Homelessness and Car Parks

The goal of our car parks is to give the homeless community with cars a safe environment to sleep overnight in local parking lots.

Tag Words: Homeless; Car Parks; Homeless With Cars; Safe; Parking Lot; Sleeping

Authors: Sade’ Anderson, Daphney Chery, Lotanna Onuekwusi with Julie M. Fagan, Ph.D.

Summary:

Our goal is to find out how we can implement a parking lot for homeless people here in Central New Jersey where they can feel safe and secure while in their cars sleeping at night. We realized that cars are the only thing some people have left besides their pride and maybe their employment. However, with their employment, they cannot possibly afford housing on their own without some assistance. Some of these homeless people probably only get paid minimum wage, and they cannot live comfortably on that salary. They usually have a gym membership where they can drive in the morning or at night to bathe and shower. The car parks are our solution to this homelessness situation and we did the best we can to lend a helping hand to those in need.
The Issue: Homelessness

Overview:
What is homelessness? Many may have different definitions of this term depending on their situation. Whether they are wealthy or on the poor end of the stick, let’s just say the meaning of this word should not be taken lightly and should be thought about all across the nation. Homelessness by definition from Wikipedia “is the condition and social category of people who lack housing, because they cannot afford (pay for), or are otherwise unable (or uninterested) to maintain regular, safe, and adequate shelter.” [1] In simplest form one may suggest that homelessness is someone or a group of people who are displaced from their homes due to certain circumstances such as financial burdens, natural disasters or domestic violence, etc. that causes them to live out in the streets.

Homelessness is a very complex and multi-faceted issue that touches many different people.

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, a person is homeless who:

- lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence; and
- has a primary night time residency that is supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations
- an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or
- a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

This includes families who sleep in cars, children and teens who find their way to shelters, and single adults who sleep on the streets, in bus stations, and store fronts. The Alliance looks at a broad swath of homeless populations. Each group has characteristics that are specific to that demographic; each has a unique set of needs and concerns. Often, the solutions to homelessness for each group differ based on their circumstances.

We often forget all the things that homelessness entails. Things such as clothing, food and shelter, which are the main three resources each individual needs in order to survive. There are people in this world that had a good thing going in the beginning of their lives and then all of the sudden they wake up in the streets trying to figure out where they were going to lay their head at night. There are a host of testimonials of people who struggle with homelessness daily [2]. Night after night, in these crowded and less fortunate cities as we walk the streets at night we are passing them by laying on cardboard boxes as they ask for money and food. “The National Alliance to End Homelessness estimates that between 2.5 and 3.5 million people experienced homelessness in the United States last year – a population greater than the size of San Francisco and Washington, DC combined’. [3]

The question we ask ourselves is… How can we help alleviate homelessness and make those homeless more comfortable to reach out to those willing to lend a hand?

On the national level, we find many different programs being established and implemented to fight and prevent homelessness. One program is called the National Partnership Agreement on
Homelessness. In this program, the government attempts to give sustainable housing and social inclusion to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. They have three key strategies in order to reduce homelessness, which are “prevention and early intervention to stop people becoming homeless; breaking the cycle of homelessness; and improving and expanding the service response to homelessness.” [4]. They are putting approximately 1.1 billion dollars in this program and they plan to help all types of homeless people including those who are recently being released from the penitentiary with no where to live due to substance abuse.

On the community level, we came across a group on Facebook [5] in which a crowd of people from Delaware, Ohio began a coalition to fight against homelessness. In this program they rallied and ask for support from their local churches, cities, county agencies and shelters. We e-mailed one of the administrators to find out more about their program and he happily replied by telling us the various aspects of their program. In this program they carried out several fundraisers where they raised enough money to purchase a building. With enough sponsors they were able to provide housing for those who are homeless. However, those affected were given a specific time frame that allows them to seek employment and get back on their feet. The program houses all different types of homeless people from those who are runaway teenagers to those who are victims of domestic violence. [6]

**Introduction**

Although both programs seem exceptional in helping others, the program we chose to mimic is a homelessness parking lot. Santa Barbara, California has worked with the city to set up 12 parking lots where homeless people sleep in their cars overnight [7]. The New Beginners Counseling Center [8], which is a homeless outreach organization, initiated the program to the city to provide a safe environment for the homeless community. This program is one of the first programs of this kind in the United States. Saint Vincent De Paul Society of Lane Co., Inc., in Eugene, Oregon USA, is who the community, business, non-profit organizations or government offices would notify if there is a homeless family in need of assistance. After the initial call is taken place, the organization will work with Saint Vincent to establish rules and expectations for the cares of the homeless family.

