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Formal and Informal Homelessness Outreach in Koreatown, Los Angeles: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

As the rate of homelessness increases across urban centers in America, vast amounts of unhoused people are being criminalized and being subjected to forced displacement by state authorities. Most of the existing literature written on homelessness services focus on formal services that take place in an office setting rather than on-the-ground outreach. These present insightful learnings, but they do not provide a clear understanding of the process of outreach nor unhoused individuals' experiences. To address this gap, we conducted a qualitative analysis, collecting narratives about unhoused individuals' lived experiences with formal and informal systems of outreach in Koreatown, Los Angeles. We sought to understand what forms of outreach made unhoused individuals feel supported. We conducted semi-structured conversational interviews with volunteers and engaged in participatory ethnography during weekly outreach. We inquired about unhoused peoples' experiences with formal and informal outreach to understand how these systems differ, what potential improvements can be made, and which initiatives have been successful. We found that unhoused individuals were able to form more trusting relationships with volunteers than with case-workers due to consistency, expectation management skills, and respect towards unhoused people. Given our findings, future recommendations include partnerships between the formal and informal sectors, further funding for formal outreach, and adhering to existing recommendations regarding formal outreach reform.

Keywords: homelessness, informal outreach, formal outreach, volunteer, case manager, community-engagement

Formal and Informal Homelessness Outreach in Koreatown, Los Angeles: A Qualitative Analysis

For this community-engaged capstone project, I partnered with the volunteer organization Ktown for All to research unhoused peoples' experiences with the formal and informal systems of outreach in Koreatown, Los Angeles. Formal systems of outreach refers to outreach done by organizations that are funded by the city or work with the city like The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) or People Assisting the Homeless (PATH). Ktown for All, on the other hand, is an example of an informal system of outreach, for it is sustained and led solely by a volunteer base and is independent from the city government. Ktown for All does not do case management or housing-enrollment, it is merely a group of individuals who get together each week to do outreach to their unhoused neighbors.

Ktown for All was formed in 2018 to combat negative rhetoric around shelters being built in Koreatown, and eventually began providing grassroots support to unhoused neighbors throughout Koreatown, including connection to housing and social services, material goods, food, hygiene supplies, tents, and more (Invisible People TV, 2020). Ktown for All (KFA) opposes gentrification and strives towards a future of affordable housing for all (Ktown For All, 2020). KFA stands in solidarity with the unhoused residents of Koreatown and also attempts to help them navigate the existing continuum of care throughout Los Angeles such as housing enrollment and social services as requested. Every weekend, members of KFA do outreach in the community, talking with unhoused residents, passing out meals, hygiene kits, food, and other basic needs. When I considered who to partner with for this project, Ktown for All was the first organization that came to mind; they have supported wide-scale advocacy efforts throughout Los Angeles during the pandemic and have maintained a consistent devotion to serving unhoused

neighbors in their community. Their model of community engagement spoke to me, especially as a fellow organizer with Street Watch LA.

We practiced community-engaged research throughout this project for many reasons. First, Ktown for All's outreach itself relies upon direct community involvement and input; without community participation in the research, it would not be true to their model of outreach. Second, we conducted research pertaining to an extraordinarily marginalized community that has been systemically excluded from conversations about how to improve their own living conditions. Historically, research pertaining to unhoused individuals has not centered their opinions, lived experiences, or needs, which is representative of much research that is *not* community-engaged. It is necessary to break the pattern of a systemic "lack of participation in research" which "has been shaped by patterns of historical abuse," and ensure that communities' increasing demands for "decision making to determine what research is done and who will do it" is met (Wallerstein, 2017, pg. 21). Community-engaged research is the alternative and the way forward. It was crucial to me and my community partner to go into this research with a community-engaged framework, especially because the research involves active participation in outreach, which takes a lot of community trust. Community-Campus Partnerships for Health's "Principles of Partnership" outlined how to maintain a mutually-beneficial, structurally competent, and respectful relationship among researchers and participants. In order to go forward with community-engaged research, it is necessary to turn to these principles and ensure that the work is community-centered and provides a beneficial outcome for the community. Unhoused individuals face extreme hostility, especially from the city government. It is naive to expect that a stranger and researcher (member of an institution) would be welcomed with open-arms. That is why community-building is *paramount* to this community-engaged research, and practicing

reflexivity and transparency in regards to my own identity is the first step. It was important that both my role as a participant in the movement and as a researcher were acknowledged at the forefront to avoid confusion, distrust, or manipulation of any kind. Because I already practice outreach within Los Angeles, I felt personally connected to the community-engaged work and a great sense of responsibility to this community in particular, as a resident of the city with the greatest housing crisis in the nation.

Los Angeles has the second highest rate of homelessness in the entire country and the most people living without shelter (LAHSA, 2020). During the Covid-19 pandemic, this reality came to a head: unhoused individuals were unable to shelter in place, faced brutal street sweeps (Dale, 2022), impacted and infected shelters, and loss of accessible bathrooms, handwashing stations, and food services (Ray, 2021)**.** The government of Los Angeles largely failed to implement an infrastructure that sustained or supported unhoused people, leaving LAHSA largely underfunded and understaffed (Dillon, 2018; Marston, 2021). In her letter of resignation, Heidi Marston, former Executive Director at Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, stated that "staff at [her] organization earned wages as low as $33,119 a year" qualifying them as "below the [federal] threshold deemed 'Very Low Income'" (Marston, 2021). Not only is the organization underfunded and stripped of significant political power, but the staff is underpaid as well. Given these shortcomings, non-affiliated, informal collectives stepped up. Informal outreach efforts grew around the city, with groups like Street Watch LA, Ground Game Los Angeles, Polo's Pantry, Ktown for All, JTown Action and Solidarity, and more coming together to serve unhoused individuals. This often took the form of Power Ups, where organizations host a pop-up table to regularly provide unhoused folks with food, water, charging resources and other essentials. Organizations also did community outreach one to multiple times a week,

walking around selected neighborhoods with supplies, building relationships and community. Both Power Ups and community outreach serve a similar purpose: consistent relationship building, an informal infrastructure of care, and a group of people ensuring that another group has their needs met.

While informal outreach efforts existed throughout the city before the pandemic, COVID-19 galvanized many groups to action (Mayorquin, 2020). Informal outreach efforts supporting the unhoused during COVID-19 represent efforts to build self-sustaining communities in conditions of extreme abandonment by the government. With the passage of legislation like LAMC 41.18, which criminalizes unhoused people if they sit, lie, or rest on certain streets (Peltz, 2021), it is more important than ever to evaluate which relationships unhoused individuals value and understand how trust is built (Roy et al., 2022, pg. 3). By evaluating both unhoused peoples' interactions with formal outreach workers and informal outreach workers, it helped us to understand what actions can be taken to center the comfort and care of unhoused people during a time of intensified carcerality, surveillance, and punitive measures towards the unhoused (Roy et al., 2022, pg. 11). Both case workers and volunteers engage in outreach in order to *serve* unhoused individuals, yet unhoused people are rarely listened-to about how to best serve them. Because of both the increased criminalization of homelessness and the reality that more informal structures of care are emerging throughout the city, my community partner and I wanted to take an in-depth look at experiences of outreach in order to understand how unhoused people feel about their relationships to outreach workers, and how we can improve the current systems of outreach that we have in Los Angeles.

