



Center for Public Scholarship & Social Change

People & Places: Community need and the use of public space in Binns Park

April 2023

by

Dr. Jennifer Frank, Dr. Mary H. Glazier, Jenna Graeff, Rachel Preibisch, Dawn M.
Watson

Dr. Jennifer Frank
Jennifer.frank@millersville.edu
School of Social Work, Stayer Hall

Huntingdon House
8 S. George Street
Millersville, PA 17551
Tel: 717-871-7622

<https://www.millersville.edu/collegecenters/cpssc/research-reports.php>

Introduction

Binns Park

Unsheltered homelessness in Lancaster City, particularly manifested by people sleeping out in Binns Park, has received increased attention in recent years. In addition to individuals experiencing homelessness, Binns Park congregants also include people who have permanent residences but who frequent the park to socialize and check-up on friends. Some of these people were formerly unsheltered homeless. Some people in Binns Park show signs of serious mental illness or have physical disabilities. Drug-related activities in the park, including sales, use, and overdoses, are also commonly reported concerns. There are other users of the park including workers from nearby office buildings, dog walkers, parents and children, and people visiting Lancaster County offices.

The presence of this diverse group of Binns Park users has drawn the attention of city and county officials and the business community. Some express concern for the welfare of people who appear to be sheltering in the park and those who show signs of mental illness or substance use disorder. Others wonder whether the presence of “these people” renders the park unattractive to parents and children, workers on their lunch hour and others perceived to have a more legitimate claim to use the park. Keeping the park attractive to the public and dealing with litter and hygiene issues are dominant concerns for public officials.

Multiple agencies provide outreach and housing related services, community meals, emergency shelter, transitional housing, and services for people with mental health and substance use disorders. These providers are challenged to respond to governmental and business directives to address the presence of visible homelessness in Binns Park, while simultaneously building trusting relationships with the congregants, some of whom are now or were previously unsheltered. Volunteers associated with informal, grassroots groups make regular forays into the park with food and incidentals, challenging the more professionalized approach of social service workers.

The diversity of people who use Binns Park makes both defining the problem and arriving at solutions difficult. Although some of the people who use the park are unsheltered homeless whose primary need is housing, many other park users are not unsheltered. Some have symptoms of mental illness, which can be off-putting to other users of the park. However, most park users with mental illness do not meet the legal standard for compulsory treatment which is only permitted when there is an imminent danger to self or others. Consuming alcohol and illegal drugs in public may lead to overdoses and other adverse health effects, but under some circumstances, these behaviors are either allowed or ignored.

Research Overview

This study has attempted to gain insight into the complexities of the issues that comprise the Binns Park problem. This community-based research project began in consultation with professionals who addressed this problem primarily from the vantage point of outreach to the homeless. We began the research project by conducting observations of the park. Through them we gained insights into who used the park and the types of activities that occurred there. The observations led to a realization that it was essential to survey or interview individuals representing a wide variety of perspectives, including social service agency leaders and direct service staff, governmental officials, homeless outreach workers, grassroots volunteers, and the congregants themselves.

The information collected through observations, interviews, and surveys has led to the identification of several major themes. These are:

- Contrasting perspectives on the nature of the Binns Park problem leading to varying degrees of emphasis on **people** versus **place**.
- Relationship between first-hand experience and proximity to homelessness and a person-oriented approach to Binns Park issues.
- Disconnect between social service programs and the needs of Binns Park congregants.

These themes form the basis for a series of recommendations. These include obtaining accurate information regarding Binns Park congregants, identifying effective methods of engaging congregants, developing collaboration between formal programs and grassroots volunteers, and honoring people's needs for human connection and personal autonomy. The fundamental recommendation is that all efforts to address the problems associated with Binns Park must be grounded in empathy and respect for the humanity of all people.

Data Collection

We began this project by conducting non-participatory, unstructured observations of Binns Park to note the behaviors and activities occurring in this area. Observations began in October and concluded in November 2021 and took place from early morning through early evening.¹ In spring 2022, members of the research team completed face-to-face interviews with twelve congregants.

In addition to observations and interviews with Binns Park congregants, in January 2022 we assembled a list of 47 stakeholders who occupy professional roles or leadership positions and invited them to complete an online survey regarding their assessment of the needs of the Binns Park congregants, the adequacy of available resources to address those needs, and their views

¹ Conditions in the park may have changed since then. A death due to a drug overdose in Binns Park in January 2022 intensified stakeholder concerns regarding the use of space in the park (Wise, 2022). Also, around that time, the Lancaster County Homeless Coalition moved from Penn Medicine to the Lancaster County Housing and Redevelopment Authority. This change coupled with intensified concerns regarding conditions in Binns Park may have affected policies implemented in Binns Park.

on possible solutions to problems in the park. These stakeholders included homeless outreach workers, ancillary services staff, non-profit agency leaders, governmental officials. Twenty-eight completed surveys. We also invited seven grassroots volunteers seeking to assist people congregating in Binns Park to complete this survey as well and five did.²

Observations

The observations of Binns Park did not always conform to what others predicted we would find. Instead, they suggested a more complex picture of how people in Binns Park interact, the types of behaviors occurring, and the impact of their presence on the park space.

Park Conditions

Observers took note of things that they could see, hear, touch and smell in their effort to document conditions in the park. These observations noted the presence or absence of trash, weather conditions, and noise from events or ongoing construction. Some of the observations confirmed negative conditions in the park.

“Empty park with lots of trash.”

“I immediately noticed the smell of urine and saw many cigarette butts and litter.”

Because observers engaged in multiple observations, they became familiar enough with the area to note when trash had increased or decreased.

“I come around to the inside of the government building and there is no one there on the benches, and all of the trash is gone. I took a picture because on Saturday, this area was covered in trash with multiple people sleeping there. Today it is clean as a whistle as if no one was ever there.”

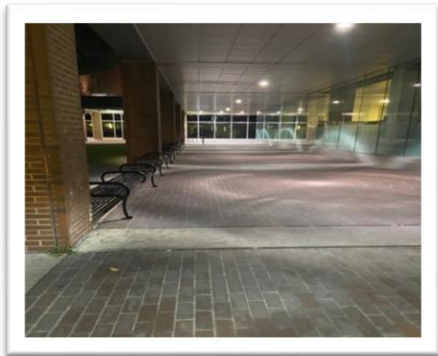


Photo 1: Morning view of an area typically inhabited, now empty and clean.

Private Functions in Public Spaces

Many observations confirmed the vulnerability of individuals conducting their private lives in public spaces. Many individuals had all their possessions and belongings with them, as depicted

² Additional details regarding data collection are found in Appendix A and regarding data analysis are contained in Appendix B.

in Photo 2. Observers saw people openly engaging in necessary human activities of daily living such as eating, drinking, sleeping, and bathing.

