

## **Topic of Interest**

Homelessness in the South Bay

## **Initial Needfinding Plan**

We've decided to focus on homeless adults for our needfinding. Our group's stakeholders include homeless adults, homeless shelters, homeless support groups, and community groups focused on the homeless. People and groups which we won't count as stakeholders include people who are "doubled up," government organizations, and homeless children. We want to talk with and observe homeless people directly. We want to learn about the main causes of homelessness and how people go from homelessness to long term housing, and what motivates people to seek help and what prevents them from doing so. We also want to talk with various homeless support groups. When talking with support groups, we want to learn why they chose their particular approach for helping the homeless and what impact they've seen come from their approach.

Some of our team members know people who are heavily involved in community groups which focus on the homeless. Our studio instructors have connected us with LifeMoves, a charitable organization which provides interim housing, psychiatric services, and guidance to both homeless families and individual adults. An interview with a team of LifeMoves clinical psychologists is scheduled for Wednesday. We are also seeking out homeless individuals who might be interested in talking with us, including places like the Line 22 "Hotel 22" bus and the Opportunities Center in Palo Alto. During the interviews, we'll try to take photos and audio recording when possible, though we might sketch interesting details about the person we are interviewing and their environment.

## **Discussion Guide**

For primary/homeless individuals:

"Hey I was gonna go grab a banana and some coffee, would you like anything?"

If yes, go grab the food and come back, if no, just go ahead and continue.

"So my name is \_\_\_ and this is \_\_\_ and we had a few questions if you'd be willing to take the time to chat?"

“Yeah... so we’re working on a school project, and right now we’re just trying to learn from the people around us to figure out what they need and how we could help.”

And then just follow on down that path for a *while*. If they talk about shelters/going to shelters wait for a pause and follow up.

(Use the ‘repeat the last three words’ said (i.e. interviewee: “I realized it was getting late so i decided to head to the shelter” interviewer: “oh heading to the shelter?” and let them take off, or remain silent techniques).

Specific questions to push for (phrase based on flow of conversation):

“Can you walk me through your day yesterday?”

“How did you choose this specific spot” (if pan-handling)

“Could you tell us about a time when you felt particularly safe and or happy?”

“When was the last time you felt content?”

“What did you have for breakfast this morning? Dinner last night? Where did you sleep?”

“I see you have a cell phone, who was the last person you called?”

“How do you stay healthy?”

“Why?”

For Secondary/Research (LifeMoves):

“Hey,

I’m \_\_\_\_ and this is \_\_\_\_\_. We’re Stanford students working on a project about underserved people. We’re focusing on the homeless, and we want to learn and understand how they spend their time, what they struggle with, and what their needs are. Thank you for taking time out of your day to talk with us.

If it’s alright with you, we would like to take a voice recording as we talk so we can refer back to it later.

If they say yes, “fantastic! I guess to start... how’s your day been?” “how’d you wind up in this line of work?” *Establish contact/build rapport*

Walk us through what you do on a day-to-day basis as clinical psychologists. What tasks do you take care of, and how do you manage your team?

How do you establish rapport with the families and individuals you work with?

What is inefficient, complex, or frustrating about your jobs?

Who are the success stories, the people who end up breaking out of the cycle of homelessness, and how did they do so?

*Once you see shoulders relax, and you've been talking for a few minutes dive into:*

Could you tell us about a family you've been working with that was able to return to self-sufficiency?

“Could you walk us through a difficult experience you had when helping a family/individual?”

“We understand that many homeless people also deal with mental health issues - one figure we've read says up to a quarter of all homeless people suffer some form of severe mental illness. Could you tell us more about your experience dealing with this?”

LifeMoves splits its services to focus on single adults and families as separate categories. Could you tell us more about why LifeMoves made that decision and how it helps you be more impactful in the community?

“In a shelter study conducted in Minnesota that we've read, many residents frequently expressed suspicions about other populations that access public assistance programs. This includes everything from shelter to emergency assistance and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. To what extent does this occur here, and how do you handle sentiments like these when working with individuals and communities?”

### **Interview Transcription**

*Michael Peterson (MP) speaking with fellow Stanford student Adrian Alabi (AA), who has been involved in serving the homeless breakfast at the Opportunity Center on Friday mornings for the last three years. He has also taken a Stanford class on homelessness (Philosophy 197I) and has been involved in other homeless support groups.*

*MP:* What do you observe as the needs of the homeless and how did you see that those were their needs?