Literature Review

Conducting this community engaged research, we hoped to expand upon the existing literature surrounding unhoused peoples' experiences with homelessness services. Unhoused experiences with on-the-ground outreach is understudied. On-the-ground outreach refers to volunteers or case managers who make contact with unhoused individuals by coming to their place of residence, whether that be their encampment, car, neighborhood, etc. Rather than having unhoused people come to them, service providers go out "on-the-ground" to reach unhoused individuals. The literature regarding on-the-ground outreach focuses heavily on the outcomes of this outreach (Fisk et. al, 2006; Bybee et. al, 1995; Lam and Rosenheck, 1999), or on volunteers' own experiences with outreach and how their attitudes changed or shifted after engaging in this kind of service (Buchanan et. al, 2004; Crone, 2022). This, however, does not tell us anything about how unhoused individuals *feel* about these experiences. Although research about experiences is lacking in regards to on-the-ground outreach, there is an abundance of research on unhoused peoples' experiences with formal services in general, and this literature illuminated some very important relationship dynamics that mirrored what we found in our research. Unfortunately, relationships between volunteers and unhoused individuals are, once again, analyzed to reflect the *volunteers'* experiences more often than unhoused individuals', so there is again a gap in understanding about how unhoused individuals feel about those interactions. However, literature on the topic of community-based organizations' strategies, partnerships, and involvement with unhoused individuals does exist, which helps to illuminate how these interactions ideally play out.

Experiences with Formal Service Providers

Although this literature does not mimic the exact reality we studied in our case, it is helpful to gain an understanding about the relationship between unhoused people and service providers more generally, as these patterns might show up regardless of the mechanism of outreach. Lisa Hoffman and Brian Coffey analyzed over 500 transcripts of interviews with unhoused individuals regarding their experiences interactions with service providers, and found that unhoused individuals most commonly feel disregarded, infantilized, and brushed, leading people to stop seeking services altogether (Hoffman & Coffey, 2008). As Hoffman and Coffey note, these systems are unavoidable, for they provide the means of survival for unhoused individuals. Without interacting with these services, the chances of finding housing are slim to none. Sometimes, this is the reality even *when* interacting with these services. Hoffman and Coffey were not alone in their findings. In fact, most of the literature surrounding unhoused peoples' experiences with formal services and providers illustrate a similar sentiment; unhoused people often report negative experiences with formal service providers due feelings of inconsistency, dismissiveness, disrespect, bureaucracy, and stigma (Bond et al., 2021; Phillips and Kuyini, 2017; Sznajder-Murray and Slesnick, 2011; Thompson, et. al, 2006). However, the literature does not suggest that positive relationship building between formal service providers and unhoused individuals is impossible. A study on young-adults experiencing homelessness found that, on balance, unhoused people feel better around service providers who are "respectful [and] empathetic" as well as "supportive and encouraging without disregarding their autonomy" (Thompson et. al, 2006). If unhoused people feel as though they are being heard, believed, and respected by their service providers, they are *able* to form good relationships with them, even to the point of feeling socially supported and cared for (Biederman, et. al, 2013). These positive

relationships are more easily built when formal service-providers are trained to understand the *specific* life experience of the population they serve (i.e. unhoused mothers who use drugs, LGBTQ+ foster youths, etc.), or when formal service-providers can relate to the experiences of those they serve (Barker and Maguire, 2017; Hudson et. al, 2008; Kryda and Compton 2008). Studies like these suggest that hope is not lost. There are possibilities for change and recommendations on how to make these relationships better. However, the bulk of the literature suggests that affirmative relationships between unhoused individuals and service providers is not the norm; most of these relationships are broken, leaving many unhoused individuals feeling disregarded, infantilized, or doubted by service providers (Hoffman & Coffey, 2008). It is important to remember, however, that formal service providers are not alone in their efforts to serve unhoused individuals. Many volunteer-based organizations and community groups also serve unhoused individuals on a daily basis. The literature suggests that these interactions between unhoused individuals and informal services (i.e. community organizations or volunteer-based groups) can play their own role in positive relationship building and supplement the work that's being done in the formal sector.

Informal Structures as Support Systems and Social Innovation

Because the dynamic between informal outreach volunteers and unhoused individuals is vastly understudied, to understand how informal outreach fits into the infrastructure of homelessness outreach we must rely on literature written about informal outreach overall. The existing literature suggests that, often, informal community organizations will take on the responsibilities and roles of the formal sector when it fails to fulfill its duties (Kennedy, 1992). Informal and grassroots organizations are able to build robust structures and communities

alongside unhoused individuals, providing necessities like food, tents, showers, clothing, harm-reduction materials, and more (Roy et. al, 2022; Yeich, 1996). Informal organizations are able to provide services that help unhoused people stay alive as well as socially and emotionally supported. In Both Roy's and Yeich's studies, groups of unhoused and housed people came together to mobilize against unjust conditions and fight for a better future. However, further literature suggests that these informal mechanisms of support (i.e. unhoused unions, community-groups, mutual aid organizations, etc.) are not likely to be self-sufficient in providing all the necessary services for unhoused individuals due to a lack of funding, volunteer burnout, disorganization, underpreparedness, and a lack of support from the formal sector (Burt et. al, 2007; Dowell and Farmer, 1992; Forg and Paun, 2021). The existing literature acknowledges the shortcomings of informal mechanisms given that they are volunteer based and independently funded. However, these shortcomings do not suggest that there is not a place for informal organizations. In fact, much of the literature surrounding socially innovative solutions to homelessness suggest that partnerships between informal and formal services would be most effective in supporting the needs of unhoused individuals (Brown et al., 2013; Gaetz, 2020; Lee et al., 2019; McGuire et al., 2002; Wright, 2000). The literature suggests that in coming together, the informal and formal systems might be able to supplement each other's shortcomings and create a system of homelessness management that supports the greatest number of people. This suggests that trust-building *might* be a more prevalent facet of informal outreach, given that this is a known shortcoming of the formal system. However, more research was needed to supplement this inference, which is where my research comes in.

Methodology

Background

In order to fill these gaps in research on unhoused peoples' experiences with outreach in Koreatown, my community partner and I decided to conduct a community-engaged project utilizing semi-structured conversational interviews and participatory ethnography. These methods, which I expand upon in this section, are intended to center community control and agency as much as possible within the research process.

This research aims to utilize Wallerstein's conceptual framework of "knowledge democracy" in order to empower unhoused individuals to illuminate their experiences with outreach in spaces that have been historically hostile towards them. Knowledge democracy encourages all forms of knowledge (cultural, spiritual, art-based, folklore, etc) to be inherently valued and recognized as legitimate in all spaces (Wallerstein, 2018, pg. 22). To hold space for this kind of community-knowledge and experience requires large amounts of trust, and I discuss how I built this trust in this section of this paper. We wanted empowerment and self-advocacy for unhoused people, and we wanted to understand how outreach could help engender that.