“Walking up to Binns Park there is a man trying to catch water from the fountain in the center of the park in his Turkey Hill iced tea bottle. Later, I see him splashing that same water on his face and head with soap. There is one larger young woman who appears to have slept outside last night in her going out dress and shoes.”

Photo 2: Personal belongings stored under the stage in downtown Penn Square

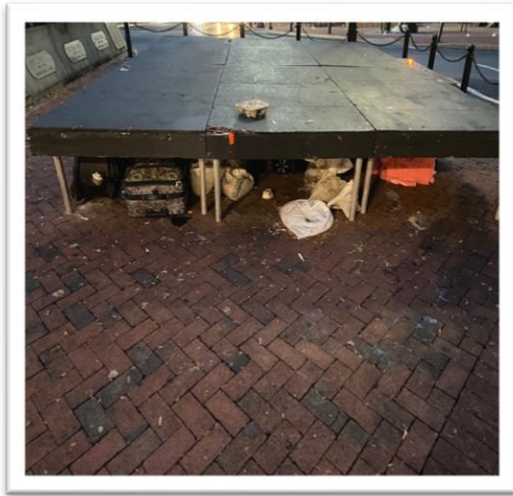
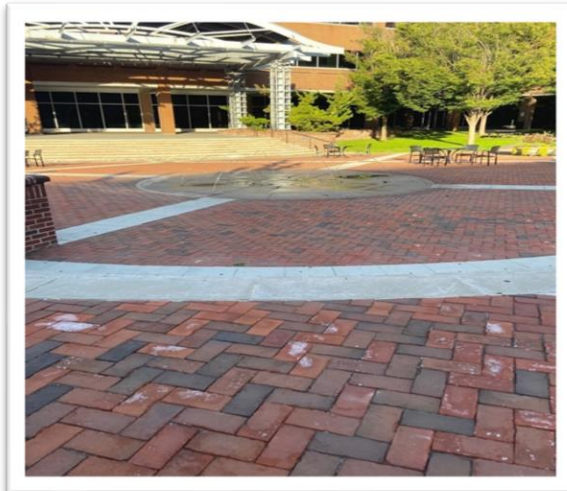


Photo 3: Water from the Binns Park fountain was observed being used for bathing



Observers also noted behaviors that normally occur within the shelter of privacy such as toileting, personal conversations, and intimate contact.

“Brown paper bag guy looked directly at me and pulled down his fly to pee in the bushes. These people definitely noticed that I was there, but they didn’t seem bothered.”

“The people under the makeshift tent are having sex. The movement is obvious, but nobody is paying attention to them.”

Human Connections

The research team conducting the observations were able to identify regular congregants and to note typical activities occurring in Binns Park.

“I walk up to Binns and there is only one man sitting at the table drinking coffee. He does not have his belongings with him, he is clean and dressed for the day. He has been there before at the tables eating breakfast and lunch with other men. The same man who was catching water from the fountain on Saturday to wash his face and head with, comes walking up Orange as I’m getting ready to leave, with his rolled up sleeping bag and backpack. He is walking extremely fast as if he has somewhere to be. He has a buzz cut white hair. A well-dressed man in a fedora with face tattoos is pushing a cart filled with his things down Orange Street. He has walked around the block many times now.”

Many people inhabiting this space behaved as if they knew each other. At times they laughed together and shared meals together. At other times they had what seemed to be intense and private conversations. The community that was observed sometimes seemed to have the kinds of connections that one would expect in other less public settings.

“A lady sitting at the benches toward the center path on the north side was talking about her medication with a group of about six people.”

“Brown paper bag guy seemed on alert. This guy had on a dark blue tee, grey hair cut neatly, goatee. Well kept. He was always moving, always checking on people. People checked in with him before they left the park.”

They also noted that there appeared to be a division between “insiders,” or regulars, within the community and various “outsiders” coming into the community, Examples of “outsiders” included: dog walkers, people exercising, county employees, and caretakers with children.

“There is a woman jogging and listening to music in her air pods, many people pull up to Starbucks on the Queen Street side, park their cars and run in to get their drinks and breakfast. More people are walking to work at this time than I would have thought. Others are exercising or just taking a morning stroll.”

Some outsiders come to distribute things or engage in charitable work.

“Opposite the main entry point to the park and up a flight of stairs was a woman I recognized from last week, who had been sitting on the corner while some young people with a Bible were talking to her and another man. She was

interacting with two young men, possibly college age, no identifying collegiate apparel, who spoke with her for at least 15 minutes and then left.”

Sometimes insiders and outsiders would connect with each other:

“Throughout the observation, many professional-looking individuals walked on the outskirts of the park to the building entrances on the north and south sides of the park. Several of these individuals would smoke toward the center of the park before entering the building. I overheard a middle-aged black woman conversing with some of the men who were gathered at the center park tables. They seemed to be familiar with each other and friendly. After they left, she went into the government building.”

“A group of young Christian students came through the park around 10:30 asking if they could pray for people. I did observe drug deals in the park at several times. I observed no police officers or government agents in the park. I only saw one police car drive past at 10am. I saw a woman handing out fresh clean socks to a group of homeless men.”

At times, insiders to the park made it clear they wished to be left alone.

“There is a woman, medium skinned, dark hair, perhaps Hispanic? Who is sitting by herself on a bench quietly until she notices someone nearby, then she shouts “YEAH YOU BETTER KEEP WALKIN” which she yelled at me and at another man who had been in the park eating breakfast at a table earlier this morning. I did keep walking. She did not seem to look at people until they got within 10 feet of her, then she would react.”

Health Problems and Physical Impairments

One of the most striking things that observers noted was that park congregants included many people with a variety of health problems including serious and debilitating physical conditions, requiring use of walkers or wheelchairs.

“The man with the walker and the man in the leather shoes sit on the stage the entire time.”

“There was a black guy on crutches talking with black guy in orange hoodie with a bicycle.”

Some individuals appeared to have colds or communicable respiratory illnesses that would normally be experienced in the comfort of a home or at the very least, in an indoor space.

“There is a man who is coughing and sounds like he has a bad cold, he spits on the ground and clears his throat. He is sick and appears to be living outside with all of his things.”

Other congregants appeared to have significant mental health problems. Some of them discussed their own mental health impairments, as well as the mental health struggles of others around them.

“I listen[ed] to a conversation where a man is telling a woman that ‘that guy is way more schizophrenic than me. I’m schizophrenic but he’s really bad, he shouts at everyone and yells to himself and freaks out. He’s way worse than me.’

Substances

Observers saw congregants use and distribute substances. Often, congregants utilized objects in the park as a shield or barrier to prevent others from witnessing what was happening.

“The stage seemed to be an area of drug use. I observed an individual go behind one of the stage pillars and not soon after, I smelled marijuana. It was difficult to tell if there was drug use going on in other areas of the park.”

