

GAPS



Austin's Homelessness Advisory Committee

This report contains ideas from members of AHAC for gaps in the Austin homelessness system that they see and feel should be addressed. These ideas fall along four themes: Resilience Support, Skills-Building, Rights & Prevention, and Supporting Services.

See what we've been working on!



Who Are AHAC?

AHAC stands for Austin's Homelessness Advisory Committee.

A diversity of voices from people with lived experience of homelessness is still missing from the overarching conversation in policymaking. The participants of AHAC represents the diverse service connections and lived experiences throughout the entire community, not simply one subgroup or population.

AHAC was created in the fall of 2017 by the City of Austin's Office of Innovation's Bloomberg iTeam in coordination with the Department of Public Health and the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO). Collectively, these entities are the "Organizers" for the committee. We started with a 6-months pilot project that included 13 members who have previously or are currently experiencing homelessness to help with the development of research tools, consult on findings, and test possible solutions. By March 2018, we had grown to 16 members with a 90% attendance rate for each meeting.

The role of the Advisory Committee is to have conversations, share stories, and provide feedback in order to reach these goals:

- Educate and inform policy makers on the realities of homelessness, including disability, mental health, substance use disorder, and other issues faced by individuals who are homeless
- Obtain feedback on current services and resources for persons experiencing homelessness
- Better understand the realities of homelessness and to inform the improvement of services
- To inform the design of materials and outreach for individuals experiencing homelessness

I. Resilience Support

Idea 1: Mentoring programs like Big Brother/Big Sister

Even though you are homeless, you know more things than other folks who have not been homeless. I don't recommend you become homeless to learn these things, but listen to those that have been there. Everyone in this room knows about survival.

Idea 2: Homeless Support Group

- We have the end goal of getting housing and have all these components which affect us that we don't always get to talk about. Once you get into housing, what else is there?
- Peer support and contact to help with utilities and maintenance, education.
- Assign a direct-care person who is in communication with the resident to discuss issues with housing(fears, potential problems) and come up with a solution or plan for resolving the issue.

Idea 3: Support Hotline

- A well-known number to call in times of need
- It's different when people tell you how strong you are for surviving instead of feeling sorry for us
- If I'd had a more affirmative experience at the beginning, I would be out of homelessness for sure.

Idea 4: Counseling for families to help with reconnection

Root problem: People have lost their families. Families are a person's home. Provide counseling and mediation for families. If doesn't work, move on to relatives. That's the closest thing to home.

2. Skills-Building

Idea 1: Entrepreneurship Opportunities, Support, & Incentives

Panhandlers are self-employed. So there is an opportunity for a business that they could manage that is low-cost and with low-overhead.

- Coordinate pick up with sign-flyers for the day after
- ½ in pocket, ½ in savings account
- Give cigs, bus pass, visa card to get people into the van for day-labor
- Provide a hotel room at the end of the day
- Competitive wage
- Exclude the term “day-labor”
- Discounted storage

Idea 2: Collaboration with Local Businesses

Work with downtown businesses to create informal employment opportunities. A lot of people do it during SXSW already.

Idea 3: Skills-Building Programs

Comprehensive programs for building relationship skills.

Idea 4: Food Waste Reduction

- Food collection
- Work with Keep Austin Fed
- 7/11 throws away the brand new pastries. My son used to go there as a kid and get all kinds of donuts.

3. Rights & Prevention

Idea 1: Customer Service Experience Guidelines & Accountability For Agencies

- It's not just about the general public perception; it's also about industry perception.
- Food stamps are associated with people who are poor. People who are poor are discriminated against and the people who work there are bombarded with people who act badly all the time.

Idea 2: Pre-Eviction Support

Housing preservation specialist so you're not evicted and help you navigate tough housing situations.

Idea 3: Discrimination/Rights Hotline

- If you're being discriminated against or treated unfairly, you need to contact authorities
- Feedback of customer service, like a Yelp for homelessness services
- Feedback that gets back to decision-makers about the quality of service you receive
- How do I know my rights? Sometimes it's confusing and you don't know you're being abused

Idea 4: Volunteer Opportunities for the People Experiencing Homelessness

Connecting people to volunteer opportunities and getting them out of the house: no stress, no liabilities for your rent and you end up connecting with others

Idea 5: Entertainment Club & Community

- Music, drama, poetry
- Theatre - people can learn their lines and also their shortcomings without taking it personally

4. Supporting Services

Idea 1: Transport Support for Families and People with Disabilities

Connecting people to volunteer opportunities and getting them out of the house: no stress, no liabilities for your rent and you end up connecting with others.

Idea 2: Homelessness Summit

A summit of city leaders - it's a level playing field. There's too much evaluation going on where people who have look down on people who don't have anything. That's something a summit can counter.

Idea 3: Pet Care for Homeless Pets

A lot of people experiencing homelessness do have dogs, and a couple of them have cats

Idea 4: Housing Convention

A whole weekend of interviews for people who need housing. Assess people, get them in the system. Each step the people need to get to the final step of housing. Give preference to elderly, MHMR, and families.

Idea 5: Housemate Pairing Service

Two retired veterans live behind me - one with Caritas and one with another organization. They were friends, and they allowed them to move into a place together.

I don't see why all housing services don't do that.

Thank You!

For more information about Austin's Homelessness Advisory Committee, visit our website at www.austininnovation.wixsite/solveforhomelessness/AHAC.