Positionality

When working with a group of individuals that has been historically marginalized and disenfranchised by City policy and a lack of social safety nets, "cultural humility" is more important than ever. Cultural humility suggests that no person outside of a certain community can ever fully understand the experiences of those within it (Wallerstein, 2018, pg. 34). In order to practice cultural humility, I must remember the fact that my socioeconomic status, race, gender, and educational attainment create social barriers that might cause distrust between

community members and me as a researcher. I am a white cis woman pursuing an education at UCLA. While many UCLA students do face housing insecurity, I have not. However, my lack of experience with housing insecurity or homelessness does not mean that I cannot practice solidarity with unhoused individuals throughout Los Angeles, so long as I recognize my positionality and continue to practice reflexivity. As a member of Street Watch Los Angeles, "a coalition of organizers" fighting for unhoused "tenant rights" and ensuring that we divest from the "heavily funded police state that enforces [neoliberal housing policies]" (Street Watch Los Angeles), I am constantly engaging with unhoused community members, actively listening to their needs and demands, and attending direct actions facilitated by the unhoused tenants union, Unhoused Tenants Against Carceral Housing. Although I do not and will not have the lived experience of unhoused community members, I am not a stranger. That simple fact made this research feel tangible.

Before the research, I was not a member of Ktown for All. As mentioned above, I engage in outreach with Street Watch Los Angeles, which works closely alongside Ktown for All in their activist efforts. My previous experiences and proximity to KFA helped facilitate mutual trust and an ethical orientation in this new partnership, however, I did not rely on my old experiences to bolster the new. I worked towards building this relationship and trust with community members by attending Ktown For All's outreach before I began any kind of research or interviews. I went to Ktown For All's outreach twice a month on Saturdays. Doing the actual work of outreach is paramount to relationship building. Showing up with consistency, empathy, and ready for conversation is how I have approached outreach in the past. However, with this particular scenario, I ensured ethics were at the forefront of the community-engaged process, and I was honest and upfront with my role as a researcher with all volunteers I spoke to. Failing to be

upfront about one's role could result in an accidental breach of participant consent, and it can erode trust down the line if anyone believes there may have been ulterior-motives (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, pg. 72). Ensuring that participants were informed of my identity from the very start made for a smoother research experience. I think that placing empathy, active listening, consistency, and flexibility above all else engendered a trusting community-engaged partnership. Affirming that participation in our research was completely voluntary and that we would not include any mention of someone without their consent also built trust in this process.

Procedure for Data Collection

To formalize the consent process and ensure community-members felt well informed, we created a detailed Study Information sheet that stated my role alongside Ktown for All as an interviewer and participatory ethnographer seeking to understand unhoused peoples' experiences with both informal and formal outreach in Koreatown, Los Angeles. Our methodological approach for this project was a community-engaged qualitative approach. In order to utilize Wallerstein's community-engaged research practice, knowledge democracy, people's experiences, desires, and feelings were placed at the center of this research (Wallerstein, 2018, pg. 22). Our hope was to not only facilitate community-ownership over narratives of homelessness, but over how these narratives are expressed as well. To create this sense of ownership, I used Rosa González's spectrum of community-engaged partnerships as my point of reference. González advocates for a community-engaged relationship that *defers* to the community rather than merely collaborates or involves (González, 2019, pg. 2). González explains how deferring to communities can lead to community ownership, which "foster[s] democratic participation and equity through community-driven decision-making [and] bridge[s] divide between community & governance" (González, 2019, pg. 5). I as the researcher attempted

to use myself as a tool that weaved together community thoughts, feelings, and desires, and helped to share them with a wider audience. In a relationship like this, the community leads, and we follow. Because unhoused individuals have historically been exiled from the narrative and self-advocating positions, I wanted to ensure I took on the role of a follower rather than a leader. Drawing on Saltmarsh's model for democratic engagement, I believe that "higher education must play a role in responding" to "significant societal challenges," and this community-engaged research helps us make strides towards accomplishing this structural shift.

More specifically, my community partner and I decided that conversational, in-depth interviews and participatory ethnography were the two best research methods to utilize for our specific project, for these two methods center community thoughts and feelings and allow for more nuanced observations of outreach. My community partner and I decided to co-create an interview guide that centered around community experience with outreach in comparison to city outreach (see Appendix B). We based this interview guide on John Levi Martin's guide in Chapter 4 of *Thinking Through Methods* (2017). Martin lays out a set of principles for interview question formation, focusing on how best to center the interviewee, avoid contamination or biased answers, and engender genuine dialogue without pushing the interviewee in a certain direction (Martin, 2017, pg. 98-101).

Both my community partner and I recognized that community knowledge and experience is boundless, so this interview guide was used as a tool rather than a rigid dogma for each interview, which led us to a semi-structured conversational interview format. Martin overviews the benefits of the semi-structured interview as both having a "protocol sheet describing key questions that must be asked and a general order to the questioning to be pursued," but also allowing "people deviate from this order, pursue their ideas with further non standardized

questions, and generally answer things out of order" (Martin, 2017, pg. 85). This gave participants the freedom to speak on their lived experience and guide the interview, but it also allowed me to gather information needed to answer our questions (Martin, 2017, pg. 85). As stated by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009), interviews without a strict structure "expose the researcher to unanticipated themes and to help [them] to develop a better understanding of the interviewees' social reality from the interviewees' perspectives" (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009, pg. 223). Leaving room for participants to provide their stories was paramount to the community-engaged aspect of this research.

I conducted eight in-depth conversational interviews with volunteers from Ktown for All, lasting from thirty minutes to an hour, not including the discussion surrounding consent and interview purpose. Each interviewee volunteered their participation and was given a study-information sheet prior to agreeing to the interview. Before beginning the interview, each participant gave a verbal consent to be recorded and quoted (see Appendix C for consent form). Each interview was both recorded and transcribed. For interviews that took place on Zoom, the video portion of the recording was immediately deleted from my computer and the cloud, and the audio portion was kept securely for personal use. For interviews that took place in person, no video recordings were used. All participants have access to both the audio recording and transcription. These interviews took place via-zoom and in person. Each participant was completely anonymized, and so were the people, locations, and instances they discussed in each of their interviews. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed using Otter.ai. I was the sole transcriber of these interviews in order to protect the identities of each participant. I ensured to anonymize names completely and redact any identifying details about a participant's location or social networks.

To supplement the data in my interviews, my community partner and I agreed I would take ethnographic field notes during outreach in order to hear directly from unhoused individuals and document the relationships I witnessed on site. This gave a more robust understanding of the relationships built during outreach and helped to illuminate some of the aspects of outreach that may not come across during an interview. As stated by Martin Forsey (2010), ethnographers' job is to actively listen and explain the "cultural context of lived experience" (Forsey, 2010, pg. 567). Going beyond the space of an interview where one asks specific questions and the participant might have certain ideas about how they want to present their experiences, ethnography opens up the door to other realities based on real-time interactions and events that take place during outreach. With the encouragement and desire of the community, ethnography was also used to further the understanding of unhoused individuals' lived experience. This knowledge shone a light on how KFA's outreach mechanisms fit into the picture of a greater scheme.

Ethnography and semi-structured conversational interviews were meant to place the control in the hands of participants. As a researcher, my desire was to capture what the community wants the public to see and understand, and my community partner and I, with the support of background research, believed that these methods will get us to that place of community ownership.

Procedures For Data Analyzing

To analyze the data, all interviews and field notes were transcribed, anonymized, and coded for themes and consistencies. I used Otter.ai, a digital text-to-speech translation tool, to transcribe and begin initial analysis of each interview. I then created pseudonyms for each interview participant and person observed during outreach, and used excel to track and securely

manage this participant anonymization. I then utilized Taguette, an open source online software for qualitative coding, to develop, identify, code, categorize and analyze themes throughout interviews and field notes. Finally, I compared themes between interviews and ethnographic field notes to ensure triangulation of data, and I came to data saturation very quickly, as I will discuss further in my results section.