Utilizing the park as a gathering place to engage in drinking or other substance use is tied to the earlier theme of private functions in public space. Many of these types of activities typically occur behind closed doors. Without closed doors, they occur in the open space as noted in the following observation:

“Two people on the south side appeared to be having a transaction of some sort. The person returned from the transaction to the stage area. More and more people appear on the stage. Several of them congregate behind the back right column on the stage. They return to the front part of the stage to eat. Several look intoxicated and some appear to nod off. I see one brown bag with what appears to be alcohol in it.

Smoking cigarettes together was observed as a unifying, social experience that sometimes included social interactions between regular congregants of the park and employees from surrounding buildings. This occurred despite a smoking ban which has been in place inside the park and next to the entrances to the Lancaster County Government Center building since April 2017 (Umble, 2017).

“Everyone seems to be talking to each other and smoking cigarettes.”

Absence of Conflict

Although there were occasional, sometimes loud, disagreements, observers did not see violence and significant conflicts. In one instance, during which a disagreement seemed about to become a serious conflict, the individuals involved left the park.

“Disturbance on north end around 9:18am. Woman yelling at man. Woman was with 3 other women. Man left on north side. Woman continued yelling after he left. She is an African American woman with a purple drawstring backpack and red handbag. She approached a small group of men on north side sitting on brick wall. They walked out of the park through the south side and dispersed.”

Observers more frequently saw behavior that is more “acceptable” in terms of park or public space activities.

“Generally quiet morning in terms of interactions and behaviors.”

“At the table a woman was writing something and talking on the phone. Two people from the group with the dog broke away (with the dog) and joined the group on the steps. These people were friendly with each other.”

Police Presence

Initial conversations about the situation in Binns Park suggested that problems in the park required frequent interactions between police officers and park congregants. During the observation period, however, observers saw police presence in areas surrounding the park but not necessarily in the park itself. Observers witnessed police officers looking into the park but not entering the park.

“A policeman on a bicycle, rides by on the opposite side of Queen Street where the construction is taking place, however as he rides by, he stares hard into the area where everyone is congregating within the park.”

“Police officer rides up the construction side of Queen Street and glances into Binns Park but keeps going and seemingly avoids the area despite there being many congregants in the park.”

Survey and Interview Responses

To amplify the preliminary insights the observations yielded, the research team developed interview and survey questions regarding the needs of people congregating in Binns Park, whether adequate housing and social services exist, and what barriers exist that might prevent people who need services from accessing them³. The survey responses provided insights from a wide range of perspectives, including those of grassroots volunteers, unaffiliated with any social service provider, and outreach workers, whose job enables them to gain first-hand views of the circumstances in which many of the Binns Park congregants live. Other respondents included professional staff of organizations that offer various social services, agency directors and elected officials.

In addition, the researchers interviewed twelve congregants who spoke about their experiences gathering in and sometimes living in Binns Park. Everyone interviewed and surveyed had something to contribute to a full understanding of the Binns Park situation.

Activities of Daily Living

Lancaster City does not have an emergency shelter where a person can remain indoors all day. There are limited options for folks without homes who need a place to “be” during the day. Some people who congregated in Binns Park did so after utilizing shelter services overnight.

Congregants’ days seemed to be highly structured around meeting the needs of daily life such as for food and warmth. One person described this experience as follows:

³ The survey/interview questions are found in Appendix C.

“You got to be out of there (the mission) by 6, 6:30 In the morning, okay, then you know, you're outside until 9:30. While you're outside until seven o'clock when they feed you, okay? Then you're outside again to 9:30 when they open (unintelligible) up, then you can put your clothing and your bag on top of the stage, then you can stay there all day. Okay. Then, five o'clock, you go eat, then you stay outside until 8:30 when it's time to go in. That ain't no life. I hated it” (Congregant F2).

Spaces meant for congregants, such as shelter programs, are often crowded and have rules and procedures, such as separate sleeping areas organized by gender, which may limit the autonomy of those utilizing the service. One person staying in a shelter explained:

“There could be more. I mean, there's right now I think I've I don't know how many people are in the basement down there. Because we're just sleeping down there. But still, it'd be nice to be able to lay with my wife. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, persons that have been separated you know? Yeah. Yeah. It's it's, it kills me. Yeah” (Congregant F7).

Personal hygiene was a major concern for the people interviewed. Respondents noted at the time there was just one porta-potty available near the library:

“So you need to have better facilities. I mean, you got to face reality. People are going to be homeless in the city. If you don't like it or not, you got to provide them some means to use the facilities, otherwise, you're gonna be pissing behind the bushes like they do here all the time” (Congregant F5).

Another person advocated for a bathroom in Binns Park directly.

“Okay, bathrooms. ... If they put porta potties down in Binns Park, it would be just fucking sweet for these people. It would...And the showers. Yes. Showers will be you know, something, anybody can just go in, they do that at United Methodist, I think is the name of the church” (Congregant F7).

Individuals interviewed expressed gratitude for the showering resources available in the community and could readily identify the schedule and services offered by the REFRESH “shower” truck. Related needs identified included clean clothing, storage for belongings, and “places to hang out when the weather is bad.” (Congregant F4).

Human Connections

Binns Park has become a de facto space for the homeless community, a situation recognized by all stakeholders and the community at large. While agency directors seemed to recognize that Binns Park is a community of sorts, they differed in their assessment of the value of this community. Some saw positive or neutral aspects to the presence of this social organization.

“The congregants have formed their own version of "community" and some of them look out for each other” (Agency Director B6).

“Many of the other folks are there because that is the life they know and like. It is their social network” (Agency Director B3).

Other times, agency directors viewed the Binns Park community in a negative light. One agency director noted that what they see in Binns Park is a poor reflection of Lancaster City as a whole.

“I walk through Binns Park several times each day. A very poor reflection on the health and beauty of this city. Dirty, smelly, human waste, sad, loud, appears dangerous, etc.” (Agency Director B3).

“There is a broad mix of people who are literally homeless, those who may be housing-insecure, and those who have housing but find connection or community amongst those congregating. Some of those who have housing find the community at Binns Park allows them a “safe” environment to use drugs” (Agency Director B8).

Substance Use

Stakeholders frequently identified drug use as a persistent problem that characterized many people in Binns Park. Some respondents noted that additional services to address this problem are needed for this population while other respondents attributed continued homelessness of congregants to substance use.

Some congregants expressed negative attitudes toward drug use in the park.

“They don’t have any discipline to themselves. And I don’t like the drug use down there.” (Congregant F9).

“I didn't know a lot of people around here lately. It looks bad because of people using drugs. That's the problem” (Congregant F1).

“Well it doesn't help that they are doing drugs out here. Because they're gonna do that. You know, please take it away from the kids that are around here. I mean, they used to do this K2 all the time during the summer 2020.... Even one of the cops said one time he'd rather see people smoke pot than do K2 because K2 is creating the problem” (Congregant F5).

