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Chinatown Outreach - Targeted Resources for the Unhoused Population

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## **Abstract**

Addressing housing insecurities is one of The Epicenter's pillars while utilizing a new federal grant. The Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program is the division implementing the project that will consist of outreach through a mobilization team. Housing insecurities are not only a city issue but a statewide one and YHDP is designed to help reduce those insecurities and improve a client's quality of life while providing food, clothing, hygiene packs, and resource information to improve their livelihood. To assess the effectiveness of our deliverables it consisted of tallying, informal dialogues, and data analysis. The most important measure is that we were able to meet our goal of servicing at least 15 clients in each outreach with 30 or more clients being supported. The next step for the agency is to perform a CARS assessment on contact instead of directing them to an agency for the assessment.

*Keywords: housing, insecurities, mental, CARS*

## **Agency & Communities Served**

The Epicenter provides drop-in resources (housing, education, health & wellness, and employment) for youth and young adults between the ages of 16 thru 24. Its purpose is to empower individuals by connecting them with resources to support individual viability in the community (The Epicenter, 2023). The community it serves is Monterey County, the LGBTQ+ community, and vulnerable communities. The Epicenter is a safe and inclusive center as it will serve all populations even if they do not fall into the above categories. 28% of the homeless population are categorized as youth and young adults under the age of 25 and 146 youth are considered LGBTQIA+2 (S Gomez, personal communication, September 14, 2022).

## **Problem Model Background and Literature Review**

### **High Rate of Homelessness in Monterey County**

In 2022, on January 27 & 28, 2,047 individuals were deemed homeless at that point in time even though there has been a reported decline in homelessness in the last two surveys, the two highest contributing factors leading to homelessness were financial issues at 50% of while drug/alcohol use came in at 2nd at 34% (Applied Research Survey, 2022). While the homeless trend is pointing downward, with the current economic climate where the rise of cost of goods and services has skyrocketed, the downward trend may be changing in the near future with the possibility of increased drug/alcohol use to cope with the situation that they are in.

9,974 out of 77,923 students qualify as homeless in Monterey County (Monterey County Office of Education, 2021). That is over 13% of students who are facing housing insecurities. Those students are entitled to special rights under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act which removes barriers to enrollment such as rights to immediate enrollment, transportation to and from the school of origin, and referrals to such services as housing, dental & health, and any other services the student may be in need (food & clothing) but it falls short. There is no provision for monetary assistance which is the number one cause of homelessness and the lack of staffing at school sites. In the Salinas Union High School District which is the largest district in Monterey County, there is a vacancy for their Homeless & Foster Youth Liaison whose responsibility would be to ensure that the school sites are following the proper guidelines/procedures in supporting homeless youth.

## **Contributing Factors**

### **Housing Shortage**

Due to the low inventory of housing causes an increase in rental prices. In Monterey County, more than 50 percent of families spend more than 30% of their income on rent (DataShare Monterey County, 2023). The ratio of rent and income should be under 30% to be able to pay for other goods and services. Senate Bill 9 was enacted which allows for up to four residential units which usually encompasses one single-family home (California Department of Housing and Community Development (2022, March). This should decrease the inventory shortage with the goal of leading to lower rental prices which would make housing more affordable. SB 9 alone does not solve this problem alone as Monterey County has provided free architectural blueprints for accessory dwelling units (ADUs) which would streamline the building process, increase the capacity of building additional dwellings on a single-family unit home, and provide an income stream for the owners. ADUs are usually reserved for relatives, friends, and singular renters.

Regional Housing Need Allocation (RHNA) is an eight-year planning period in which each city and county must build a certain amount of housing units in the timeframe to meet the housing demands with the Association of Monterey Bay Governments being the responsible agency for preparation. The units are built in four different income levels: very low (7,868), low (5,146), moderate (6,167), and above moderate (14,093) for a total of 33,272 units. Unfortunately, the RHNA does not account for natural disasters such as floods (Pajaro Valley) and fires (Salinas) which have plagued Monterey County and have displaced many families without resolution. The other challenge is the oversight for the cities and/or neighborhood groups that try to circumvent RHNA with little recourse. For decades, California has not been

able to meet the housing demand due to population growth, and at this point, there has not been sufficient housing built to alleviate the issue.