Results

I identified three major themes regarding unhoused peoples' experiences with both formal and informal outreach in my interview and fieldnotes analysis. Formal outreach was associated with 1) inconsistency, 2) broken promises, and 3) bureaucracy. Informal outreach was associated with 1) consistency, 2) expectation management, and 3) respect. In analyzing the data, there was a very clear-cut dichotomy between unhoused peoples' experiences with formal and informal service providers. I reached theoretical saturation in my interviews extremely quickly, meaning that I was hearing very similar accounts from each interviewee, leading to concept redundancy. These findings were reaffirmed by my participatory ethnography, ensuring that my research had triangulation (multiple methods leading to the same results). This leads me to believe that my results are more accurate than if I had just had the opportunity to conduct interviews or engage in ethnography; the two in conjunction with one another makes these findings much stronger.

Negative experiences with formal service providers

I found that every single interviewee had multiple examples of unhoused neighbors describing their disappointment with formal outreach services. This reality was supplemented by my participatory ethnography, where I heard unhoused individuals speaking about their

experiences first hand. Most commonly, unhoused neighbors in Koreatown described feeling disrespected and disregarded by formal services. These instances of disrespect and disregard were undergirded by three major themes: inconsistency, broken promises, and bureaucracy.

Inconsistency

Commonly felt among unhoused individuals was a feeling of inconsistency among formal service providers. During my second outreach with longtime member of Ktown for All, Betty, I had the opportunity to meet Rex. Rex came out of his tent quickly when he heard Betty outside, excited to see her. Betty asked how things were going with Rex's case manager, a topic the two seemed to have discussed before. Rex told us that he had been offered a Tiny Home the last time that his case manager came out to visit him, but that he had not seen him or heard from him since that offer. He said that the last time he saw him "it look[ed] like he was just making his rounds, just following up with everybody." It didn't feel to Rex that his case manager was concerned with if he actually got to move into his Tiny Home or not, considering the fact that there had been no follow up or plan going forward. Rex asked Betty if she could speak with his case manager, and Betty expressed that she would try.

Rex's experience is a common one. As Garrett, a volunteer with Ktown for All and interview participant, put it: "I think we pretty much all know that [LAHSA staff] are overworked and underpaid." Hailey, a co-founder of Ktown for All and interview participant, expressed that "they all have way too many cases. They're all underpaid, they're all way understaffed, there's so many openings at every agency." As aforementioned in the introduction of this paper, former Executive Director of LAHSA, Heidi Marston, resigned due to these very issues. Under these difficult conditions, inconsistency seems unavoidable. However, the explanation does not make it less salient and personal to those experiencing its consequences.

This unpredictability of services, contact, and follow-through has a negative impact on the relationships between unhoused individuals and their case workers. During my third outreach alongside Lenny, Ktown for All volunteer and interview participant, we spoke to multiple unhoused neighbors who requested medical care, mental health services, and shower locations during our conversations. Brittany, a pregnant unhoused resident of Koreatown, said she had not seen her case manager in weeks, and she was not sure when the next time would be. Unsure of where else to get these answers, she had to ask others for these resources. Brittany and Rex were not sure when to expect their case managers next; it could be within the week, it could be three months from now. This inconsistency caused Rex and Brittany discernible anxiety, disillusionment, and sadness surrounding case management. Neither of them knew who to ask for what, how to ask, or when they could ask it.

Broken Promises

Inconsistency ties in closely with an inability to follow through. Another common experience unhoused individuals have with formal service providers — when they *are* able to get in touch with them — is a slew of broken promises. Each and every interviewee expressed that they had relationships with unhoused neighbors who had been promised something (i.e. housing, benefits, enrollment into a program, etc) by a case manager that had fallen through at some point or another.

In an interview with Ktown for All volunteer, Sean, he stated that the majority of experiences he witnessed between unhoused neighbors and formal outreach services included situations where case managers "said they were going to do this and that, and then [the unhoused resident] show[s] up, and then [they] get transferred, while the [case manager] didn't appear." Garrett expressed a similar expectation: "providers will promise things often you know because,

like, it's a part of their platform to make big promises they aren't able to keep. So I think that's that's that's a big thing is it being let down often, and not being communicated with." Lenny stated that the most common thing he hears during outreach is "you know someone came by, I never heard from them again. A few folks were actually really close to getting housing and then it just fizzled, and nobody really knew where that went." Time and time again, unhoused people are being promised a way out without receiving one, which creates a severe distrust of service providers.

Hailey heard a story from a fellow volunteer about an unhoused neighbor, Raul, who had been offered housing, and had it taken away for asking questions:

> A friend of ours is working with someone who was offered a place, and he said, 'I never said no, I just asked questions about whether my grandkids could come visit and how far away it was'… he got marked down as service resistant, and couldn't get into [other] programs. The caseworker wrote that he rejected housing, so now he's like way down on the list...for housing in the future.

Raul was promised housing, and by simply asking questions about his future place of residence, the opportunity was taken away from him. In the eyes of this case worker, asking questions about one's potential housing means that one is service-resistant and does not want to live there. Raul felt dehumanized by this case manager and distrustful of formal services going forward. Why were housed people allowed to ask questions when they apartment-searched, but he was not? Why should questions cause him to lose his opportunity at housing? Because of this situation, Raul struggles to find housing again, continuously being reminded of this broken promise.

All the interviewed volunteers encouraged the public not to blame individual case managers for these failings, for the structure of the system is not their fault. While true and

important to keep in mind, this does not change how unhoused people feel about interaction with case managers and formal service providers who have historically promised services that did not come to fruition. Unhoused people come to expect that they'll "get burned," as Sean put it, often losing hope in the system.

On my outreach with Lenny, we spoke with Marcel, an unhoused man who was about to enter into a sober housing program. He told us that this was his only option to see his children again, and that the programs he had tried before had fallen through. We asked when he had last seen his case manager, and he told us that he commutes an hour each way for his appointments. Case managers do not come to him. If it were not for his own persistence, he would not have gotten enrolled in this program, nor have this opportunity to get off the streets.

Bureaucracy

When someone like Marcel is able to gain entrance into a program, there are many steps they must take to get approved. As Hailey stated in her interview "the system is set up so that your housing profile has to be perfect" to obtain any kind of permanent housing. This system creates a barrier between relationship building, as there is no room for compromise or empathy with someone's situation. During Garrett's interview, he told a story about a woman named Rosalia. Rosalia was pregnant and unhoused after fleeing domestic violence. She had not received offers of housing from LAHSA or PATH, but it was clear to some volunteers at Ktown for All that she needed to be housed in order to maintain her pregnancy and her safety. Volunteers with Ktown for All got her into a motel for a few evenings. While she was there, the volunteers contacted formal housing services to get her into emergency shelter. When they got in touch with the organizations, they were forced to take Rosalia out of the motel and put her back in the encampment in order to prove that she was unhoused. If a case manager could not prove

that she was at the encampment, they would not be able to get her housing based on protocol. As Garrett put it,

> that was probably kind of re-traumatizing because … she was getting out of there because she had some really messed up stuff going on in the encampment. The people next to her … would smoke meth and play music all night. She kind of got peer pressured into using a few times, she was pregnant, didn't want to, some kind of coercion stuff going on, a really messed up situation. But we had to drive her *back* to this encampment so they could see 'Oh! She's homeless.' And the person *knew* that that's what we were doing, but they said 'I'm sorry, we have to document her at this encampment on the street for her to be homeless and attach her to these things.' Because if she's in a hotel room that means… she's housed.