Some congregants reported were aware that the undesirable behavior of drug-using individuals has a big impact on how they are treated as a group.

“I've seen drug overdoses that look like the intersection of yoga and K2, they fall over and bend over backwards on the bench...it looks terrible, it looks like an eyesore you know, an overdose or something like that happens and then the city cracks down on the community here. And that's just it, it's that cycle” (Congregant F12).

Another congregant asserted that the drug dealers/users were from “outside” of the area.

“All we have to do is come down here and hang out. We'll go to the park. The last person to die here. We never saw him before. But it's just one of those things. You freeze to death in the wintertime when you're drinking alcohol (Congregant F2).

One congregant expressed frustration with what he viewed as an inappropriate prioritization of the needs of drug users or that drug users were getting services and support that others were not able to access:

“If people who have a job, they lose their residence. Those are the people that need housing, not all the drug people, okay? Give to the druggie, giving everything, housing, wasting your money...the bottom line is, the whole thing is bullshit. The druggie they go in there, they qualify for everything” (Congregant F1).

Of those who mentioned drugs as a problem, a handful further acknowledged that the congregants in the park are particularly vulnerable to drug dealers.

“They are surrounded by quick temptations on the streets and preyed upon easily by those that deal with drugs or are able to convince them of quick-fixes for their situation. There are a lot of great people out there who struggle and cannot get the help they need. They get frustrated and upset, understandably, and that in itself makes it more difficult to proceed and work for / with them at times” (Outreach Worker A4).

“There is concern that drug dealers prey upon those congregating in places - that is one of the biggest risks to people congregating. It is also a deterrent to the general public” (Agency Director B7).

Trash

A frequent complaint from the stakeholders who participated in our community survey was the issue of trash in the area.

“At times, the amount of people congregating has caused the area to be overly messy with trash/body fluids (mostly urine), etc., as well as people's belongings.” (Agency Director B2).

“There seems to be excessive trash” (Agency Director B6).

Some congregants also expressed disapproval of those who contributed to the trash problem.

“A lot of these people...they end up throwing stuff on ground that's part of the problem. The trash can will be right next to them but they'll be throwing stuff on the ground. That didn't work, you know, for the people that have to clean up. It's disrespecting the people that are trying to help you. You know, like when I first came down here to sleep, I'm sleeping on that grille out there, they used to heat it. What happened was that they would throw all their trash around and I picked it up. One of the horse, the mounted police officers said, I see what you're trying to do, because as long as you clean up around here, we're not going to kick you outta here. But it's only after these people trashed up the area. You see what they're going through cleaning the stuff out that they started enforcing the curfew. The longest time I slept out here for almost seven, eight months, and never been hassled because I always cleaned up my area” (Congregant F5).

Many respondents blamed the trash problem on congregants and/or volunteer groups bringing food and other items into Binns Park for these individuals. One of the elected officials who

completed a survey noted that the government was often left to clean-up after outside charitable groups came in to help those experiencing homelessness.

“As the number of people congregating in Binns Park increases, our staff are tasked with cleaning up more trash, more food waste, more human waste. It is totally unsanitary -- even when port-a-potties were available. The food waste is a result of people with good intentions dropping off food that does not meet health/food safety standards. Sometimes people dump bags of clothing. All of this causes conflict and consternation among the employees who work in adjacent buildings as well as businesses” (Elected Official E2).

Photo 4: Outside groups are discouraged from bringing food into Binns Park. The sign lists alternative locations to go for food and meals.



One grassroots volunteer asserted the chronically homeless individuals in Binns Park were doing all they could to maintain the space with limited means, but that this work is sabotaged by outsiders.

“The long term (pros) homeless people [...] They clean up after themselves and like to be left alone or in their small community of each other where they look out for one another. The K2 people trash the space that they sleep in and are fine with it” (Grassroots Volunteer D2).

Exclusion and Marginalization

Being outdoors and “sleeping rough” not only exposes people to dangerous and unhealthy experiences (Watson et al., 2022) but also to public judgment that further marginalizes them.

“My main concerns are like, you have some people, you know, everyday people, you know, that walks through downtown Binns Park they can be they can be very ignorant. Not understanding, like the other day, you know, I was on the bus, and it was an older lady. You know, she made a comment about, you know, ‘those people better not come up to me, you know, do they take showers, where do they take showers,’ but for individuals that’s not in this situation, you know, before we quickly speak, you know, learn about an individual, because we have all types of individuals who are homeless. You know, things like that can happen at a snap of a finger. You know, this is not something that we want, right, you know, but it’s something that we have to learn to accept and deal with, until things are better for us. But in the process of getting things better, you have more dark days, and you have good days” (Congregant F4).

Others explained these feelings further:

“I think a lot of those people are just discouraged. Feeling like they’re just like, stuck, you know. Like, there’s no way out and they just...”homeless” just becomes their life, their life. They’re not seeing the light at the end of the tunnel (Congregant F10).

Grassroots volunteers, outreach workers, and ancillary services providers emphasized the need to view homelessness from a human rights perspective. They confirmed that people who are homeless feel disrespected and discriminated against. One grassroots volunteer stated:

“We need a new system. We need to recognize basic human needs as human rights and fight for them as such: healthcare, housing, food, education, clean air and clean water” (Grassroots Volunteer D4).

A respondent from the ancillary social services group also pointed out that there is a need for government officials to recognize the humanity of people experiencing homelessness, the impact of chronic stress on their lives, and their daily struggle to persevere and find resilience.

“Understand just how difficult it is to feel subhuman day in and day out and the mental toll that takes on individuals” (Ancillary C7).

Another respondent from the ancillary social services group suggested that a nuanced understanding is in order as people might find themselves homeless for a plethora of reasons.

“Sometimes these individuals end up homeless because of things that are entirely out of their hands, but then they are looked at the same as an individual who may have a more conflicting background which resulted in their homelessness” (Ancillary C12).

Responding to Needs

In response to survey questions regarding the needs of the people congregating in Binns Park, outreach workers, ancillary service providers, agency heads, and elected officials made a variety of recommendations including more transitional housing options, more services with fewer barriers, and better staffing for agencies currently serving this group.

"I would like to see more services accessible on the street. Increased housing options -- especially transitional living units. Consistency of service delivery across all domains" (Elected Official E2).

Some advocated for an increase in services for specific underserved groups such as those suffering from mental health and substance use disorders as well as for children and families experiencing mental health issues and homelessness.

"Low-cost housing. Mental health/drug specific housing" (Elected Official E1).

Some respondents noted that some services are or will soon be in short supply.

"I do feel like we have an adequate amount of shelters, but only just enough. I think in the next year we will need to expand. I do not think we have enough low-barrier shelters. I also think we need more family shelter. And the data has proved that we need way, way more DV shelter and space. I also think we need more/bigger Day Centers for people to be in" (Ancillary C11).