Running a successful homelessness program is not an easy task at all. Many rules and regulations has to be enforced or met in order for the program to be as beneficial as intended. The New Beginnings organization established a parking lot program that was very successful in the city of Santa Barbara with the approval of the city’s councilmen. To begin the parking lot program, members of the New Beginnings organization appeared before the city council ordinance committee and together they discussed the issues about homelessness in the city and how they are going about in correcting the issue. The Staff of the New Beginnings Organization wrote up a proposal basically provided some legal documents of their plan of the parking lot program, which included detailed materials on having RV vans in the different location of the provided parking lots to make it safer for the homeless people. The staff had to address the committee and show them how their plans would work and exactly what they are asking the city to provide. However many concerns were risen by the council which were

- RVs Currently Take Advantage of Parking Permits by Parking All Day
- Potential Additional Costs to the Department
- Program Should Concentrate Overnight RV Parking to Only One Lot
- Not Consistent with the Cities Policies and Mission
- Not Appropriate Use of Cities Facilities/Resources
- Number of RVs Could Potentially Increase
- Enforcement Issues/Operational Problems
- Affordability Issues for Everyone in Santa Barbara, Not Mandated to Live Here

These are typical issues that came up when we were writing our proposal to the city of New Brunswick. Many of the parking lots in New Brunswick, consists of people purchasing overnight parking passes so they can park their cars overnight. One of the major concerns was the revenue that the safer parking lot program would take away from overnight parking permits. To accommodate for these concerns Santa Barbara pass certain rules for the New Beginnings to follow. The RV’s are not allowed to park within 50ft of a residence; The RV’s occupants may use the property for overnight parking only to make sure the homeless people have a safe environment and the lot will be open after business hours.

The City of New Brunswick has yet to come back to us with their decisions and accommodations to our proposal. However we are expecting many rules and regulations.

**The Service Project**

Once our proposal is approved by the city of New Brunswick, we plan to start implementing the overnight parking lot program. We will start by purchasing the 3 RV’s to invite those homeless people and families without cars to sleep overnight. We will only start with one parking lot and analyze the outcome for the first 6 months. New Brunswick Square Mall is the main parking lot that we are pushing for due to its proximity and it’s availability. Our volunteers will be needed immediately, and will most likely be students from Rutgers University who are willing to participate in this community service project. Our main focus is to hire someone who is willing to organize the parking lot permits and maintain the RV’s, as well as making sure we have someone in charge of moving them every night after sleeping hours. A RV Specialist will act as a liaison with the city and the New Brunswick Square Mall administration to make sure everything is in place every night. The specialists will also Specifically, the Specialist will be conducting participant screening and selection, vehicle inspections, issuance and review of permits, lot placement, lot acquisitions, site orientations and reviews, daily RV check-in and check-out, case management, liaison with City staff, providing weekly reports, weekly supervision, and referrals to community resources and public relations. The new Specialist will be assisting with the resolution of disputes between individuals, program participants, citizens, and business owners. For this main parking lot the Specialist has been providing supervision of program participants during parking hours, 9:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m., as many days per week as necessary, in order to ensure compliance with program regulations and the specific requirements for parking in this city lot, as required by the license agreement.