Although the case manager did not want Rosalia to have to go back to the streets in order to get documented as unhoused, there was *no* other way for her to gain entrance into an emergency shelter program for pregnant women. This protocol is binding, and provides no leeway for case managers to make decisions about what is just or unjust to their standards. As Garrett put it, it's an example of "bureaucracy getting in the way of just helping someone who is desperately in need." This is not where her story ended with bureaucratic troubles. The volunteers ended up getting Rosalia a motel room for a few more nights after she had been registered as unhoused and they were waiting for paperwork to go through. Towards the end of her motel stay, Rosalia went into early labor and had a stillbirth. She then got disqualified from all the services they had enrolled her in. She was left without a place to stay while mourning a child: "she was also crying and upset you know… I can't imagine dealing with all that and then also just not knowing where you're going to sleep in a few days, or if you'll have somewhere to sleep."

After that, Rosalia went through the volunteers to get her housing at a domestic violence shelter. The trust had been broken between her and the formal system of care. The levels of restrictions, regulations, rules, and protocols that one must go through to obtain housing create dehumanizing situations for unhoused individuals. Rosalia is left with nowhere to sleep after miscarrying, because she is no longer pregnant nor a mother, therefore unqualified for emergency services. These barriers do not only create difficulties obtaining housing and maintaining safety for unhoused individuals, but they create a negative view of services and formal service providers. Garrett shared, "everyone has been let down before, everyone has been failed by the system… it's just little things, like someone's like 'Hey I got approved for section eight but I can't find anyone who will take me.'" A case manager is able to get someone approved for a section eight voucher, but finding a landlord to accept is a different story. Bureaucracy makes it so that formal systems of outreach can only go so far; unhoused people must go the extra mile to follow up, self-advocate, and navigate the system on their own, or with the help of others. This leaves unhoused individuals feeling abandoned by the system or fearful that it will never work for them.

Trust Building with Unhoused Individuals Through Informal Outreach

As we see from the examples explored above, relationships of trust can be built between service providers and unhoused individuals. However, it seems that this is more common among informal service providers (like volunteers) and unhoused neighbors. In analyzing the interviews and ethnographic field notes, I came across three themes that helped bolster these trusting relationships between informal outreachers and unhoused individuals: consistency, expectation management, and respect.

Consistency

Ktown for All meets every Saturday at 11:30 am in a church parking lot. They gather their supplies for the day, do a round of check-ins, go over their best-practices, and go on their assigned routes. Each route covers certain subsections of the Koreatown neighborhood that have encampments within them. Typically, each route has a lead volunteer who knows the area well, and other volunteers who come along with the lead. Except for the first Saturday of the month, when Ktown for All holds their membership meetings, unhoused neighbors can expect to see familiar faces each week. There is rarely a week where a route is not covered, and most weeks, routes are covered by at least one or two of the same volunteers. Ktown for All is consistent in their approach to outreach, never surprising their unhoused neighbors by not showing up without contact. During my times at outreach, I noticed unhoused neighbors, like Rex, stating something to the effect of "Oh! You're here, is it Saturday already?" The community expects Ktown for All to regularly come, and each interviewee stated that they felt this was a fundamental part of building trust with their unhoused neighbors. As Hailey puts it: "I think a lot of it is just showing up repeatedly. We just show up a lot…If I see somebody that I know from my route, I can stop and say hi… I see people out all the time… just walking around my neighborhood, and I've gotten to know them." Unhoused neighbors say hello to Hailey and want to engage with her, because they see her every week and associate her as a consistent, friendly face. Even volunteers who do not have the same close connections to unhoused neighbors as Hailey does believe that consistency is what keeps Ktown for All successful and a beloved part of the neighborhood.

Interviewee and volunteer, Maria, states that Ktown for All's process of splitting outreach into routes really helps with consistency. The volunteers in the organization choose a route that they want to go on each week for outreach, and typically, these volunteers continue to go to their

route on a weekly basis. This helps people build connections and maintain familiarity, because you're seeing the same faces over and over again. As Wilson put so simply, you're there "at the same time, every week, essentially. And folks are kind of accustomed to that… you're just part of their lives, essentially." This is an enormous contrast to how unhoused folks recognize relationships with formal service providers and case managers. In fact, Lenny describes that "it's even gotten to the point where sometimes, we usually go out on Saturday, but I know my partner and I sometimes have a thing to do on Saturday, so we'll just do our route the next day on Sunday and we've had it to the point where we'll show up at 10 on a Sunday and the person, you know will be like 'hey yeah we were wondering where you were, like, you usually come on Saturdays right?'". While Lenny assured me during the interview that this Saturday to Sunday swap does not happen often, it showed how Ktown for All volunteers are ingrained into the community infrastructure; it is shocking when a volunteer shows up a day late because of how reliable they are perceived to be by their unhoused neighbors. This keeps the relationships between unhoused individuals and informal service providers trusting, and enables people to open up. Interviewees stated that the longer they did their routes, the deeper their conversations became. I noticed this trend during my outreach observation as well. Volunteer Betty and Hailey had seemingly close relationships with most people they encountered on their routes, calling everyone by their names and discussing things like family matters, personal updates, and progress finding housing. It seemed as though each unhoused resident of the neighborhood was excited to see them, and had been expecting them.

Expectation Management

In order to maintain these positive relationships, volunteers focus heavily on expectation management. In Ktown for All's "best practices," the organization encourages volunteers not to

"make promises" and to "manage expectations. We cannot guarantee outcomes, so it is best to be upfront and honest and only offer supplies we have on hand." (Ktown for All, *Best practices,* 2022). During outreach, I saw this rule in practice. Lenny and I had stopped to talk with Brittany, the unhoused woman who asked us about services, and she was wondering if we could help get her a tent for someone who had recently become unhoused and was staying in the neighborhood. Rather than say "yes, of course we can," Lenny carefully constructed his response. He said that he was not sure if we had tents on hand, so he would put in a message to Ktown for All's discord channel to see if this was a possibility. If it was, he would come back later in the day to let her know and bring the tent by, but she should not expect anything, as we cannot promise that anyone will have a tent right now. Finally, he told her that she can be sure that we are working on finding one. Lenny did not say "I'm sure we have one somewhere" or "we should be able to do that." Instead, he clearly laid out the steps it would take to see if we had a tent, and ensured that she did not take this as an absolute yes. Garrett also stated in his interview "even if I know we have tents, I'm not going to promise them, because we may not be able to find them. Something may happen. I will be like, 'I think we have some tents, so I'll try to get you one. I'm not sure, though.'" Maria says that if someone "asked for certain things that you're not sure that you can get, don't make any promises," for, as Hailey put it "we've seen what that kind of disappointment over and over and over again leads to," and that's broken relationships.

When expectations are managed correctly, unhoused neighbors know what they can and cannot expect from volunteers. Sean explains that on outreach

sometimes [people ask] for services… People ask me if I have any housing, and I kind of have to explain that I'm just a volunteer, but that I can file an LA-HOP request, and I kind of talk about that. I really try to manage expectations, like, 'you know I hear the system is

backed up' or you know, like, 'this is just to get a social worker to come out and talk to you this isn't like a guarantee of you know, really anything.