"We have one MHU (Mental Health Unit) in Lancaster County. We have NO children's MHU in Lancaster County. Case management is not capable of serving all of those meeting criteria. Psychiatric care is a 3 - 6 month wait list for those with insurance. The system is stressed and overburdened" (Agency Director B11).

"No, there is no shelter for boys aged 8-18. Little shelter for families. Shelter hours do not work for those having a night shift job" (Agency Director B11).

Connecting People with Services

Many survey respondents acknowledged that there are challenges connecting homeless people and other congregants of Binns Park to the services that they need. Two agency directors noted reasons that people who need services opt not to access them.

"Paranoia about what will happen if they engage, fear of the 'system'. Choice not to be housed" (Agency Director B13).

"Right to refuse services/intervention, mental health issues" (Agency Director B4).

Outreach workers reported that often individuals may not seek out services due to distrust, stigma, embarrassment, communication struggles and other barriers to access. Multiple respondents from this group noted that they would like to see increased access to services through an expansion of low-barrier supportive services.

"There are many 'hoops' that homeless individuals must jump through in order to get services at times or be able to get things such as legal documentation, which then also prevents or restricts / limits them to what they're able to obtain. People often get burned or let down and then have a tough time getting back into a hopeful progress of their situation" (Outreach Worker A4).

One of the outreach workers noted the daily challenges the homeless face and how that affects a person's ability to interact with social service providers.

"The weather itself can be such a fear day to day - rain, snow, cold, heat, windstorms, etc. and dealing with that consistently can really wear on a person's health physically and mentally. Remember there may be trauma present and many obstacles and setbacks which may be unreadable on the surface when you come across someone" (Outreach Worker A4).

Another respondent noted myriad problematic circumstances that often deter people who need services from taking the necessary steps to receive them.

"There isn't someone to meet with them to explain the services, mistrust about institutions because of past experiences, not enough funding for the program, too many bureaucratic barriers (ID's, paperwork, etc.), office location is not nearby or have hours they can access it, income-related barriers (both from making "too much" or making too little), past legal convictions, current or past substance abuse, caseworkers having too big of a caseload to effectively work with someone, institutions not communicating with each other and creating a barrier for the client, public perceptions/prejudice, transportation, language barrier, health barriers (both mental and physical), lack of access to medication, and I am sure I missed some" (Ancillary C11).

One of the congregants expressed frustration with bureaucracy and program requirements when trying to access services to meet basic needs.

"What makes them think that social services is going to be able to provide something or do something for them or they'll get rejected from one place and go, "to heck with it. Why would I apply anywhere else? Aren't these all the same? Aren't they all?" Well, no, no, they're not. But I can understand that hesitancy (Congregant 12).

Other respondents emphasized the need to bring services to the people who need them rather than expecting the congregants of Binns Park to come to agency offices.

"I think we need more of pretty much everything related to mental health and substance abuse services. But those services need to have flexible "office" hours, they need to have case workers who will come outside of their offices, they need to have significantly less red tape to get into the services, and they need to pay their case workers a fair wage for the very tough job that they do" (Ancillary C11).

"I am a firm believer that services may need to be offered to the individual where they are not requiring all individuals to go where the services are available...although it is not always simple to determine when to have this occur as there is a fine line between being supportive and enabling. This is a complex issue and one that needs to be determined on an individual basis" (Ancillary C8).

Another respondent from the ancillary social services group noted that service providers need training in trauma-informed best practices to meet the needs of the Binns Park congregants effectively.

“I would suggest some cross-training for the social services sector in general. For example, someone at CareerLink may have been in a trauma-informed training, but they might not have any idea how that would present in someone who has been homeless. I think even a yearly training of expanding outside the specific sector of their social service would be incredibly helpful. And should be mandatory for govt workers and public officials” (Ancillary C11).

A grassroots volunteer urged decision-makers to gather information from those affected as well as from people working on the front lines.

“They need to actually engage with individuals in crisis and incorporate them into the decision-making process. They need to treat folks in crisis as actual community members rather than kicking the issue down the road or into other municipalities. They also need to listen to social workers and volunteers on the front lines, who can advocate in a way that a grant seeking non-profit is unable” (Grassroots Volunteer D5).

Discussion

The observations the research team made of Binns Park provided an overview of conditions in the park as of fall 2021. These observations confirm the existence of problems, such as the proliferation of trash and the use and sale of prohibited substances. Researchers also noted that many people congregating in the park had obvious physical or mental disabilities. At times the congregants used the park to engage publicly in activities that most people perform in the privacy of their own homes. However, researchers only rarely observed conflict between congregants and noted that most of the time park congregants engaged in the following kinds of social interactions: talking, sitting, hanging out, interacting, congregating, checking on others, recognizing others, meeting up.

These observations suggest that it is essential to determine how the community can address the issues occurring in the park while at the same time respecting the rights of people to use public spaces for socially acceptable behaviors. Some of the people who congregate in Binns Park are unsheltered, have mental or physical disabilities, or suffer from substance use disorder. However, those problems do not disqualify the individuals who are experiencing them from occupying public spaces. Deciding who has the right to use public space and what they are entitled to do in that space has become a contentious issue and finding a balance between maintaining sanitary and safe conditions and respecting the rights of everyone to use public space is challenging.

The presence of people in Binns Park with problems raises another issue, namely, what is the responsibility of the community to provide services to meet their needs. Are community resources to house those who are unsheltered, assist those with physical and mental disabilities and address addiction issues available, adequate and accessible to the congregants of Binns Park who need them? Furthermore, are they provided in a way that encourages people with needs to use them? What else could the community do to ensure that Binns Park congregants are not deterred from seeking assistance because it seems stigmatizing, humiliating, or

irrelevant to their needs? Survey and interview responses offer varied insights into this question.

People vs. Place

Survey and interview responses indicated that different categories of stakeholders held contrasting perspectives regarding the nature of the Binns Park problem and how to address it. Survey responses illustrated the closer a respondent was in proximity to the daily lives of street congregants, the more likely their perspectives indicated a focus on self-determination, dignity and worth of the individual, and a sense of humanity as the primary concern. This orientation is “**people-focused**,” as the concern was more on the basic needs and vulnerabilities experienced by individuals congregating in these areas. Congregants, grassroots volunteers and outreach workers noted the potential for danger to people congregating in Binns Park, for example from drug dealers who came to the park to sell drugs to people with substance use disorder. Vulnerabilities of the park congregants made them at risk of exploitation rather than a danger to others.

Conversely, program administration, staff, and elected officials were more likely to view the Binns congregants as responsible for the park’s troubles especially when increased numbers of congregants outnumbered people who simply traveled through the park or used it to access nearby offices. Those stakeholders in administrative positions expressed more concern with the responsibilities associated with caring for the location in question and were more “**place-focused**”. For example, trash left in the public area was seen as a serious problem by all groups, including the congregants themselves. Agency heads, social service providers, and elected officials saw the congregants as the source of the trash problem without considering how effectively park congregants, some of who are unsheltered, are able to manage the trash disposal problems of a public area. Some congregants noted that they disposed of trash properly but were frustrated that not everyone did the same. None of the respondents from leadership positions seemed aware that congregants concurred in the need to clean up the environment by dealing with trash, waste, and drug activities but did not have the resources or authority to do so.

