

THE STREET CHAMPIONS PROJECT

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Non-profit social project, new idea

PROBLEM STATEMENT

On 2016, at any given night, there were 536,364 homeless people in America, according to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. More than 20% of them in California. The total number includes the total of household families experiencing homelessness, veterans, chronic homeless and young adults. According to the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, between 2.5 and 3.5 million people experience homelessness in America every year. It is hard to confirm the numbers related to homeless for two reasons: there are different ways to count it (for example, some are homeless for one night and others experience homelessness throughout the year) and variety of definitions for homelessness. No matter the method or the definition, the fact is that there are too many people living in the streets, shelters and transitional houses in the United States.

The major causes of homelessness are poverty, but mental issues and addictions are also on the top of the list. The government has a goal and a plan to solve and prevent the problem, which includes housing, education, jobs, criminal reform and health care. Most of non-profit organizations and programs advocating for this cause, are focused on housing, food, and jobs. However, there is a lack of attention and resources to a big problem: mental health, mental strength and the eagerness for a better life.

With this project, we want to encourage the homeless people to improve their own lives themselves, and this way, create a solid path to a stable and dignified life.

IDEA

It is known and proven by science that exercises has the power to improve mental health by releasing substances in our system that make us more happy and creative, improve self-confidence, reduce stress, boost brainpower, sharpen our memory and help control addictions. When exercise is incorporated as part of a recovery program, it can help people overcome mental issues and achieve goals in life.

The idea of this project is to partner with shelters and universities around the country to create an exercise program for homeless. Students and researchers of Sports Science, Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Science, and Psychology (among others) would be responsible for coordinating training sessions in specific sports (according to cultural and geographical

The key resources needed for Street Champions Project are people and funding.

There are several key administrative people needed to organize and run the program:

- A contact to handle legal and financial compliance
- An operational person to organize program logistics
- An outreach person to handle marketing, partnerships and fundraising

The program can be funded by grants and donations.

The first steps to start and run this program successfully, include:

- 1) Formalize the organization and the operational plan. For all stakeholder's protection, it's best to form a non-profit organization. Another important factor is to recruit board of directors from variety of backgrounds who can bring valuable insight for the organization.
- 2) Confirm commitment from all stakeholders.
- 3) Start and test a pilot program before scaling it nationwide.

Estimated costs to set up the organization is around \$160,000. Breakdown for estimated costs:

- Legal fees: \$1000 (will ask for pro bono work from an attorney)
- Non-profit organization filing and processing fees: \$1000
- Insurance: \$4000
- Administrative and marketing expenses: \$1000
- Salary (3 part-time people for one year) : \$150,000

A successful sports/exercise program for homeless community is a feasible idea. There are existing programs that have proven that this type of initiative works (for example, Skidrow Running Club). There is interest for it from social workers working in Los Angeles homeless shelters. To make the idea scalable, it needs to have a solid and tested plan that can be replicated nationwide.

BEST POTENTIAL PARTNERS

The ideal partners for our project will vary by location, but as the pilot project will be in Los Angeles, we plan to partner with:

- The Midnight Mission for a shelter. They offer a flexible, tolerant and accessible place for the night to those who shun traditional shelters. The Midnight Mission provides emergency services to guests at no charge and facilities are safe and quiet. The place have air conditioning and heating, clean accessible restrooms, and onsite managing security personnel.
- UCLA University for variety of resources such as creating a sports program for homeless. The plan is to engage with students and researchers from the Sports Science, Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Science, and Psychology departments to provide the best scientific mental and athletic support for people in need towards achieving sports goals and mental improvement.. Eventually some of the UCLA facilities might also be utilized for special events.

- GRID Alternative to provide workforce development. GRID Alternatives provide a “classroom in the field” for job trainees, giving students hands-on experience in the rapidly growing field of solar installation. GRID provides job seekers with real-world experience and helps connect people that need good jobs with an industry that needs good people.
- Sketcher as a local sports brands to provide shoes and clothes and sponsor competition fees and travels expenses for athletes. The brand is known to sponsor good causes, for example they already support the Friendship Foundation that encourages kids of special needs to make new friends, engage in new activities and bring people together.

IDEAL END STATE

The best possible outcome from our project is to help as many homeless people as possible and help them gain a permanent home and a stable life. The goal of the program is to improve homeless people’s mental health through sports while providing other necessary support such as shelter, food, exercise, support network and possible work training and opportunities. It is a win-win project; because it’s beneficial for homeless, university, government, and community.

The short-term plan for the Los Angeles based pilot program is to help around 400 homeless people, which is around 20% of homeless population with mental health issues in LA’s Skid Row area. Long-term goal is to replicate the pilot model and expand the program to other cities nationwide.

The Street Champions Project will help the homeless people to recover their lives, bringing back their self esteem and life goals, and encouraging and supporting their steps towards a stable and independent own life.