### **Earning Power**

12.1% percent of persons in Monterey County live in poverty and only a little over 25% have a Bachelor's or higher degree (United States Census Bureau, 2022). With a limited education, and a high rate of jobs that fall into sectors that do not pay a livable wage such as agriculture, retail, and the fast food industry we will continue to be in a county where individuals and families are struggling to get out of poverty. A higher education is a pathway to higher earning power one has but if there are barriers to achievement the generational poverty continues. We need to have a system where more individuals have access to higher education with costs being eliminated or minimized to attract more students, and targeted resources to remove barriers that will prohibit completion.

In Salinas, agriculture makes up the highest workforce at 11.7% but with the lowest average earnings at \$26,449 which equates to a monthly earning of \$2,204.08 (Data USA, n.d.). With a median gross rent of \$1,718, it would take a multitude of individuals pooling their resources together to afford a rental property living in Monterey County. The difference between a monthly earning (\$2,204) and median gross rent (\$1,718) would leave an individual with 486 dollars for all other expenses. Housing targeted towards agriculture workers and their families would mitigate housing expenses and free up monies for other needed necessities.

### **Mental Health & Substance Abuse Disorders**

In California, in relation to the general public, the homeless population has a higher rate of mental health and substance abuse issues. Only 18% of the homeless population did not suffer a serious mental health condition, but 27% of the population incurred a hospital visit for a mental

health condition and 56% of these visits occurred before the occurrence of being homeless. (University of California San Francisco, 2023). Having a mental health issue is a high predictor of an individual who may suffer from homelessness in the future, therefore, identifying those who suffer mental issues promptly and providing them with the appropriate care and resources should reduce the homeless population. As with any medical condition that goes untreated with medication or therapy, the onset of the disease is exacerbated which in turn debilitates one's body and will cause irreparable harm. Thus limiting their ability to find employment, or care for themselves which exacerbates their condition. Dedicated mental health resource teams must mobilize and visit locations that have a large concentration of homeless individuals such as encampments, train tracks, and parks to provide a needs assessment and identify any barriers that would prevent treatment.

The correlation between homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health is a derivative of each as may incur inversely. Does the occurrence of one of them lead to the next? If someone becomes homeless, do they turn to substance abuse to deal with the homelessness or did substance abuse lead to homelessness? Within the homeless population categorically, 38% were dependent on alcohol while 26% abused other drugs (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2017). Homelessness involves a multitude of stressors which encompasses securing a place to sleep, scrapping for food, and safety which for many involves using drugs and/ or alcohol as a coping mechanism that leads to unintended consequences: addiction, crime, violence, hospitalization, and incarceration. Providing wrap-around services that target the issue and empowering individuals with agency support could bridge the wellness gap that may lead to betterment, success, and ultimately housing.

## Consequences

### Inadequate Housing

29.5 % of Monterey County residents lived in substandard housing for the period between 2014-2018 (DataShare Monterey County, 2023). Substandard housing is hazardous and could lead to injury, and/or death in makeshift living quarters which may lack a kitchen and/or lack of plumbing facilities, and exposed electrical outlets which are code violations. Exposed outlets could lead to fire and/or electrocution and those makeshift rooms in garages next to water heaters are a recipe for the inhalation of carbon monoxide (Santos & Romero, 2023). To address this issue the city should propose building tiny homes on underdeveloped parcels of land, or when new homes and/or rentals are being built by developers that at least 40% must be affordable to individuals, and/or families whose income falls below the median income in the city they reside. The current “affordable housing rate” is 20% of homes being built.