*AA:* Yeah I think the biggest one, I had someone tell me flat out, that a lot of homeless people feel invisible. People just walk by them on the streets. People try not to look at them because they don't want to give them money. People are just busy and don't want to talk to them. They don't have friends or family which is part of the reason why they are homeless. One of their needs is to just have someone that can hear them. You find a lot of times you might say hi to a homeless person and they seem kind of grumpy but once they start talking they will tell you all

the stories about when they were in school, jobs, how they got here, because they haven't had anyone to talk to. So I think one is just being heard. Another is just uplifting them because they are in a situation where -- it's different if you're having a tough quarter where ten weeks and then I have break -- but when that's your life, you're constantly stuck in this rut feeling like this is too much for me, I'm never going to get out of this, kind of thoughts like that. Just breathe encouragement into people, whether it's through prayer or just directly encouraging them. As they tell a story you can say 'oh you're so gifted and so talented. You're able to do this. I'm an engineer, I don't even know how you're able to do this' or whatever. Helping them see the gifts that God has given them. Just words of encouragement. Otherwise you can pray for someone to get healed that's always cool. But a lot of it is just hearing their needs and encouraging them or being their friends and being with them. Whether you go everyday or once a week or once a month, if you're committed to a group of people and start seeing them around, depending on how close you are they might become your friend or family. I think that's also a need, they don't have people consistently in their life.

*MP:* Yeah. What various ways have you seen people try to commit to being a group that consistently establishes contact with a group of people and help rather than just seeing people randomly and helping? How have you seen people try to address that?

*AA:* Servant breakfast is the best example. It's every single Friday morning and it's at the Opportunities center which is right next to CVS and Gott's and all those places. You realize after you start serving there that when you go to CVS, you see those people. You're there consistently every Friday but then also if you're going to downtown University you'll see them walking around. If you're just hanging around this community, they are in this community so you'll interact with them that way so it'll be beyond your once a week thing. City Impact is the other extreme where they used to be an outreach ministry like Servant Breakfast but the guy running it thought there was such a need that they need to plant a church and move to that area. So they live among the homeless population there and serve them every single day. Those are a couple examples.

*MP:* When you say they go and serve them everyday, what are some of the things they do to serve on a daily basis?

*AA:* Their needs are different than the average person's needs. One of the biggest things is addiction. A lot of people are on drugs or addicted to other things. Therapy for people, helping them overcome their addictions -- one believing that they can and two giving them proper treatment, mental health recovery -- that's a huge one to do day-to-day. Another is educational needs. I know City Impact they have a school now that they do. They're teaching these kids -- kids are the future so if they can train up the kids, give them education, teach them how to get

jobs, that's how you're going to roll out the next generation and get them out of there. There's also physical needs like food, making sure they can get food. Housing -- if they can't afford housing, reducing the cost for them somehow. There's also just bathing. If you're homeless homeless you don't have a shower, so setting up little things for them to stay clean. Brushing their teeth, things like that. Or even just telling people that they need to because a lot of people are like 'I'm so broke, I can't afford this.' But they're going to get sick if you don't take care of yourself in this way.

### **Selected Observations**

#### *Interview with LifeMoves*

- Our interviewees felt they were straddling a divide between the admins at LifeMoves and the clients they serve: cultural, linguistic, socio-economic.
- Resources are decentralized: psychologists and residents spend a lot of time trying to find help; each shelter has their own policies on who they can help and what is expected of the people they are helping; psychologist's tasks and experiences differ depending on the site they are working at
- Homeless people are really, really busy. Between required workshops to continue receiving aid and efforts to make money, they have little time to relax and recover. Many homeless feel less willing to participate in support groups because they experience this time pressure. This pressure is layered on top of stigma for seeking help and a general sense of anxiety and negativity.
- At one site, clients are allowed to simply walk up to psychologists and talk, but they almost never do. Psychologists expressed how many of their clients are reluctant to seek and participate in activities intended to support them.
- Residents don't always feel psychologists and other workers are equipped to help them, and won't trust them. For example, a young therapist leading a parenting workshop will be asked "You're not a parent, how can you help me?"
- "If trust is broken, it's terrible, the people are all they have," and "It's difficult to live so close to each other."
- Residents of Haven House feel a loss of control and dignity. Their homes get searched, they have adhere to a strict set of requirements, and the program feeds into an urgency to "break out of their circumstances" as quickly as possible.
- Fast turnover of residents and shelter staff.