Sean makes it clear that he does not have control over the formal housing system, and also tries to be realistic about the likelihood of getting housing. While he is still supporting peoples' wishes, he is also being upfront about what people can expect so as not to disappoint them. This boils down to having respect for unhoused peoples' feelings and experiences.

Respect

The final theme contributing to positive relationships between unhoused people and informal outreachers was respect. Ktown for All volunteers are encouraged to ensure that unhoused voices are centered in their decision making. Their "best practices" document asks volunteers to "open by saying you're with Ktown for All and the items you are offering. Don't press if individuals do not want items or help, or don't respond. If someone ignores you or asks you to leave, respect that… Offer to listen to people, but don't ask prying questions about how or why they are homeless" (Ktown for All, *Best practices,* 2022). These practices lead to relationships that place unhoused peoples' needs at the forefront of communication, rather than the volunteers'. Wilson explains that on his route, it's far more common for people to talk about their day, the weather, how things are going, and what else they could use during outreach next week. Wilson recognizes that "people just kind of want a listening ear," so he'll talk to them about whatever they bring up, rather than pressing folks to have "a difficult conversation." If someone wants to open up, he's all ears; if they don't, he will never press.

Wilson provides unhoused people with respect, and he refuses to pry. He will always ask how people are doing, but he will never ask them to open up more than they feel comfortable

with. I noticed the same tendencies from each volunteer I accompanied on outreach. If a deeper conversation came up, such as relationships with one's family or disappointment with a failed housing opportunity, these were brought up entirely by the unhoused neighbor themselves. Betty would ask her neighbors about how their housing progress was going, and if they said "fine," or "good," or "meh," she would let them speak more if they wanted, or talk about something else if they preferred. This kind of treatment puts the autonomy on the unhoused person themselves, rather than assuming that everyone wants to pour their heart and soul out.

In an interview with Ktown for All volunteer, Lucy, she explained that "deep connections are always important for everyone" we cannot "extrapolate as to people's housing status meaning they need them more or less." Lucy does not assume that unhoused people should automatically want to talk to her, or that they should be friendly just because she is. Like all humans, unhoused people are allowed to connect with people in the way they see fit, and a volunteer's role is to be unequivocally respectful and center people's autonomy. Lucy points out that unhoused people are in no way inherently different from housed people in terms of how they want to or should form connections. As human beings, we all deserve respect and connections, and someone's housing status does not change how a connection should be approached.

This respect for people's boundaries, personal experiences, and desire to talk or not talk creates a safe environment for unhoused individuals and volunteers. When Ktown for All comes by, the expectation is that one will receive water, food, supplies, and chat if they want to. Volunteers provide a listening ear, but not a prying one.

Volunteer Burnout and Challenges of Informal Programming

However, none of this data suggests that volunteer-led initiatives, or the informal system, is perfect. Many interviewees expressed concerns about the sustainability of weekly outreach, volunteer burnout, and disorganization in the group. As Sean explained, in doing this kind of outreach, you're "intentionally putting yourself into some degree of trauma… not necessarily first hand trauma but, like you, are experiencing residual trauma and secondhand trauma just by kind of, when you interact with people who are living on the street, who are constantly in trauma, you are kind of fielding some of that." Ktown for All volunteers go through very minimal training, and it is all community led. There are no on-site psychologists or servicers for volunteers. The downside to the informal structure is that these support mechanisms are not necessarily in place for the volunteers.

As Nathaniel explained "I end up carrying [that weight]... it's something that takes some mental space as you're going through other activities outside of outreach. I think on the negative side that's something that will lead to burnout." As Lucy says, "it's hard to do the route every week" but it's also "hard to step back." Volunteers often feel the weight of what they do, as they are frequently filling in for the formal system when it fails. As Garrett expressed, "it can be frustrating, because sometimes people confuse us for service providers… I think that it can add to a lot of burnout and tension within the group." Garrett touches on the difficulty of maintaining organization-wide agreement when the organization does not have strict protocol or guidelines. The true guiding force for Ktown for All is their "best practices" document. However, this does not tell someone how to manage their level of involvement, nor how to avoid burnout. There are multiple gaps in KFA's organizational structure that jeopardize its longevity of volunteer base and ability to self-sustain.

Discussion

These results suggest that formal systems of outreach were less effective at building relationships with unhoused individuals, due to their inconsistency, broken promises, and bureaucracy. Ktown for All was able to build more positive and trusting relationships due to their consistency, expectation management, and respect for unhoused individuals. However, the informal system lacks the structure of the formal system, and simply cannot provide the same resources. This narrative could potentially place blame on the individual case workers rather than a deeply broken, underfunded, and overwhelmed system (Marston, 2022). So, it is important to remember that case managers must follow directions, and their lack of follow-through, inability to put people in housing, and inconsistency reflect the capabilities of the *systems* they are in rather than individual failings.

Limitations

Before discussing the implications of my results in full, it is necessary to acknowledge that these results are restricted by significant limitations. They are based on a total of eight interviews with volunteers for Ktown for All alongside about 15 hours of participatory ethnography with unhoused residents of Koreatown. This research is very limited in scope due to the time constraint of the project, my small number of interviews, and my limited ability to attend outreach sessions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This means that while my research is still valuable, it is not generalizable. Because my ethnographic study and interviews were conducted at a neighborhood level, it cannot be assumed that the dynamics of other neighborhoods are the same, or that the recommendations I make are generalizable beyond Koreatown, Los Angeles. It is also worth noting that I only studied the mechanisms of *one*

informal organization, and that other informal organizations might have a very different way of approaching interactions.

That being said, my results do still align with previous research done on the topic of unhoused interactions with formal systems of outreach (Bond et al., 2021; Hoffman & Coffey, 2008; Phillips and Kuyini, 2017; Sznajder-Murray and Slesnick, 201). The literature surrounding unhoused experiences with outreach often revolves around what could make the formal experience better; as I found in my research with Ktown for All, consistency, empathy, and honesty are the tenants of good relationship building in outreach which is also consistent with the literature on the subject (Biederman, et. al, 2013; Thompson et. al, 2006). Therefore, while these limitations should be considered in the analysis of my arguments, my findings align with the existing literature on the topic.

Implications

My results suggest that there are major shortcomings with the formal system that negatively impact relationships with unhoused individuals — the opposite of what formal systems hope for. The entire reason these systems are put in place is to help lift people out of homelessness and provide support. Although we are, as a country, spending more money on homelessness than we ever have before, the money is not being used to support the case managers who need it to help unhoused people (Dillon, 2018). We see the impact of this lack of funding on the effectiveness of case managers: they can only work with what they are given, and often, they are given very little time, very few resources, and very limited visits on the ground with unhoused individuals, which negatively impacts their relationships and contributes to their inconsistency, broken promises, and bureaucratic nature.

That these negative conditions harm relationships between unhoused people and the formal system is widely supported by the literature. In a study done on unhoused women and social support from service providers, Biederman found that broken promises made people feel unimportant, not

> worthwhile, or deserving of service providers' time and energy. One participant who had been homeless for more than 5 years described a complete lack of positive expectations because of chronic disappointment from unmet expectations over time. Thus, dehumanizing experiences…might have a cumulative effect with consequences manifesting over time (Biederman, 2013).