Between 2017-2021, 14.2% of Monterey County residents lived in overcrowded households (1.01 or more in a single room) in which multiple families reside in single-unit dwellings (DataShare Monterey County, 2023). A family of three to four individuals sharing one room, while the kitchen and bathrooms are communal, or living in make-shift sheds in the backyard and garage. Individuals residing in overcrowded homes are susceptible to communicable diseases, and mental health issues, and suffer a higher rate of personal accidents (National Library of Medicine, 2018). Communicable diseases such as the coronavirus require an affected person to isolate for five days but how is that feasible when living quarters are shared? The lack of privacy which leads to feelings of being suffocated, and hindering one's inward & outward expressions causes mental health issues as you have to bottle up your emotions. There is an increase in personal accidents because of the limited amount of space to



move freely and everyday items may be a hazard (chairs, tables, sofas). To resolve this, we need to look at other States where they have been able to reduce overcrowded housing and to see if this would be viable in Monterey County.

### **Health Issues**

When families are spending more than a third of their income on housing, those families suffer from a higher rate of food insecurity than those who spend less. This leads to a higher level of health-related issues as opposed to children who are food secure which leads to obesity, diabetes, developmental problems, and mental health issues are some of the health issues that may incur (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). The reason for this is because of the monetary constraints families spend their funds on unhealthy foods which are more cost effective than healthy foods. Programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) help reduce insecurities. Early identification of those who suffer from food insecurities and then followed up with target resources to reduce hunger, and unhealthy diets are key in reducing health-related issues.

61% of homeless respondents had one or more health conditions (Lisman, M. 2019). If health-related issues are one characteristic of being homeless, what resources are being provided to support those who require medical services? Instead of being reactive, the identification of health-related issues needs to be diagnosed early on to prevent further trauma. Diseases such as hypertension, and diabetes are exacerbated due to lack of medical care and individuals are in danger of heart attacks, strokes, amputation, and diabetic shock. For those who are suffering from housing insecurities, their priority is housing & food, while healthcare is secondary.

<b>Contributing Factors</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
Housing Shortage	High rate of homelessness in Monterey County	Inadequate Living Conditions
Earning Power		Health Issues
Untreated Mental Health Disorder		Cyclical, barriers, keep job, perpetrates, generational

### **Project Description**

**Working Title:** Chinatown Outreach- Targeted Resources for the Unhoused Population

#### Project Description

The project would consist of mobilizing our services as opposed to being a drop-in resource center and outreach in Chinatown with the goal of providing goods & services, resource information, and referral services to community resources those who are facing housing and food insecurities. The information is not limited to rapid rehousing, transitional housing, and other services that will provide the basic need and awareness. Myself, Melina Perez (Youth Homeless Demonstration Project Coordinator) & Arely Matus (Mutual Aid Youth Leader) will be working collaboratively on this issue. I would be responsible for collecting & analyzing data, having informal dialogues with our clients, and creating a chart on how many individuals we have contacted and the services that we have provided. The information would be shared with The Epicenter's Deputy Director to verify if we met the goal of a minimum of 15 contacts with each.

## **Project Justification**

The project should be implemented because those individuals who are facing housing insecurities are not aware of programs and resources available to help transition them out of homelessness. Mobilizing services eliminates the need for potential clients to find transportation to our site. The agency expects to contact at least 15 clients with each outreach and raise awareness of programs and community resources that will reduce the amount of homelessness and improve the health & well-being of our clients.

The housing shortage pushes up rental prices that make housing unaffordable. The contributing factor that would be addressed is the housing availability by providing resources to our clients that there is non-traditional housing availability such as shelters, transitional housing programs, and organizations that support the housing insecure. By building capacity and identifying areas where the unhoused are concentrated we will target our services to those specific locations. One of the main barriers to receiving services is awareness & transportation and will eliminate both with our mobile services. Besides housing information, we will also provide resources to mental health services, Medi-Cal or Cal-Fresh and clients will have access to our clothing closet and food pantry.

The project meets the best practice standards because it will address those clients who are facing housing insecurities and provide them with resources to address the issues. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) of Ethical Principles will be the guiding source for policy implementation and standard operating procedures to ensure that we are meeting professional guidelines and those of our community. We must respect, have cultural sensitivity, and keep a client's dignity & self-worth intact. Our mission is to support the vulnerable community and not impose our value system on them.

