

Jason's View of His Future Homeless Status

Jason identified himself as "being on my own....I have to figure this all out by myself." He reflected on the fact that he had "lots of bad relationships in my life and growing up.....I didn't have a positive environment or the 'all American family'. I guess it works for me that I am mobile and on my own because it is easy to move if I am around hypocrites." He denied that he has worked with anyone from an agency to plan for his future.

He credits his ability to "joke a lot, and look at tomorrow as another day for my daily survival." He denied being depressed about this situation saying, "I know I should be, but I'm not. I have perseverance and just keep at it everyday, no matter what I do I don't let the obstacles take over." He said that if "I could stay in 1 spot and not leave, I bet I could make it OK."

Jason encouraged the investigator to "remember that if you see a man over 30 with a backpack, he is probably homeless and carrying everything he has with him, so smile!"

Participant Five: Carrie, Single Woman

Background

Carrie is a 29 year old single woman who describes herself as "part Gypsy and White." She volunteered to participate in the study, after she struck up several conversations with the investigator outside the RSGM on Record

Street on her way to check in for the night. The interview took place on a curb in the parking lot of the RSGM, so she could "stay outside while the sun shines." She states she has no living children (1 died as a baby) and left her "man" over a year ago when he "took my money and broke my mother's dishes." She denied taking any legal actions against him, or that it was an abusive relationship. She has been in Reno for 7 months from Sacramento and has been homeless all of that time, "if you count not having a place in my own name."

Carrie said she grew up in a rural area of Idaho and "had to work early and didn't finish high school." She denies having any relatives or friends "who care or could help....they have their own stuff." She states she is "OK health wise...it's not like I need to take pills to survive.....not like some folks do." She denies taking any regular medicine or being under the care of anyone healthcare providers. She also denies having any current addictions, but "I started drinking when I was 12, but have been clean for most of the last 2 years." She said she has been employed with some day-type jobs, but that she is a "cook's helper" and hasn't found a regular job. She has had two offers to work in the casinos but at night, and she said she can't work at night, because "I don't feel good and then I am afraid I would start drinking again."

Financial Status

Carrie said she had "saved up a stash of my own money" during her last relationship and used those funds to come to Reno and to live on for a while after getting to town. She now relies on sporadic jobs for money and has started sleeping in the RSGM shelter during the holidays. She said she "is thinking about what I need to do to find something more reliable for work." She has not applied for any general welfare assistance, "I want to do this on my own.....I think I can, but maybe not."

Services Accessed

RSGM. Carrie said that "everyone knows a gal can come here...it is safer than staying with people you don't know very well." A friend she had met in a casino job had told her about the shelter and she comes here to sleep. She eats lunch several times a week at St. Vincent's dining room, and then can just wait for the shelter to open the waiting line. She said her friend told her that the shelter has a program and wants me to join, but "I don't have time for that.....I just want to work." She said everyone she has met is helpful at the shelter and that she has formed friendships with some of the other women and "we help each other out."

Clothes Closet. Carrie said she was not ready for the cold weather and has gotten a coat, gloves, hat, and shoes from the shelter and a clothes closet with vouchers. She said she has her clothes "at a friend's motel room, but that makes it hard." She expressed frustration at being able to find personal

hygiene items, and that "I have to save money to get those, I guess." She also said that most casino jobs have dress requirements (white blouse and black pants) and she had those, but that she loaned them to a friend and didn't get them back.

HAWC clinic. Carrie has been to the clinic twice for "female problems" and would go back again. She said they even told her where to go for the clothes closet. "I told them I probably need glasses and I can go back for a referral."

Barriers to Access Services

Night Employment. Carrie feels that most jobs she is most qualified for would require her to work at night, and that is not what she wants to do. She said that she knows women with children and "thinks they get a better deal because they work around when they get care for their kids." She expressed her desire to be able to talk "with one job person who could know what I do and then find jobs for me." Carrie was asked if she could read and write and if that was a barrier to her getting a job and she said she "reads better than I write and don't like numbers, so I guess I am not the waitress type, but I can help out cooks." She is hopeful that she could find a job in the next "couple of weeks."

Personal Confusion. Carrie said that "there is so much, and I get confused....then there can be a lot of paperwork which is hard to deal with." I find out about things from people I meet, mostly other women. Carrie said she has rarely lived "on my own" and that knowing what to do is harder than she thought. She did say that if "someone really explained the buses to me, I could get other jobs instead of staying downtown where I walk everywhere."

Emotional Issues. Carrie said that she "like everyone" has issues, but she doesn't want to focus on them, "or I'd just stop." She denies that she has sought any assistance from a professional or agency and that "I force myself to know I have it better than a lot of gals who have themselves and kids to worry about." She denied any specific details other than, "men have always brought me down." She said she feels "happier" in Reno and because of that knows she can survive here. Carrie did say she has "seen a shrink", but that wouldn't help her now with any of her problems.