Constant disappointment leads people to distrust formal service providers altogether, which aligns exactly with how participants felt in my research.

The literature also suggests that bureaucratic interaction harms relationships between unhoused people and formal service providers, leading unhoused people to feel dehumanized; this aligns exactly with what I found in my research. A study on service user's perspectives on homeless outreach found that bureaucracy "can deter people experiencing homelessness" from accessing services, as they perceive "service providers as 'inefficient, nonresponsive, and ineffective'" (Bond et. al, 2021). Informal systems of outreach often must work to counteract this bureaucracy. Because of the relationships volunteers are able to build with unhoused individuals, many unhoused residents will actually ask volunteers questions about where to and how to obtain services in the greater Los Angeles area like mental health care, showers, bathrooms, and housing. In my own research, I found that when services were too bureaucratic and difficult to navigate, unhoused neighbors in Koreatown would turn to informal services for support, like in

the cases of Rosalia and Rex. Informal systems were used to bolster and fill in for formal systems.

If a system that is meant to support and serve people actually turns people away and leaves them feeling worse in the end, this means it is necessary to make changes to that system. However, this is not to suggest that shifting towards dominance of informal outreach is the answer. Ktown for All offers something distinctly different and, frankly, not comparable to formal systems. When KFA shows up, unhoused neighbors can expect food, hygiene kits, waters, and friendly faces. It is true that when case managers show up, there is not that same consistency; case managers are often spread thin, making it very difficult to build those close-relationships that a community member can. However, the stakes are also higher when meeting with a case manager. Volunteers do not have to deal with a housing shortage or an offer that fell through. In KFA, there is little room to disappoint, for volunteers are specifically asked to never promise anything, not even a tent.

KFA is great at expectation management, but they also could not exceed expectations if they tried. Volunteers are unable to provide any kind of housing to unhoused individuals unless they specifically go through the formal system, which is a major shortcoming. Volunteers are also not trained mental health professionals; they cannot deescalate situations of danger, a mental health crisis, or a life-endangering situation. Previous literature also finds that volunteer-based outreach, while great for community-building, struggles with organization and longevity (Burt et. al, 2007), feelings of confidence in serving the community long term (Forg and Paun, 2021), and ability to self-sustain without formal support (Dowell and Farmer, 1992). To replace the formal with the informal would be an injustice to the unhoused community. There is a needed space for

this relationship building that takes place during outreach, but there is also a needed space for professionals who help unhoused people find permanent, supportive housing.

Recommendations

Therefore, based on my own research and the existing literature on the topic of services for unhoused individuals, I recommend the following: 1) formal systems of outreach, such as LAHSA, and informal systems of outreach, such as KFA, work together to create a coalition-based system to serve unhoused individuals, 2) the government should increase funding for formal systems of outreach, 3) work to implement existing suggestions regarding effective formal outreach mechanisms.

As discussed in the literature review, existing literature on the topic of best-practices to serve unhoused individuals suggests that a partnership method between formal and informal systems can help both parties fill in one another's gaps. Oftentimes, the power of informal organizations' ability to connect with unhoused individuals is underestimated, leading people to believe that the formal system must be amended without the input of the informal (Brown et al., 2013). However, "bottom-up" approaches that include input from community members and organizations have proven to be more effective in terms of integrating services and building relationships (McGuire et al., 2002). It is also true that partnerships have proven to yield further gains than a simple increase in effectiveness; for example, they can also increase "efficiency gains (e.g. eliminating redundancy)" (Lee et. al., 2019). In the case of Ktown For All, an efficiency gain might look like having more time to devote to other forms of outreach and relationship building, rather than having to help unhoused people navigate bureaucracy.

The same study also finds that collaboration can look different across organizations; it does not have to mean that suddenly informal organizations are running outreach across the city,

it can can mean that formal systems look to informal organizations for help with relevant information sharing, referrals, or on-the-ground contact (Lee et al., 2019). While personal and organizational clashes are possible when attempting this kind of collaboration, my research found that informal outreachers actually view case managers favorably, and simply wish they had the resources they needed to do their jobs. It is necessary to understand how we can best encourage formal and informal systems to join forces and work together to create strong relationships between providers and unhoused individuals, as well as humane and community-based pathways to housing. We cannot abandon the effort of getting people housing, but we also cannot abandon relationship building and a community of care. To merge these two would be an ideal case: city resources and community relationships.

This mechanism of change could only be implemented if the formal system was provided with further funding and decision making ability. As Marston states in her resignation letter, those expected to solve homelessness and build relationships with unhoused individuals are not the same people who have political and regulatory power (Marston, 2022). Case managers who care about the well-being of unhoused individuals are still "hamstrung by rules, red tape, and bureaucracy. We are denying power and funding to the very entities tasked with finding and implementing solutions" (Marston, 2022). The formal sector must be more robustly funded, and it also must look to the informal sector for guidance as to how relationship building can succeed between unhoused individuals and providers.

Another way to help solve the issues of trust between unhoused people and the formal sector is to listen to previous recommendations surrounding reform of formal outreach. My research found that consistency, expectation management, and respect were all helpful in building trust with unhoused individuals, which, in turn, made unhoused people more likely to

open up to the outreacher. These three tenets of good relationship building are also reflected in the existing literature surrounding positive relationships between unhoused individuals and formal service providers (Barker and Maguire, 2017; Hudson et. al, 2008; Kryda and Compton 2008). Existing literature suggests that case managers who treat unhoused people with respect, empathy, and autonomy are more likely to have positive relationship outcomes (Thompson, et al., 2006). The literature also states that hiring case managers with experiences of homelessness themselves can help create an increased level of trust and comfort (Barker and Maguire, 2017; Kryda and Compton 2008). It is important to focus both on the economic and social solutions to this problem of distrust. While an increase in funding will, ideally, give case managers the time and opportunity to build connections with unhoused individuals and allow them to show up more consistently, it might also be helpful to train case managers in specific autonomy and empathy building techniques, and employ people with similar experiences who can understand the history of these complex relationships and deep rooted systemic distrust.

Future research

Due to the limitations of my study, there is much future research that needs to be done on the topic of relationships with formal and informal systems of outreach.

First, this study should be replicated across different areas of Los Angeles, following multiple informal organizations such as Street Watch LA, Ground Game Los Angeles, LACAN, and JTown Action and Solidarity. This way, we could see if these results are 1) generalizable across informal outreach organizations and 2) generalizable across different areas of Los Angeles. Ideally, in this secondary study, one would interview unhoused individuals as well as participate in ethnography to ensure that more areas of interest are covered and that unhoused voices are clearly centered in the research. This updated study should also interview case

managers and try to gather ethnographic data on interactions between case managers and unhoused individuals in order to have triangulation on all fronts.

Going forward, more research needs to be done about how these different systems of outreach can be best balanced and merged. It is not typical for formal and informal systems to work together, as informal systems often serve as a way to fill in the gaps of the formal system. However, with alignment on both sides of the system, it is possible that less harm will be done onto unhoused individuals. This is a suggestion for further research into the matter to understand how those systems might work and how they would interact.