## **Benefits**

The benefit to the client is to raise awareness and provide them with resources with the goal of reducing housing insecurities and increasing health & well-being. With our mobile services, our clients will have direct contact with our personnel and the barrier of transportation will be eliminated. Shelter will eliminate one of the barriers that prevent them from maintaining their health and well-being such as medical visits, and access to higher-quality food.

For the community, there would be less crime because desperate people do desperate things to support themselves, and the use of emergency services will decrease because those who are facing housing insecurities have a higher rate of medical issues (diabetes, HIV, tuberculosis).

The agency's benefit is that it will reach a new set of clients due to our mobile services with the goal of reducing homelessness. We will also raise awareness and hopefully with our positive contacts, it will lead to new clients seeking services from The Epicenter who were not aware of our services in the past.

## **Implementation Process**

The intern and mentor have had a multitude of meetings regarding the implementation of the federal grant which consisted of best practices, guidelines, services, location, and analyzing data since the Fall of 2023. The Epicenter will have monthly meetings with the following stakeholders: Clina de Salud, and Access Support Network to determine the effectiveness of collaborative services and local services that are currently targeted in Chinatown. The targeted group would be foster youth, and those facing housing insecurity between the ages of 16 to 24 but we will serve all clients regardless of age. Intern, YHDPC, and Mutual aid leader will have outreach efforts every other Friday with it commencing on 9/29/23. The team would be responsible for the implementation of providing the following services: set-up & breakdown,

food, clothes, & hygiene distribution, resource information, and needs assessment. Primary responsibilities for the intern would be creating food kits, cloth selection, set-up, collecting and analyzing data. The goal is to meet the immediate needs of the clients, remove the transportation barrier, and provide awareness of existing resources.

The deputy director and YHDPC will share with the intern safety practices, awareness, expectations, and responsibilities. The team is expected to follow the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) of Ethical Principles and will be the guiding source in standard operating procedures to ensure that we are meeting professional guidelines and those in the community. The team must respect, empathize, have cultural sensitivity, and keep a client's dignity & self-worth intact. The mission is to support the vulnerable community and not impose a value system on them.

The intern's main responsibility would be to create a tally sheet with the following identification: initials, date of birth, and services provided to the client and then create a graph and/or chart with the services that were provided, and feedback from the clients. In conjunction with the deputy director, the YHDPC will evaluate the effectiveness of the program, reevaluate the services provided, and determine if there is a need to make any changes to improve the client services.

### **Expected Outcomes**

The goal is to provide the basic needs of the clients' now (food, clothing) and in the near future (housing support), therefore, improving their quality of life. In addition, the need to increase a client's awareness of resources that will support their well-being, if The Epicenter does not provide those services. At each outreach, the goal is to support a minimum of 15 clients at each outing.

## **Assessment Plan**

The assessment plan is to determine the number of clients who visit the weekly outreach and utilize the services that may include but are not limited to food, clothing, CARS, and hygiene products. Informal dialogues will also be taken into consideration to determine feedback from our outreach and unmet needs. The intern will use tally sheets to determine the number of participants, the location of where most of the clients are being served, and the services most being rendered. The tally for each client and services rendered will be added and then be charted, mapped, and/or graphed. This information would allow the team to evaluate what areas need the most and least support, therefore, allowing the team to target their efforts on which services the clients need the most.