Taken together these observations paint a picture of miscommunication and overwhelming pressure on both the part of the LifeMoves' psychologists and their residents.

#### *Interview with Zach, a member of the community who lacks secure housing and regular income*

- I "don't want to be a burden," and it "wouldn't do me any good to overstay [my] welcome."
- "I refuse to be broke." (used many times in conversation)
  - Described himself as a gentleman gangster

- “Meditation [and martial arts makes me] physically and mentally strong . . . Feet on grass/soft ground, golden roots stretching deeply into ground. [It’s] enlightenment, and how we encounter God.” “I read a lot.”
- In the ~hour and a half we spent with Zachary, we counted 8/9 people who said hi (they’ve seen Zachary before and are on friendly terms with him), 4 of whom donated.
  - He appears to have a group of people who check in on him day to day.
- Mentioned a man named Ebenezer multiple times in the conversation; on the topic of suicide, Zach recalled how Ebenezer said “I’m sorry your dad couldn’t bear to live a full life” shortly after Zach’s father committed suicide.
  - Ebenezer clearly had a major impact on Zach, repeating several times throughout our interview that “You can’t choose what life gives you, but you can choose how you live life.”
- Emphasized his trip with his ‘acquired’ brother to his family in LA a few weeks back
  - Highlighted how nice it was to sleep inside for free with a bed
- Led us through his whirlwind of a childhood full of moving, abusive/alcoholic stepfather, diabetic mother
  - Talked about how his grandpa started with nothing and started buying real estate but won’t let Zach just crash there
- Nicknamed Quasimodo, and instead of being sad about it, he told us the tale of how important a historical figure Quasimodo was.
- Gave an informal typology of homeless individuals:
  - Mentally handicapped individuals-> he sympathizes, but doesn’t help them much
  - Drunk/Drug Addicts-> Thinks they’re basically worthless and admits he’s stolen / taken advantage of them
    - Usually only after a drunk man tries to steal his items
  - Other handicapped individuals + down on their luck-> where he and his friends fall
- Told tale of when someone held a gun to his head and robbed him blind
  - Infuriated Zach, who chased him down and ‘as if by god tripping him’ the assailant slipped and fell.
- Thinks Government is terribly inefficient and bad at social welfare
- Sleeps in a motel every night for \$44 /night, cannot pay a monthly discounted rate because he makes that \$44 up by pan handling day to day

Overall, Zach largely seems to have his life together in terms of a set daily routine and forward focus. When diving deeper, however, we find a very smart individual pushed to extremes who is constantly aware of his surroundings and makes very deliberate choices about each of his actions. Due to his physical handicap, Zach relies on his tone of voice and body positioning to convey a sense of hostility in order to protect himself from other individuals who might wish to steal his belongings.

*Interview with Adrian, Stanford student involved in several homeless support groups*

- Adrian became involved with serving the homeless through various church ministries.
- Morally motivated: He feels compelled to help the homeless because “God cares about the homeless, the poor, the needy.”
- He said through reading the Bible he developed an understanding of God’s love for the poor and the homeless. Because of that, he felt like he should help out.
- Once he started helping out, he found that he cared very deeply and had a strong desire to help out in every way he could.
- He took a class on homelessness and helped manage a database of homeless people in the county and what kind of services they’ve been using. He presented work from his class to CEO Jen Padgett of Community Solutions, Inc., a nonprofit working to end homelessness.
- He thinks homeless people feel “invisible” and really want to talk and be heard.
- People avoid the homeless on the streets because they don’t want to spend the time talking and they don’t want to give money.
- Potential avenues for support could be long-last relationships with homeless individuals, listening, uplifting, supporting financially, providing basic needs like food or cleaning.
- Because of serving in local area, he runs into homeless individuals when just going through town -- at CVS, walking downtown, etc. That can be very helpful to establishing long-term relationships. He tries to do as much as possible to connect with homeless individuals, especially when he runs into people he’s met before around town.
- “Having more people being involved with the homeless would help.” It would give them more connections and help them find people who they might share commonalities with.