Distance From First-Hand Experience

The contrast between place-focused and people-focused approaches reflects different priorities shaped by different types of experiences and responsibilities. Which is more important, the public’s need for clean and orderly spaces or the basic survival needs of vulnerable individuals who spent large amounts of time in Binns Park? The closer the respondent was to first-hand experience, the more likely the respondent was to focus on how issues in Binns Park affected the **people** who congregate there.

In response to the question, what do city or county officials need to know about life on the streets, congregants and grassroots volunteers frequently suggested that government officials and social service providers need to spend time overnight in Binns Park to experience what it is like to be unsheltered. None of the public officials or agency heads reported that they needed

this experience. Rather, their views focused on maintenance issues, public safety, and the need to control disorder, themes consistent with broader responsibilities.

Grassroots volunteers knew many of the congregants by name and seemed to approach them as individuals rather than as a problematic category of people. Some of the grassroots volunteers spoke of their own experiences with homelessness and as clients of various social service programs. Many congregants expressed appreciation for the approach the grassroots volunteers took. In contrast, agency leaders saw the efforts of the grassroots volunteers as contributing to trash and disorder in Binns Park and sought to discourage them. Is it possible that collaboration with grassroots volunteers would enable social service providers to connect more effectively with people who need services? It is regrettable that shared goals regarding the needs of the Binns Park congregants do not provide the basis for a cooperative effort to ensure that human needs are better met.

Disconnect Between Programs and People

Survey and interview respondents differed as to why people congregating in Binns Park do not seek help from existing social service providers. Congregants, grassroots volunteers, and outreach workers noted that the available services do not always meet the needs of those who seek assistance from them. Many congregants offered the opinion that sometimes they do more harm than good. Many congregants are focused on looking for work, housing, and a safe place to be during the daytime hours. Often, programs had goals other than these. Congregants objected that one program in particular focused more on personal and spiritual development rather than on helping them find housing and employment.

Another theme expressed by congregants, grassroots volunteers, and outreach workers pertained to the stigma associated with seeking assistance. A perception that there is a lack of empathy and respect among service providers creates a climate of distrust. If people experience barriers when trying to access services, for example due to the lack of identification, many lose hope and give up. In contrast, congregants praised low barrier programs with staff who were empathetic, patient, and understanding.

Agency directors and elected officials noted that there were myriad reasons why people do not access the programs that are available, including the distrust that many people have for the service providers. Some of the respondents in leadership positions noted that mental health issues accounted for some reluctance to seek assistance and contributed to the distrust many have for social services. Others thought that limited knowledge about what is available was also a factor. One respondent noted that under most circumstances people have the right to choose whether to receive services. These responses focused mostly on the reasons individuals choose not to access services and very little on what needs to occur to create low barrier services that meet the critical needs the congregants are experiencing.

Recommendations

If there are people sleeping in Binns Park, or outside anywhere, there is a need to address the problem of insufficient, affordable housing. Addressing this problem requires ensuring the

availability of safe, welcoming emergency shelter, transitional housing that helps people with acute needs become stabilized and good quality permanent housing that is affordable. To the extent that the Binns Park congregants are also physically or mentally disabled or suffer from substance use disorder, maximizing access to relevant services and encouraging their utilization is also warranted. There is readily available information regarding effective programs that address these issues.⁴ We recommend that elected officials and agency leaders significantly enhance the efforts being made to address the housing and related needs that Binns Park dramatically illustrates.

Another major issue are problematic behaviors associated with some of the Binns Park congregants. Proclaiming and enforcing rules regarding food delivery, trash, accumulation of personal belongings, public urination and defecation will achieve limited success unless the reasons why these behaviors are occurring are addressed.⁵ Public bathroom facilities are a necessity in areas where people are allowed to gather. Binns Park is no exception. If a portion of Lancaster County's residents are unsheltered, public toilet facilities must be provided or the current problems will continue.

It seems clear that there are insufficient low-barrier daytime facilities where people are allowed to congregate. Currently, shelters provide resources during the night leaving the people they house with no place to store their possessions and no place to be during the day. Lancaster County Housing and Redevelopment Authority has acquired property on South Prince Street and is exploring developing it as a center to provide services to people lacking housing. This offers the possibility of the creation of an appropriate setting for people without shelter and others to gather in a safe and welcoming environment.

There is no evidence to suggest that simply closing Binns Park will be a successful strategy to address its current problems. Aggressive law enforcement approaches in the absence of increased shelter and housing options may temporarily reduce the visibility of the problem. Evidence from other communities shows that problems will be displaced and may eventually

⁴ The US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/> and National Alliance to End Homelessness <https://endhomelessness.org/ending-homelessness/solutions/> provide guides to best practices including rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing (especially for people with serious mental illness), permanent rental subsidies, eviction prevention programs, and mobile health care. Other promising approaches include giving cash to homeless people, developing low barrier drop in centers, tiny homes, and 3-D printed housing.

⁵Other research has indicated that "sweeps" with the intent to remove people and/or their belongings from the area do not accomplish that task long term and may strain future interactions between police and the public (National League of Cities, n.d; Perez, 2023). These interactions are frustrating for everyone involved and serve to create more distance between congregants and others as well as increase fear, animosity, and mistrust.

return to the original location. The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness has developed guidance for communities to use when addressing encampments.⁶

The recommendations described above pertain primarily to the presence of people in Binns Park who are unsheltered. Their needs are critical and addressing them must be a priority. However, the findings of this research project identified other important issues that the remaining recommendations address.

Develop More Accurate Information Regarding Binns Park and Its Congregants

The data obtained in this research project did not conform to some commonly held assumptions about the Binns Park congregants. Most congregants were not homeless. Violence and conflict among participants were not frequent occurrences. Survey respondents claimed it was not usually necessary to summon assistance to address most of the problems they observed. Researchers observed drug delivery and drug use and many stakeholder/respondents identified substance use disorder as a pervasive problem. Opinions differed as to whether the congregants themselves promote this dangerous activity or whether it is an example of outsiders victimizing vulnerable congregants.

We recommend stakeholders secure as much information as possible about the nature of problems in Binns Park by obtaining information from a variety of sources, including from the congregants themselves and those who work most closely with them. Even where there is agreement that a problem exists, recognition that there is more than one way to define it can open up other responses to it. For example, the issue of litter and/or feces in the park is public health issue that requires identification of resources to clean it for the welfare of all park users. For congregants, there is the additional personal hygiene issue associated with the lack of public restrooms. If people who congregate in the park lack access to toilet facilities, unsanitary conditions in the park will persist.