## **Assessment Plan & Expected Outcomes**

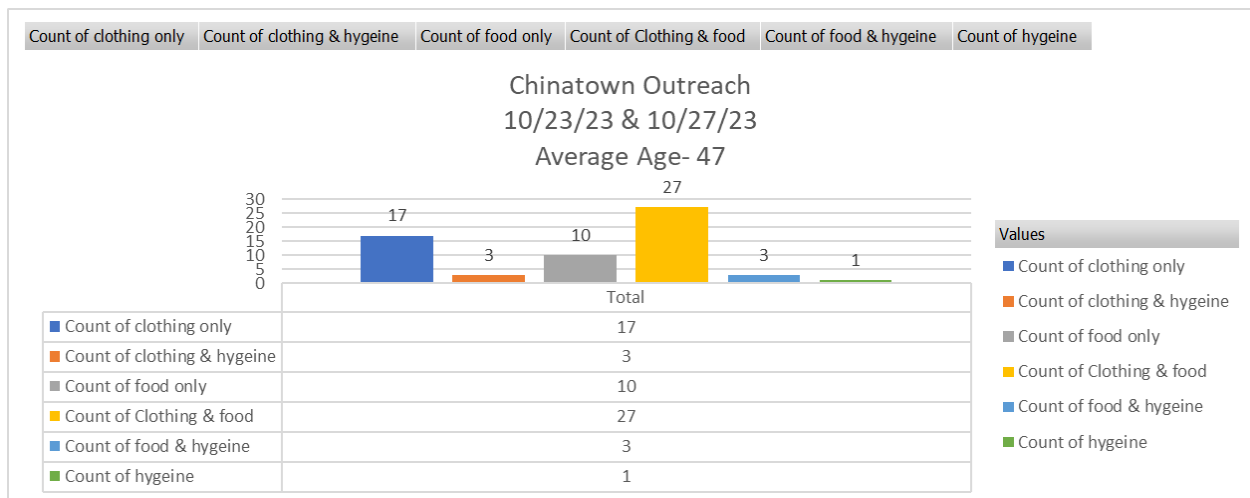
### **Project Results**

The outcome was that at least 15 individuals who were facing housing & food insecurities were provided with food, clothing, hygiene packs, or resource information meeting our goal of a minimum of 15 contacts in each outreach. Each individual was provided with the option of selecting their goods or services based on their needs with the overwhelming majority of our clients selecting food and clothing which totaled 27 clients at a 45% rate. The rate would have been higher if there was the capacity to supply more clothing sizes.

The measure that was used was to determine what services were being utilized the most, the age of the clients, and whether the agency reached their targeted goal of the clients that were expected to serve. With the data collection and analysis, the agency was able to assess the project's success which would determine if the services provided met the needs of the clients and did the deliverables needed to be changed or eliminated to enhance a client's well-being.

The method that was used to gather evidence with a tally sheet which identified the items and/or services that were being utilized and informal dialogues with the clients. Data collected was inputted into a spreadsheet and manipulated using a pivot table. The team was able to interpret the data and the results showed that the goal of servicing 15 clients was doubled in each outreach and the agency was able to determine what services the clients utilized the most.

The project achieved its expectations as the goal of providing services and resources to at least 15 clients in each outreach was met twofold as a total of 61 clients being supported with the average age being 47. Each client was given the opportunity to select from the following categories: clothing, food packs, and/or hygiene packs. By providing the services the quality of life of each client improved.



The dialogues that the intern had with the homeless population and from observation, the following was learned. The homeless population is resilient and respects their internal community. Every day is a struggle to survive but they manage day to day by sharing their limited resources with others. Many times when clients came for clothing, if they felt the clothing item may not fit, they would leave it behind because they said it may fit someone else. The dialogues they had with each other were with a sense of sincerity and caring for one another

as they shared resource information and inquired about their well-being. They are in a community within a community. From the 60+ clients that were supported, one was able to secure housing, another was number 150 for monetary housing assistance, and another shared that they had overdosed three times that week.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

Housing insecurities will continue to plague Monterey County as there are inadequate programs to support the homeless population. The demand for housing is high, and with limited inventory it causes the rental prices to skyrocket. Programs that provide affordable housing are full and the waitlist for programs may be for years. To resolve the issue it must take a collaborative effort (city, county, non-profit agencies, businesses, etc.) to address the root causes and then provide solutions that meet the needs of most.

The recommendation for The Epicenter is to continue their outreach efforts in Chinatown ensuring that their client's basic necessities are being met with food, clothing, and resources. Providing more clothing to distribute with an array of different sizes, and specifically larger sizes for men in shirts & jackets such as XL and XXL, with pant sizes starting at 38 and higher. Socks are also in need, and clients inquired about tents and backpacks which would provide shelter and to carry small items. The new intern should continue to gather results to meet the changing needs of the clients and modify the tally sheet to include gender. An improvement would be conducting a CARS assessment on the spot, instead of directing them to The Epicenter for an assessment.