While LifeMoves is focused on aiding in mental health and the psychological effects of living without a place to call ‘home,’ Adrian presents a more feasible/achievable way of helping the homeless through simply making them feel more ‘normal.’ While religion clearly plays a role in Adrian’s desire to help, the effects of his time spent actually talking to individuals and giving them a supportive ear, goes beyond any belief system.

*Interview with Michael, homeless rider on ‘Hotel 22’, a bus (Line 22) in Silicon Valley that runs through the night and often has homeless individuals looking for a place to sleep in it:*

- 52 year old man, with a bad cough.
- Gets on line 22 3-5 times a week during winter, but when it's warm he doesn't need to as often. Bus is cold but not as bad as outside in the winter .
- Tough to fall asleep in moving (and stopping) vehicle.
  - He prefers to sleep outdoors when he can.
- We didn't get to talk about how he became homeless.
  - But said he found out about Line 22 from a friend.
- He says the bus is safe and that's what he likes about it. People mind their own business.

*Direct Observations on Line 22:*

- Only one or two potentially homeless individuals.
- Everyone had either a hat or hoodie (potential for solution space?).
- Loud group of individuals got on and talked non-stop.
- Only lighting is in the back, but every single stop is not only jarring but the lights come on.

- Random announcement about bicycles in English and Spanish.
- Hard to store your belongings safely as no overhead or under seat capacity.
- Increasingly bumpy ride and bus shakes and rattles constantly.
- Only way to comfortably sleep is if you have a row to yourself, but if you have a suitcase, that's all taken up.
- When Michael started coughing a lot, woman in seat in front of him looked disgusted, and covered her face and mouth with her sweater and her hands.
  - Woman even even got off on the next stop.

### Selected Interpretations

- There exists layers of separation between the homeless and the people who want to help them.
  - Often these layers are unspoken barriers, for example, fear of stigma, which lead many homeless to avoid taking initiative to seek help. This was mentioned again and again by the LifeMoves team.
  - “People don’t seek help for three main reasons: they are afraid, they don’t trust those offering help, or the help offered doesn’t seem worth their time.” Quote from LifeMoves psychiatrist.
  - Consequently, both homeless people and their supporters often feel lost when looking for resources.
- Organizations which are able to connect disparate community resources are not always able to mobilize them effectively.
  - Programs designed to help the homeless often add extra stress on people already in a highly stressful situation. This is something upon which everybody we spoke to at LiveMoves agreed.
  - One of the LifeMoves PhD students recounted a Haven House resident who was homeless because her abusive boyfriend was in jail for hurting her. The student later heard that she moved back in with her boyfriend after leaving the program. The student considered this a failure and still is struggling to process this situation.
- Homeless people often lack deep relationships where they feel heard, respected and understood.
  - This is one of the foundations of the LifeMoves training. The psychologists are told to “lean in” and show respect through verbal and body language so that they can best help their clients.
- When homeless, the experience of dealing with other people feels simultaneously isolating, claustrophobic, and hostile.
  - This is best encapsulated by Zach’s view of other homeless people and other people: some people try to take advantage of him so he must be alert and he also feels the need to do the same to other people (which makes him feel both claustrophobic and hostile), and other times he feels isolated – shunned by his family members and people on the street who might be able to help him.
- Two of the most prominent emotions experienced by the homeless are shame and despair, and support programs do not always mitigate these.

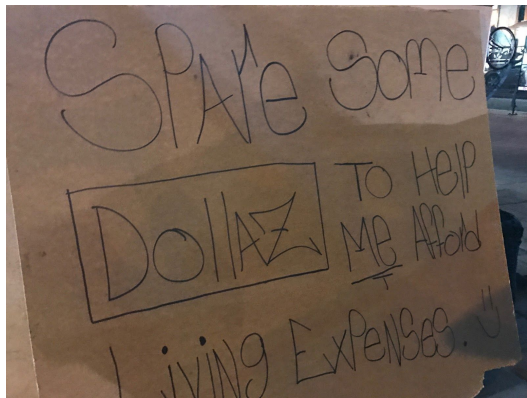


- Often times the programs are about ‘uplifting’ people and finding them shelters and homes. While that can aid in reducing one’s sense of ‘hopelessness, it does little to reduce the shame around living on welfare and in shelters.
- Independence and preserving one’s dignity is really important to the homeless.
  - This is consistent with all of our need finding interviews.
- Forming connections with people and knowing how to make the most of social bonds becomes a major avenue to success.
  - This is true with Zach’s survival routine, as well as with a story we heard from LifeMoves about residents at Haven House eventually becoming administrators and managers at the program.
- They seek and pursue ways to empower themselves, find solace, and feel they are building themselves beyond their circumstances.
  - Zach prides himself on keeping himself “physically and mentally strong,” his description of martial arts is poetic and almost religious.
- Inspirational people are important, but they have to provide the right guidance and the right emotional support at the right time.
  - Timing is critical as it has to be at a time when the help-seeker is willing to accept help, and the help-provider is actually capable of aiding them.