Going forward, more research also must be done on how these different systems of outreach can be best balanced and merged. Research should also examine whether other cities have successfully implemented this coalition or partnership based model between informal and formal organizations, and conduct a program evaluation, analyzing how effective it was at relationship building and serving unhoused individuals. It is important to ask what made it effective? What challenges did the partnership face? How can the partnership improve? How do unhoused individuals feel about these services? If it has not been implemented in other cities, one should conduct a trial in coordination with the city government, accompanied by a program evaluation of the trial.

Conclusion

I found that unhoused peoples' relationships to formal systems of outreach were, on balance, tenuous, unstable, and untrusting due to inconsistency, broken promises, and bureaucracy. In contrast, I found that unhoused peoples' relationships to informal outreachers were positive due to consistency, expectation management, and respect. However, these

differences did not indicate that informal systems of outreach should replace formal ones. Through analyzing narratives shared by unhoused folks and first-hand accounts from volunteers I found that, while relationships made through informal systems of outreach often fostered more trust and genuinity, volunteers in these informal systems face burnout and a lack of qualification needed to obtain further services for unhoused people. Instead, I found that partnerships between the formal and informal systems would be the best way forward, with an emphasis on further funding the formal system and incorporating existing suggestions as to how to improve relationships between unhoused people and case managers.

This research exhibits what trust can look like between outreachers and unhoused individuals. Although it reveals flaws in our formal system, it also illustrates hope for the future and mechanisms to build stronger relationships that are already in place in community-led outreach. This research adds a new perspective and comparative analysis into the field; it shows that there is no single ideal mechanism of outreach, formal or informal. However, there are important relationship building tactics that can be taken from the informal systems, such as expectation management and consistency, that may not have been obvious before.

This research illuminates how pivotal it is to listen to and learn from community-members and community based organizations. Unequivocally, unhoused individuals I spoke with felt more comfortable with Ktown for All volunteers and members of their own community than case workers or outside outreachers. Community organizations advocate for community engagement and relationship building on this scale, but they are often ignored. This research shows how pivotal it is to listen to community members and understand what works for them so that we can embed those practices into our formal systems of care, and create the best service possible for unhoused people across Los Angeles.

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Appendix A

Study Information Sheet

COMMUNITY-LED OUTREACH IN KOREATOWN, LOS ANGELES

Community-Engaged Capstone Research Project in Partnership with Ktown for All and UCLA undergraduate Chloe Rosenstock

AT-A-GLANCE

Challenges

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, housing injustice became very visible. This prompted government action to house people quickly with temporary solutions such as Project Roomkey (PRK). PRK has limited spots and it is not always a good fit for specific individuals.
- Passage of LAMC 41.18 -- which criminalizes sitting, sleeping, or lying on the sidewalk -- created many new challenges for unhoused people being displaced at record rates
- These sweeps disrupt both formal service providers and community outreach efforts.

What's next?

- We must ask unhoused people what helps make their experiences on the streets easier while trying to find housing
- We must empower unhoused voices and experiences in order to imagine a more equitable Los Angeles
- This research project will contribute to this conversation and strive towards a future of community-led care

COMMUNITY-ENGAGED PROJECT

We are conducting a qualitative research project in Koreatown, Los Angeles to understand the impact of community-led outreach on community members of Koreatown. Community-led outreach refers to outreach led by volunteers and neighbors in Koreatown. We are conducting interviews with Ktown for All volunteers.

KTOWN FOR ALL

Ktown for All is a mutual aid organization formed in 2018 to combat negative rhetoric around shelters being built in Koreatown. Eventually, they began providing grassroots aid to unhoused neighbors throughout Koreatown, including connection to housing and social services, material goods, food, hygiene supplies, tents, and more. Ktown for All was created by residents of Koreatown to facilitate community and comaraderie between unhoused and housed neighbors.

RESEARCH METHODS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

We are using qualitative methods for this research project, focusing on conversational interviews, but also employing ethnographic observation of outreach in Koreatown. Interview questions were formulated alongside volunteers with Ktown for All. We are interviewing volunteers and unhoused residents of Koreatown in order to understand the impact of community-led outreach in comparison to outreach by formal service providers. We are committed to ethical research -- interviews center community voices and people with lived experience of homelessness. We anonymize all participants and information is kept private and confidential. We are collecting audio recordings with the verbal consent of participants stored in a secure, password-protected location. We are committed to a community-engaged research approach and want to ensure that this research is used as a tool to better the lives of unhoused people.

Appendix B

Interview Guide

In coordination with Ktown for All and UCLA, I'm interviewing volunteers with Ktown for All. *Our **goal** is to understand people's experiences with outreach workers and volunteers*. Your name or other identifying details will be kept private. I'm hoping to talk to you for about 30 minutes to an hour. Is that ok?

I'd like to record our conversation - the recordings will be private and I can pause it at any time. Is that ok with you?

After our interview, we'll send you the final transcript so that you can make sure you're comfortable with the information shared. Pseudonyms will be used in final transcripts and all shared information will be kept private and confidential.

These questions are all just a guide for our conversation. I want you to talk about anything you think is important about your experiences with service providers or volunteers.

Is it ok if I start recording?

Guiding Conversational Questions: Below are the questions that we can discuss throughout our time together.

Personal Identifying information:

1. Name, age, contact information?

2. How long have you been living in Koreatown or at your current location?

3. Where did you live before this?

    a. What are some differences you've noticed between [previous location] and Koreatown? (either interaction with neighbors, general feeling, etc)

4. How and why did you start volunteering with Ktown for All?

Interactions with City Service providers:

1. What has your experience been like interacting with service providers in Los Angeles?

    a. Has communication with service providers stayed consistent?

    b. Have you felt respected by service providers as a volunteer?

2. What is a typical interaction for you with service providers/case managers? Please share a story of this interaction.

3. Have you noticed differences between your interactions with service providers and unhoused folks' interactions with service providers? Explain if so.

4. How do conversations with unhoused neighbors usually go around service providers?

    a. Are there frequent patterns or themes you notice?

Interactions with fellow community-members:

1. How do you feel about your relationship to others living in the community?

2. How do you approach interactions with unhoused neighbors in Ktown? Explain a typical interaction during outreach in as much detail as you'd like

3. Do you see barriers to implementing KFA's model on a broader scale? Are you hopeful that it could be more widely applied?

Aspirations / looking forward:

1. What are your hopes for the future of Ktown?

2. What do you wish people knew about homelessness?

3. What would you like to see in the future from the City ?

    a. Either different, the same, or nothing

4. What would you like to see in the future from your other *housed* neighbors of Ktown?

Wrap up

1. Is there anyone else in the area that you recommend we reach out to?

2. Thank you for your time and sharing of experiences. Do you have feedback on this conversation?

    a. Any specific questions that we should change?

    b. Is there anything missing? Is there anything you wish we had asked?

Thank you for all your time and sharing your experiences. Feel free to reach out to us with any questions or additional information you would like to share. You can contact Chloe Rosenstock, Undergraduate Student at UCLA at crosenstock@g.ucla.edu*, or you can text/call me at 310-422-6591*

Appendix C

Community-Led Outreach in Koreatown

KTown for All x Community Engagement and Social Change Capstone

Verbal Consent to take part in research

- I... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question

- I understand that participation involves a 30 minute - 1 hour long interview about my experiences with outreach

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be used anonymously

- I understand that my comments may be quoted in the research paper or presentation

- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained until the project is complete

- I understand that I can access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

Chloe Rosenstock, Undergraduate Student at UCLA

Contact: Crosenstock@g.ucla.edu, 3104226591