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## Appendix A

### Project Implementation Plan

Attend meeting to discuss capstone project	September 14, 2023	Mentor, YHDPC	Notebook	Identification of capstone to serve the needs of the agency
Attend meeting to discuss best practices for outreach	September 21, 2023	Mentor, YHDPC	Notebook	Safety awareness for intern
Create item distribution checklist	September 25, 2023	Intern	Computer	Item distribution
Create document for tally	September 28, 2023	Intern	Computer	Tally document for identification
Outreach	September 29, 2023 (bi-weekly)	YHDPC, Mutual aid youth leaders	Van, clothing, tally document	Servicing the the unhoused
Review client information outreach	October 2, 2023 (bi-weekly)	Intern, YHDPC	Tally document	Provide number of clients served
Review tally document	October 5, 2023	Intern, YHDPC	Tally document	Revision to ensure that we gather reliable data
Meet to discuss effectiveness of outreach	October 6, a week after each outreach	YHDPC, Mutual aid youth leader	Computer	Determines effectiveness of distribution
Create chart of services provided	October 27, 2023	Intern	Tally document	Provides snapshot of number of services provided and where to concentrate our services
Meeting with stakeholders	November 3, 2023	Deputy Director, YHHP, Intern	Chart	Determine effectiveness of outreach



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Client's initials: \_\_\_\_\_

DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

**Services Rendered:**

- Clothing
- Food/water/snacks
- Hygiene packs
- CARS
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

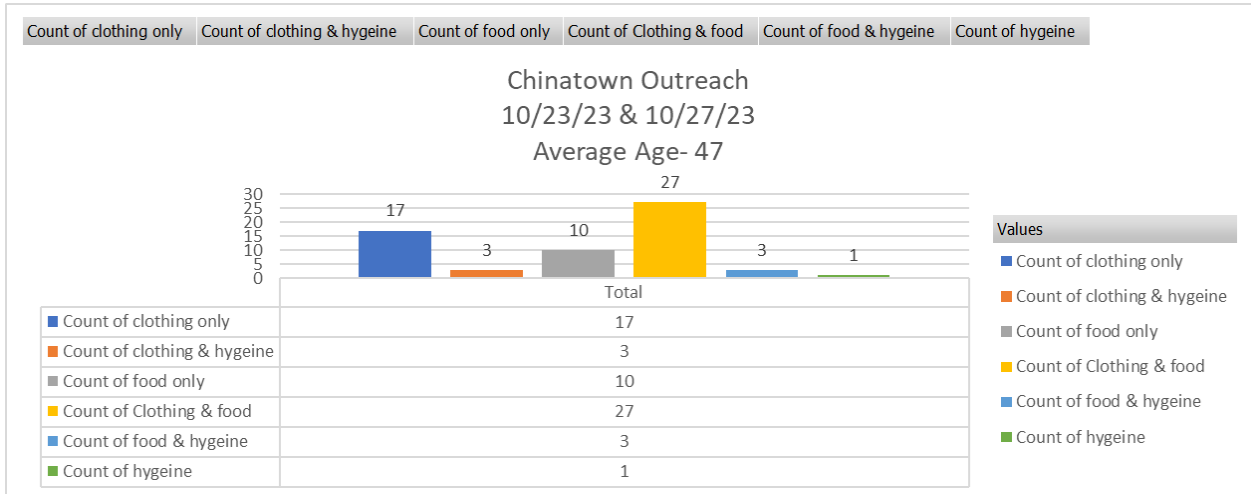
Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Client's initials: \_\_\_\_\_

DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

**Services Rendered:**

- Clothing
- Food/water/snacks
- Hygiene packs
- CARS
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_



**CARS-** Is a coordinated system to identify the needs of those individuals who are experiencing homelessness with the resources that best fit the client’s situation.