We hope to see a huge impact on the homeless community and we hope that this program alleviates some of the insecurities and provides more of a safe environment to live in. This is just the beginning in helping the homelessness issue, our next step is to open the parking lot to homeless people and families with vehicles and to help those without monthly income find jobs so that they can better provide for themselves.
Financial Aspect:
We will begin with one parking lot and approximately 3 RV’s will be purchased. However, those who are homeless with cars will also be allowed to park in the lot. Also Security Guards and Cleaning crew will be hired to secure and keep the lot cleaned. This is a nonprofit organization, so we will be finding sponsors and governmental grants to accommodate for our expenses. Below is a table that outlines the expenses of the safe car program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPENSES</th>
<th>PER MONTH</th>
<th>PER YEAR</th>
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<td>EMPLOYEES (9) &amp;</td>
<td>$10,500.00 per month</td>
<td>$126,000 per year</td>
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<tr>
<td>VOLUNTEERS (10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>RV’s (3) one per lot</td>
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<td>$39,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
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<td>$165,000</td>
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Proposal to the New Brunswick City Council:
DATE: December 9, 2009
TO: City Council President, Elizabeth Sheenhan Garlatti,
78 Bayard Street
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
FROM: Sade’ Anderson, Daphney Chery, Lotanna Onuekwusi
SUBJECT: Proposal to implement Safe Parking Program for the Homeless in Middlesex County
As students of Rutgers University, we have stumbled across an issue that needs to be addressed. The issue of homelessness in the Middlesex County area has placed a major concern on us and needs some attention. After brainstorming different ideas to address the issue, we have chosen to mirror a plan that has been implemented in Santa Barbara, California. The New Beginning Counseling Center located in Santa Barbara, has created a New Safe Parking Program where they found Municipal parking lots in which homeless people can sleep over night. They mainly purchased RV’s where they invited homeless families and individuals to stay between the hours of 8pm – 6am. Our target population is those homeless people who may have lost there housing due to financial difficulties but still have a low income. However, some of these individuals have made other arrangements to provide for themselves such as, purchasing gym memberships so that they can shower and take care of their personal hygiene.
As a group, we intend on implementing a similar project in the Middlesex County area. This will be a non-profit organization that will fully depend on sponsors and governmental grants. We have decided that the New Brunswick Square Mall parking lot located on Route 18 is an
ideal location to begin our Safe Parking Program. With this in mind, a section of the mall parking lot will be reserved for the program between the hours of 9pm- 7am. Between our operation hours there will be specialist at the location to foresee the program and make sure that everything runs smoothly. Luckens Bolivar who is our RV Specialist will be monitoring the vehicles and RV’s that will be placed in the lot during our operating hours. We are aware that there are many concerns that will arise with this plan. In Santa Barbara, the major concerns for the council members was that having a parking lot that facilitated homeless people with cars will bring down the revenue. Some of their other concerns are listed as follows:

- RVs Currently Take Advantage of Parking Permits by Parking All Day
- Potential Additional Costs to the Department
- Program Should Concentrate Overnight RV Parking to Only One Lot
- Not Consistent with the Cities Policies and Mission
- Not Appropriate Use of Cities Facilities/Resources
- Number of RVs Could Potentially Increase
- Enforcement Issues/Operational Problems
- Affordability Issues for Everyone in Santa Barbara, Not Mandated to Live Here

We expect the concerns to be similar to that of Santa Barbara in addition to the:
- mall hours
- customer concerns
- operational problems

To accommodate these issues we will put a maximum number of RV’s allowed in the lot at a given time, we will strictly abide by the cities policies and regulations, and also have a cleaning crew to clean so that the aesthetics of the lot is preserved.

If this program is approved we are expecting there to:
- a decrease in homelessness
- secured environment provided
- an organized setting
- a stable environment
- one less worry
- a diminish in their psychological mindset

In closing, we ask that this proposal be placed in the next agenda to be reviewed by the City Council committee. If approved, we will be willing and able to implement a program that can better our community by addressing the issue of homelessness.
Editorials

Dear Editor:

As a senior at Rutgers University, I have noticed a huge issue with homelessness in the city of New Brunswick. Whether I am walking down George Street pass Picken' Chicken, or on the Rutgers Shuttle, I have experienced an overwhelming numbering of homeless people wandering the streets. My concerns are what is being done about this issue and how are we willing to help.