Identify and Promote Effective Approaches to Engage Congregants

Congregants who were or had been homeless expressed clear preferences regarding the shelters from whom they had received services. For example, they characterized the day shelter at the Council of Churches Food Hub as being welcoming and helpful. They characterized the program staff as able to make human connections with them based on empathy, patience, and understanding. This low barrier program appeared successful in cultivating trust on the part of the people who frequented it.

On the other hand, many congregants shared concerns about the rules, approach, and policies of the Water Street Mission. One congregant shed tears at the prospects of a friend going there as a last resort because she felt he would be treated badly. Although an extreme example, it was one of several expressing negative views about Water Street Mission.

⁶ See Appendix D for these recommendations: <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/7-principles-for-addressing-encampments>

It is important to engage Water Street Mission, the facility with most of the shelter beds for Lancaster County residents, in conversation about effective approaches other programs are taking in building trust in their shared clientele. Such conversations could examine the extent to which program elements are aligned with best practices and should incorporate a wide range of agency experiences and insights from congregants directly⁷. All the social service providers would benefit from participation in this dialogue.

Find Common Ground between Formal Programs and Informal Efforts

The data revealed wide gaps in the perspectives of stakeholders representing formal organizations and those of grassroots volunteers. This finding raises the question of what could be done to find common ground between formal programs and informal grassroots efforts that are seemingly at odds with each other? Perhaps the baseline for agreement around which formal groups and informal groups could connect is shared compassion for the humanity of the individuals who congregate in the park.

Are there ways to ensure that grassroots, mutual aid, and voluntary humanitarian efforts are met with less resistance? The outreach workers, who have regular, direct, in-person contact with the congregants as well as agency credentials, could employ a middle ground between more formalized agency approaches (case management) and less formalized and more grassroots voluntary approaches (food distribution). The goal would be for these efforts to coordinate and support each other rather than discount each other's perspective and approach. Doing so would provide both formal and informal efforts with an opportunity to learn of and address the unintended consequences of their actions. For example, grassroots volunteers have identified rigid policies regarding eligibility as a barrier to congregants receiving services. County and city officials identify food distribution efforts as a source of excessive trash. Acknowledging the existence of these issues is a prerequisite to figuring out how to correct them.

Honor the Needs of Congregants for Human Connections

Congregant interviews revealed the presence of an informal network of reciprocity and support among people on the street. Some stakeholders, particularly grassroots volunteers and outreach workers, recognized and respected this as a manifestation of personal autonomy. Could a strengths-based approach that recognizes the importance of personal relationships and organic community become integrated into the services offered to Binns Park congregants? We recommend exploration of the ways in which formal programs could build upon informal social networks of community and trust. Grassroots volunteers are potential collaborators in service provision that incorporates rather than replaces mutual aid efforts.

Implement a People-Oriented Approach

⁷ See Appendix E for a summary of the recommendations Binns Park congregants and grassroots volunteers made about what could be done to help people in the community.

Does Lancaster want to be a community that values a place more than the lives of the people in it? Do some people's lives, in the context of the utilization of public space, matter more than others? Do people's economic contributions affect their standing to exercise basic rights as a human being? Ultimately, this research project seemed to be about the dichotomy of protecting "people" or protecting "place" in the absence of effective communication and collaboration between divergent groups.

Our response to the people versus place issue underlying these questions is that all individuals have the right to use public space. Recognizing this fundamental human right and implementing policies based on it requires empathy with the circumstances in which Binns Park congregants find themselves and increased respect for their humanity and need for autonomy.

Because direct contact with the people who congregate in Binns Park was associated with increased empathy and respect for their human rights, we recommend strengthening program approaches that decrease the social distance between treatment providers and those seeking services. Restrictive policies and formality increase that distance and decrease empathy. It may be necessary to provide local leadership and social service professionals with training to adopt a service model that collaborates with community members and incorporates the insights of first-hand experience. Building in more first-hand relational experiences with people who have needed assistance to meet their needs can be a first step toward increasing humanitarian understanding.

Appendix A

Data Collection Methodology

There were three phases to our case study: observations, surveys, and interviews.

Observations

First, we conducted non-participatory unstructured observation over the course of three (3) months to best understand the nature of the location, the groups and interactions of individuals, and the various behaviors demonstrated in a public park area of Lancaster City called Binns Park. Eight student researchers conducted 30 separate individual observations individually by sitting or walking in the area. Researchers took notes on a prepared form after their observation indicating what they saw, heard, smelled, and otherwise noticed, which were collected via a google form.

Collecting observations over a longer period of several months allowed for assessing the scene across a variety of weather conditions and at a variety of times of day and days of the week. Observations were helpful in identifying congregant stakeholders.

Surveys

Non-congregant stakeholders were listed and categorized by role in the community. From here we utilized a snowball sampling method by asking respondents in the survey to make suggestions about other relevant stakeholders to whom they recommend we also survey. We categorized potential respondents by their position into the following tiers: Outreach Workers, County & Agency Directors, Ancillary & Support roles, Grassroots Volunteers, and Elected Officials. Organizing by tier was our first effort to analyze the data, as our hypothesis was that responses might differ based on role and positionality. Respondents were invited by email to participate voluntarily in the electronic survey via Qualtrics. We received a total of 33 stakeholder survey responses.

Survey response rate: 33 of 54 complete responses: 61%
 (42 of 54 incl incomplete responses: 77%)

	Invited to survey	Incomplete response	Complete response	Completed Response rate
Grassroots & Community	7	1	5	71%
Outreach workers	11	-	7	63%
Ancillary Staff	19	4	11	58%
Leadership	13	3	8	61%
Elected Officials	4	1	2	50%
Totals	54	9	33	61%

Interviews

To gain the insights of congregants, we utilized a purposive sample with the help of the outreach team at LancoMyHome and The Food Hub. Due to the potential vulnerability experienced by street congregants, professional outreach workers with established relationships helped facilitate safe and comfortable access. Many respondents expressed eagerness to share their story and perspectives and because of this, the extra support offered by outreach workers was not always needed. Interviews were conducted in-person and were completely voluntary. For consistency for the congregants, the number of interviewers was limited to two in order to increase the interviewer's visibility in the community and increase comfort levels.

Twelve (12) interviews with individual congregants were conducted. With permission, interviews were audio recorded. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was conducted at the location of the respondents choosing. All interviews were conducted outside in the center of the Binns Park area or inside the day shelter.

Appendix B

Data Analysis

Observations

Non-participatory unstructured observation data was coded by multiple coders using Dedoose software, an online platform that allows multiple researchers access to edit the same project from different locations. These codes were collapsed into overarching themes that were presented in the data. Data from the observations assisted also in identifying congregant stakeholders for a later phase of the project.