## **People Profiles**

### **People Profile #1 - Zach**

A 23 year old, handicapped, man, who relies on the charity of Palo Alto residents to make ends meet every day.



### *A Day in the Life*

Zach wakes up around 9 am and does an hour or two of meditation in his Pay by the Night Motel. Once he feels grounded and secure, weather permitting, he boards the bus from Fremont to Palo Alto. Along the route, he touches base with some of his friends who are trying to decide where the most traffic will flow that day. Rainy days are particularly difficult as fewer people are out walking, and sitting in the rain is rarely worth the potential health hazard.

Once in Palo Alto, Zach wheels himself to the corner of Walgreens on University and Bryant. Zach has chosen this spot because it is the heart of Palo Alto, with the central hall and police station located just a few blocks away on Bryant street.

Zach spends the rest of his day from about noon till 6 pm, in his spot talking to anyone willing to spend a few minutes and chat. Drinking red bulls do keep him alert, and eating a sandwich or banana for sustenance, Zach does his best to avoid being 'broke.' Most of the time he makes enough money from charitable donors that he can, by the end of the day, afford his \$44 a night motel. The few 'regulars' who know Zach well and check up on him day to day are his prime contributors, one of whom, usually donates \$20 to his cause.

When foot traffic begins to slow Zach makes the call of when to head home. Getting back on the bus to his motel, with the sun down and darkness around, he can finally relax a bit. On his way between the bus station and 'home,' he is on high alert. In his pocket he carries his day's earnings, usually around \$50, and he has no recourse if someone steals it, aside from trying to chase the thief himself.

After paying for his room, he is finally able to truly relax and watch a bit of tv, or read his favorite martial arts books.

### *Challenges*

Many of Zach's challenges are a glimpse into those of the homeless community in general. He lives day to day, spending the money he earns panhandling on rent and food immediately. Without a way to save, he is stuck in a cycle of dependence upon the generosity of others. Because of this cash-based way of life, Zach always has to be alert and focused in order to protect his limited wealth.

These problems are compounded by Zach's unique challenges, most notably, his deformed back and legs (a result of his birth). As Zach says himself, it's harder to be intimidating and threatening when you appear to be weak and disabled. Consequently, he often finds himself the target of drunks and other desperate homeless individuals. In addition, there are no wheelchairs or assistive devices made for people with his specific disability, so he has to use a modified wheelchair anytime he wants to move comfortably. Zach challenges himself to never be broke. By pushing himself to never have 'nothing', Zach puts himself in a position which makes it harder for him to seek help or aid as he has to devote all his time towards panhandling.

### People Profile #2 - A LifeMoves Psychologist

A clinical psychologist in LifeMoves' Behavioral Health Department who works directly with residents and clients at one of the shelters in the LifeMoves network.



### *A Day in the Life*

As a graduate student in psychology, her time is split between her research and her work helping clients. Depending on the site she is assigned to, she may have a milieu session where she is open for anyone to walk up to her and talk with her. She takes on a small number of clients; her goals in her appointments with them are to make sure they remain on track with the requirements of the program and to help them find more resources to help them during and after their time in LifeMoves. She understands the importance of making sure her clients feel listened to and knows that her clients feel a lot of pressure to recover as quickly as possible, and she takes this into account through her daily sessions. She also leads support groups for sub-communities of residents, like parents and veterans. She frequently interacts with people who don't speak English or have a limited grasp of English and finds speaking other languages (especially Spanish) very useful.

### *Challenges*

Case managers and administrators often don't understand the realities of their clients' lives. She often has to defend her client against demands from her superiors. She sometimes finds it difficult to earn the trust of her clients: parents don't trust her when she leads a parenting group; clients who see themselves as her elder find it difficult to take advice from someone younger and less experienced than them. She notices language and technological fluency provides barriers for her clients. She finds it frustrating when she can't make progress with her clients, especially when her clients' distrust of her is the obstacle.