Carrie's View of Her Future Homeless Status

Carrie stated she has "become lazy" in trying to find work as hard as she should. She thinks that as soon as she has a couple of weeks in a regular job, she can look for a "nice roommate and get a real place with a stove." She said she has only been homeless because, "I am living on my own", but refuses to seek any assistance from women's agencies at this time. She repeated several times that, "I will be OK in a few weeks and get on my feet."

Participant Six: "Candace," Single Woman Previously Homeless and a Current Homeless Agency Staff Member

Background

Candace is a single, 37 year old ethnic minority woman who experienced being homeless in Washoe County "several years ago." She is now employed as a staff person who works with homeless persons in a local service agency, but wanted to share her experiences for the study. She states she had one episode of being homeless after losing her job in a casino and ending up on the streets due to drug use and gambling. Her drug of choice was "meth, and others to bring me down."

She is a mother of three children who do not live with her and said her addictions forced her to "find other arrangements for her children." One child had been adopted by grandparents and another she arranged to live with one of his friend's family, and one had not been living with her. She credits her recovery and being able now to help other homeless individuals with being a Christian and her faith that God would help her.
Reasons for becoming homeless

Addictions. Candace stated she had used drugs, primarily meth for 22 years prior to finally "hitting the rock bottom point." She had worked in food services in a casino for "years", but the environment was bad for her because, "everyone there uses." She considered other meth users her friends and found that her life revolved around her addiction.

Employer "personal loans." and no drug testing. Carrie said that the casino offered employees loans for "\$200-500 at a time and then collected it back from their pay. She said these loans allowed her to "hang on with my drug use quite awhile." There were never any questions as to why she needed the loans or suggestions for her to receive any type of counseling or support.

The casino did not do any random drug testing for employees that she knew and she felt this contributed to the ongoing "freedom to use drugs" environment. She said she was tested before being hired, but never again. She said employees routinely "got high together."

Loss of job. Carrie said she lost her job from her "drug behaviors", but no one ever counseled her to get treatment support or referred her to any agencies or programs when she was fired. "They knew what was going on, but didn't say anything."

No friends to help. When she lost her residence, Candace stated she had no friends who could take her in.

Survival Behaviors While Homeless

Since Candace is no longer homeless or experiencing addictions, she shared her experiences with a clear perspective of her several survival behaviors. She said most of the other women she met were on drugs, some had been abused, some needed mental help, and there were a smaller number who had been homeless for a long time and didn't want to change.

Buddies. She identified that women often "buddy up" during the day with other women in order to not be alone and as vulnerable as being alone. The women met each other in the night shelter. The "buddies" also pooled their money to be able to rent a room in a weekly motel. Candace lived in weekly motels on and off for a year, and then lived with "friends". She understands now that the people she saw as friends were only those she "got high with."

Don't show you are afraid. Candace said life on the street and even with buddies is dangerous for women. In order to get drugs when she had no money, she "acted tough" and was able to "use with people who had the stuff." She now realizes that during that time on the streets because she was "using" that "my mind wasn't right and I didn't know how scared I should have been. Now I would truly be scared to death."

Don't stay in one place...move around. Candace shared how difficult it could be to stay sitting or laying in one place too long. "People watch you and could take advantage of you, catch you off guard." She said she had a bike for awhile and would ride it all day, just back and forth. She would also sit in casinos until security would be watching her and then she would move on to the next casino.

How She Ended Her Homeless Status

Candace gives the credit to ending her homeless episode to a local rehabilitation program and the fact that "a woman she had known who had been a heroin addict and was there, kept after me to get in the program." She states that she had "hit rock bottom when I realized I really had no place to lay my head and didn't know where or how to get help. It was the most devastating time and I was shocked to my senses. I cried to God to help me, that this is not my life. He must have gotten me to the right place. A Christian based recovery program was just what I needed. "

Barriers Candace Identified For Homeless Women

Mental and physical health issues are ignored. She talked in depth about the concerning issues so many women who are homeless face with their mental and physical health and are not really capable of making good decisions about getting treatment. "Some are even coming to the shelter straight from hospitals.....they aren't released to family or a home, but to a shelter! Hospitals in town will actually call us and tell us they are sending someone over to us because they are homeless.....yet, some are not well enough to come here. We are not set up to give hospital level care to people....some

are incontinent, vomiting, need help moving, and then we send them back! Over half of them are obviously 'crazy' and don't make good decisions, but no one else makes decisions for these women."

Disability income. She spoke of women who do receive a monthly mental disability income check, but that they "aren't managed" with their money and as a result "go off to feed their addictions until the money is gone, and then come to the shelter." She said that some of them make bad decisions and even walk away from the safety and warmth of a shelter, but no one can stop them. She discussed how "very few of the mental cases can ever hold a job....yet, somehow they fend for themselves."

Asking for help. Candace spoke of the difficulty many women face without ever asking for help in anyway from shelter staff. Yet, she said that she is encouraged by the women who will ask for help....."a closed mouth won't get fed." She said shelter staff does not have the ability to ask every woman what they need for help.