Surveys

Survey data was collected via Qualtrics online software and exported into Excel. Multiple coders collectively coded the qualitative responses to the questions by tier. Codes were collapsed into themes at the bottom of each coded column in the spread sheet. Themes were collected by survey tier and compared across position.

Interviews

Interviews were transcribed using Otter AI software and checked for errors. Cleaned transcripts were uploaded to Dedoose, the same online platform used to analyze the observations. Multiple researchers coded each interview transcript using line by line coding techniques. These codes were discussed and compiled into overarching themes from the congregant interviews. Themes from the congregant interviews were compared qualitatively with the themes from the non-congregant stakeholder surveys which generated the basis for our findings and implications for this study.

Appendix C

Survey Questions and Congregant Interview Guide

1. Please provide your first and last name.

2. Please identify the role which best describes your involvement in Lancaster's homeless network of services:
 - Outreach/Direct Services
 - Leadership/Management/Administration
 - Program which supports homeless services (MH, D&A, School District, Church)
 - Community advocate
 - Community member

3. How long have you lived in Lancaster County?

4. Do you spend a lot of time here/ the Binns Park area / another downtown city area? Where, specifically? For what purpose? Why do you prefer this area? Have you ever been asked to leave one of these areas? Please describe.

5. Do you have permanent housing or have access to safe and secure housing? Have you been homeless before? Please describe:

6. How would you describe the needs of people who congregate in the Binns Park area or other city areas?

7. Have you had any concerns about folks congregating in Binns Park or another city area? If so, please describe. Are there conflicts or disagreements between people?

8. Have you ever made a report about concerns related to people congregating in a particular area of the city? Who did you make a report to? What was the nature of the report?

9. We are trying to understand the networks of people in this area. Who else should we be talking to?

10. What are some reasons why people might not use social services that are available to them? What are some barriers that people face?

11. Have you ever had any concerns with getting services for yourself or family? If so, please describe. What has your experience been with shelters and social service agencies? What was helpful? What was not helpful?*

12. Do you feel like there are enough shelters or transitional housing options?
13. If there were greater availability and variety of transitional living options, what would cause you to consider staying in one?*
14. Do you feel that there are enough mental health and substance abuse services that are offered in our community? What kinds of these services would you like to see more of?
15. What do you think the city or the county (government) needs to know about life on the street?
16. What do you think the shelters/programs need to know about people's needs?
17. What do you think needs to be done to help people in need?
18. Is there anything else you would like to share about homelessness or services?

**Only asked of congregants and grassroots volunteers*

Appendix D

SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR ADDRESSING ENCAMPMENTS

The US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) has created specific guidance for addressing encampments, summarized in 7 principles:

1. Establish a cross-agency, multi-sector response: government, agencies, schools, advocacy and mutual aid groups, shelter and housing providers, and unsheltered residents.
2. Engage encampment residents to develop solutions: people in encampments should be included in conversations and decisions about their living environments, and areas should not be closed or swept without notice.
3. Conduct comprehensive and coordinated outreach: outreach should not focus on ridding an area of an encampment, but on building trust and providing needed services to help meet the needs of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness
4. Address basic needs and provide storage: because housing is not instantly available, community spaces must be kept open and available so that all residents have access to restrooms and hand washing. Additionally, increased sensitivity and care for people's belongings is needed and secure, easily accessed storage areas are an interim solution.
5. Ensure access to shelter or housing options: consider the previous success of some of the solutions employed during the Covid-19 pandemic for non-congregant shelter, which are low-barrier approaches to bringing people inside.
6. Develop pathways to permanent housing and supports; funds from the American Rescue Plan can be used to develop housing units.
7. Create a plan for what happens to encampment sites after closure: ensure that public spaces remain safe and accessible for all community members.

Appendix E

Recommendations of Congregants and Grassroots Volunteers

Have stores rent out empty rooms.

“Once they're filled [shelters], where are you going to put people? They are going to sleep outside, right. But then there's a lot of buildings downtown that are emptied above all the stores and they don't want to rent them now. That's what bothers me the most all the stores downtown have [sic] rooms upstairs. They could remodel and make apartments or just rent the room not like they did back when I was before I was born, my dad, all these stores downtown, people rent the rooms out while they're here for a weekend or two here for a week they rent the rooms out. But now they're all empty” (Congregant F2).

Facilitate the government officials in getting first-hand experience about unsheltered life feels like.

“You know, it's all about what the government wants to do... just come out here and spend a day with us and see what our life is like. And then go back home and really filter it in...to sit behind these desks...not knowing what life is really like out outside the building or these government buildings. They have no idea what we go through” (Congregant F4).

Build more shelters instead of parking garages.

“I'm quite sure, you know, there can be a whole lot more shelter and transitional housing. I mean, the money that they put up, like, like this new building, parking garage...they didn't need that, you know, they could have put up a building for the homeless and transitional housing...every time you turn around, they put up condos and parking garages and whatnot. That's not what we need in the city. We need, you know, places for the homeless to go” (Congregant F4).

Provide more supplies for people to meet very basic needs.

“You need to have more available, if people need sleeping bags, provide sleeping bags. If they need blankets, provide blankets. If they need water, provide water. It's a crime that people don't have water...that's a human necessity” (Congregant F5).

Consider case by case care... and LISTEN.

“The majority of barriers we hear about why we can't give everyone housing is due to the most difficult individuals. As the saying goes, it only takes one person to ruin it for everyone. Which is why case-by-case care is so important. We cannot allow the most extreme outliers, who are often the most visible, to determine how the majority of those in crisis receives assistance and housing” (Grassroots Volunteer D3).

“Listen - really listen - to them. Provide affordable housing in Lancaster. That & a lack of a living wage are substantive reasons for much of the homelessness in Lancaster. Mental health & domestic disruption are other reasons, but there's a dearth of affordable housing which means people can't get back on their feet quickly” (Grassroots Volunteer D3).

References

- National Alliance to End Homelessness (n.d). Solutions. <https://endhomelessness.org/ending-homelessness/solutions/>
- National League of Cities (n.d). An overview of homeless encampments. <https://www.nlc.org/resource/an-overview-of-homeless-encampments/>
- Perez, R. (2023, January 4). Homeless encampment sweeps may be draining your city's budget. <https://tinyurl.com/2p849vjc>
- Umble, C. (2017, March 8). Smoking to be banned anywhere outside Lancaster County Courthouse, downtown government center. LNP LancasterOnline. <https://tinyurl.com/34j7b3ns>
- The US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). (2022 July 29). Resource Roundup for Addressing Encampments. <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/>
- Watson, D., Frank, J.M., & Graeff, J. (2022). Two sides of the same coin: Homelessness as environmental injustice, *Engage for Change Journal*, <https://blogs.millersville.edu/engageforchangejournal/>
- Wise, J. (22, January 5). Man found dead in central PA park: Coroner <https://www.pennlive.com/news/2022/01/man-found-dead-in-central-pa-park-coroner.html>