Elijah’s Promise, a soup kitchen located on Neilson Street in New Brunswick, is a great support system for homeless people in the local area. They serve meals daily to feed the homeless and less fortunate people. However, is there anything else out there to help those in need? Are there any other opportunities for the homeless people to someday have a future? Taking a class at Rutgers, Ethics in Science inspired me to focus on this issue more in depth to help find a solution. In Santa Barbara, California, they implemented a program for homeless people who have a minimum wage job but unfortunately, cannot live solely on their income. Small populations of homeless people have vehicles in which they sleep in every night because they can’t afford housing.

The New Beginners Counseling Center is an organization that counsels and works with homeless people to help meet their needs. They also work with other organizations to come together and help homeless people in any way possible. So while working with the city of Santa Barbara, they turned a municipal parking lot into a homeless parking lot where homeless people with vehicles can park their cars and sleep peacefully at night. They also have counselors that come by every couple of hours to make sure that these families are safe and secure. This sounded like...
an amazing idea, and I thought it would be great to implement that same program here in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Although this may not be an easy program to implement, we must start somewhere. First we have to realize the issue of homelessness and how it’s not only affecting those that are homeless but also the community. Then we must reach out to those who have the means and are willing to lend a helping hand, and last we must stop talking and start doing. We must do whatever is in our power to see the impact and the improvements on this issue. We need the solution, and the homelessness parking lot is one, are there any others?

Thank you,

Sade’ Anderson

Dear Kevin Whitmer of the Star ledger, 

My name is Lotanna R. Onuekwusi and I am currently a senior at Rutgers the State University of New Jersey in New Brunswick. The reason that I am writing you this letter is because my colleagues and I have stumbled over an issue that needs immediate attention. Lately, it has been brought to our attention that “homelessness” is a growing problem all across America today in which millions of people are wondering around the streets with no place to go or call home. According to estimates of the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, it is estimated that on any given night in America about 700,000 to 2 million people are homeless. As you can see there are high numbers of people that are homeless which means that there are not enough programs or organizations out there to help these people find somewhere to rest their heads. We as Americans are simply not doing enough for the homelessness. The idea of people being homeless really bothers my colleagues and I, so we took the initiative to research and find a program that would benefit and be of assistance to those who are homeless. We came across a program called “homelessness parking lots” which we feel would be a good idea to bring forth to the city of New Brunswick to help out with the homelessness. This program or idea has already been established by an outreach counseling group in Santa Barbara, California in which they provided a dozen private and municipal parking lots throughout the state of Santa Barbara in California and transformed them into relatively safe area for some of the estimated homeless people to come and sleep in their car and keeping them from harm’s way. My colleagues and I are planning on exploiting this same idea of the Santa Barbara program and establishing it at the city of New Brunswick in New Jersey. This is our solution to the homelessness issue that seems to be of a concern to many people. We plan on speaking with the councilmen of the city of New Brunswick and ask for some assistance in providing some lots for us to make this program a success. Thank you very much for your time and attention, have a blessed day.

Sincerely,

November 4, 2009
Dear Caitlin Mahon, Targum Editor and Chief

My name is Daphney Chery and I am a senior at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey School of Environmental and Biological Sciences. I am writing this letter to bring awareness to a growing problem in our nation. Homelessness has been growing rapidly in our communities and although there are many different programs to help with this issue, there is still so much more we can do. New Jersey is estimated to have approximately 17,000 homeless men, women and children. Middlesex County alone is said to have roughly 500 or so homeless men, women and children. With this being said, two fellow classmates and I came up with an idea that may help out with this issue. We are mirroring our idea from a program that’s been established and implemented in Santa Barbara, California. In this program we would find a municipal parking lot that’s empty at night and we would get a permit from the city allowing those who are homeless with cars to park their cars in that parking lot and sleep there. That way we could come to them every night and provide food and also things they may need for their basic needs. We are currently working with the city of New Brunswick on finding a parking lot to facilitate this program. We realize that we may not be able to house all those that are homeless but small steps toward providing them with the bare necessities may aid them in their process to get back on their feet. We’re asking that if anyone knows people who are homeless with cars to please contact us as we are in the process of finding that population. Also if anyone is interested in helping may also contact us. We appreciate you for your time and hopefully we’ll hear back from many readers of the Targum!

In regards,

Daphney Chery