### People Profile #3 - Adrian

A Stanford graduate student and a member of a homeless support group who works towards serving some of the many needs of homeless individuals.



### *A Day in the Life*

Adrian is a Stanford graduate student and on the men's soccer team at Stanford. Over his five years at Stanford, he's served the homeless in many capacities: running a database of homeless individuals to help organizations determine effectiveness of various programs, serving breakfast every Friday morning at the Palo Alto opportunities center, going up to San Francisco for various outreach events, and even just talking to homeless individuals when he sees them around town. Though he can't devote much time because of his circumstances as a Stanford student-athlete, he hopes that he can build lasting relationships with homeless individuals because he feels that they often "feel disconnected" and don't have many people to talk to. He hopes that he can be someone who listens to homeless individuals, makes them feel heard and valued, and empowers them to get out of their situation.

### *Challenges*

Adrian is not able to spend more than a handful of hours each week helping out. Additionally, he sometimes finds interactions with homeless individuals difficult due to the differences in his circumstances and their circumstances, especially when he has no prior relationship and is meeting someone for the first time. He also says there are also a seemingly insurmountable amount of needs to support and only so few people trying to provide support, and it's often discouraging.

#### People Profile #4 - Michael A 'Hotel 22' Regular

A 52 year old man who regularly utilizes VTA Line 22 as a safe place to spend the night. Note: Michael was not very interested in sharing his story with us, but what follows are what we were able to gather before he began his arduous attempts at falling asleep.



#### *A Day in the Life*

Michael's day starts when "Hotel 22" turns back into "Line 22," the VTA Bus route that loops between San Jose and Palo Alto. Around 4:30 am commuters start to board. After a night of fitful sleep, Michael has to decide which stop to get off in search of some cheap food and an odd job. Dragging his suitcase, medium sized (just too big to be called a carry on) with him, he finds it hard to find work. On those lucky days he does get a job, he finds himself able to afford more comfortable housing than a bench seat on the bus line.

After a day of either working or panhandling, Michael sets out in search of a place to sleep. In the summers and even into the late fall, he is able to sleep outdoors in one of the many public parks in the South Bay. Even as he does this, his suitcase is with him. With all of his belongings inside, sleeping in the parks is still not a restful experience. Come winter time, Michael hopes he has saved up enough money to afford the \$2 bus fare on Hotel 22, and if he does, the cycle begins again.

Lying up against his suitcase (which he places gingerly on the window seat), the bus rattles and comes to grinding stops. He frequently falls out of his aisle seat, choosing to protect his belongings over his body. On a good day he says he gets 3 to 4 hours of sleep, which he says is a leading cause of why he feels like his mind has deteriorated since he first began living on the streets.

#### *Challenges*

Michael's biggest challenge is getting a good night's sleep while still keeping his few belongings safe. While the bus fare is cheap, it is a less than ideal place to rely upon at night. With groups of commuters and drunk individuals using the bus for transportation it is loud and has an air of unpredictability. In the summers he is able to rely on homeless encampments and a network of peers, but come winter, much of that community breaks up in search of warmth.

**How Might We's**

1. How might we *close* cultural gaps between the homeless and workers who may be less exposed to the experiences of those they serve?
2. How might we *aggregate* resources to help the homeless and the people supporting them without sacrificing organizational flexibility?
3. How might we *connect* homeless to a long-lasting, supportive community?
4. How might we *relieve* unnecessary time stress on the homeless and *promote* a sense of meaningful activity and progress?
5. How might we *encourage* people with insecure housing to *pursue* help?
6. How might we *reduce* the stigma of seeking help for people with insecure housing?
7. How might we *foster* a higher level of trust between workers and the homeless?
8. How might we *ensure* the homeless are able to *feel heard*?
9. How might we *help* the homeless *raise* their own self esteem and perceived self value?
10. How might we *grow* the community of supporters for the homeless?
11. How might we *help* homeless people feel *secure* and *safe*?
12. How might we *convince* supports to *commit* to making meaningful relationships with the homeless?
13. How might we *help* homeless people *secure* their belongings?
14. How might we *steer* the homeless on a path towards security?
15. How might we *empower* individuals without a mailing address to collect their welfare benefits?
16. How might we *help* homeless people *sleep* comfortably?
17. How might we *make programs* that work with homeless people's schedules?