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PROBLEM

Our official problem statement is as follows: We seek to provide weekend services (non-perishable food and hygiene items) to youth experiencing homelessness using a partnership between University of Washington students and local youth facing homelessness. We are working to address the lack of services available for youth facing homelessness in the University District on weekends, due to organizations such as the University District Youth Center (UDYC) - our partner organization - being closed. An additional problem that we are working on is to break down barriers between the youth facing homelessness and UW Greek life students who are neighbors in the University District. This problem exists due to stigma around homelessness and individuals who are facing homelessness.

The evidence we have for these problems has been gathered through anonymous interviews conducted with youth who use UDYC’s services. 4 out of 6 interviewees expressed that their day-to-day activities change on weekends in comparison to weekdays due to different needs because of fewer services being open. Through interviews with students in Greek Life at UW we have been able to delve deeper into the stigmas that surround youth facing homelessness, and how that stigma creates barriers in understanding and communicating between the two groups of youth. Additionally, through conversations with our mentor in the organization, RJ Solomon, we have learned more about how service availability differs between weekdays and weekends and the necessity for increased provision on weekends.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Approximately 4.2 million youth and young adults experience homelessness every year in the U.S., representing a public health crisis of grand scale. Youth who experience any level of housing insecurity are more susceptible to homelessness later in life, and adds a double burden of trauma, and mental and physical health struggles. Helping this population move forward and thrive is an effective strategy to help improve youth’s quality of life and end adult homelessness. In the University District of Seattle, youth struggle to access services on the weekends when service delivery centers are closed. Additionally, these youth must face stigma and marginalization by the UW students they share their community with. To combat this problem, we created a digital guide for the UW Greek community’s philanthropy leaders that outlines a weekend service delivery table operated by their members with the goal of empowering homeless youth by providing consistent access to basic needs and capitalizing on the Greek community to reduce stigma and build community.
The primary beneficiaries we hope to serve are local University District youth who are experiencing homelessness. University District youth who are experiencing homelessness face the problem of lacking weekend services and negative stigma from local communities due to factors that are mainly outside of their control. In the case of lacking weekend services, this problem mainly resulted as a product of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many service providers were forced to cut back on hours and work force due to increasing regulations on how businesses and services should be run during the pandemic and as a result many providers chose to cut services during the weekends. The other problem outside of their control that University District youth who are experiencing homelessness face is negative stigma resonating from neighboring communities. This stigma mainly results from individual’s preconceived notions about homelessness that are further echo-chambered in specific communities such as the UW Greek System to the point where people in these communities believe these notions to be the truth.

Our evidence is first pulled from our mentor Rebecca “RJ” Solomon, the Housing Navigator of UDYC. According to RJ, weekend services at the UDYC have been limited to weekdays due to COVID-19 regulations. As a result she wanted us to develop a plan in order to provide services during these gaps where there is little to no service available. Additionally she mentioned that there is often hostility due to stereotypes between youth experiencing homelessness and local college communities. This sentiment of stigma between these communities was further validated by Brandon Cain, President of Theta Delta Chi, a local UW fraternity. He mentioned that from what he has seen and heard much of the greek community empathizes with the situations that local youth experiencing homelessness are going through yet overall hold negative sentiments towards them.

This population has not been able to solve these problems themselves because the problems are out of the control of these individuals. In the case of lacking weekend services, as the COVID-19 pandemic is dying down and regulations are loosening, services should begin to come back as society tries to move back to where it was before the pandemic. As a result the lack of weekend services should and can only be fixed as time goes by. In the case of negative stigma from surrounding communities, much of this problem comes from the perspectives that these communities have about youth experiencing homelessness. Therefore in order to fix this problem of negative stigma, perspectives and stances that these communities may need to be changed, yet it is hard for youth experiencing homelessness to do this themselves.
SOLUTION

Our proposal seeks to provide services for youth experiencing homelessness at these critical moments where youth may not have access to the resources that they need. Our solution is a digital guide (see appendix) intended for the University of Washington Greek community’s philanthropy leaders. The guide outlines costs, timelines, and benefits of a weekend service delivery table operated by Greek members with the goal of empowering and improving the quality of life of homeless youth by providing consistent access to basic needs. Additionally, this solution capitalizes on the resources of the Greek community to reduce stigma and build community.

This solution will help the problem by providing tangible and intangible resources to youth experiencing homelessness. Tangible resources include hygiene products like toothbrushes and toothpaste, nonperishable food, clothing for inclement weather protection, and power strips for phone charging. Intangible resources include a sense of community and belonging between peers and UW Greek students and a reduction in stigma that feeds into negative stereotypes and interactions outside of the weekend service space.

In our theory of change (see appendix), we stated that to measure the success of our solution we would track:

- How many youth use the services each week
- How many youth return in consecutive weeks
- How consistent service use by youth results in improved quality of life
- How consistent service use by youth results in a reduction in the number of negative interactions with UW students and the Greek community
- Analyzing our success implies there are labor hours available in the Greek community or in UDYC to gather and analyze data.

Evidence that our solution will help the problem comes from multiple rounds of feedback and changes to our solution to ensure it is the most appropriate for our target audience. Our original solution was a weekend service table that provided only hot meals purchased using UW students’ dining hall account funds. Our idea was to build community and serve youth experiencing homelessness through cooperation with UW students.

Our feedback on this idea from Randi Eseltine and RJ Solomon included the question of who would organize this service, since UDYC was unable to provide extra labor on the weekends. Further, they critiqued the extra burden of keeping hot meals at a safe temperature for serving youth, and the complications with transporting the meals from campus dining halls to the service table.
SOLUTIONS CONT.

We improved on this original solution by switching to non-perishable food and adding hygiene and other related service products like charging strips and clothing. Additionally, feedback from RJ and Randi gave us the idea of incorporating the Greek community. Outside feedback on our solution has come from multiple sources including:

- **Rebecca “RJ” Solomon, Housing Navigator, UDYC**: Her feedback included introducing the idea of cooperating with the Greek community in our solution. She acknowledged the stigma faced by youth experiencing homelessness and the opportunity for the Greek community to directly participate in reducing stigma and building community. Further, she suggested adding power strips and clothing to the hygiene items offered at our table, and that surveying UW students would be a good way to gauge their interest and attitudes.

- **Randi Eseltine, Director of Community Engagement, UDYC**: Randi gave us feedback in the early stages of our project. She strengthened our service delivery approach by offering alternatives to our original proposal that only included hot meals.

- **Current members of the Greek community**: Their feedback included information on the structure of the Greek system’s philanthropy, and their interest in adopting this proposal into their philanthropy efforts. Greek community members approved of the in-person, recurring opportunities provided by this solution, as opposed to remote fundraising, and liked the possibility and feasibility of this proposal to help local youth. Additional feedback included ideas for distributing our proposal to the Greek community by attending a chapter or all Greek meeting.

- **Youth who use UDYC**: From a written survey distributed anonymously by RJ Solomon, we gathered feedback from six youth experiencing homelessness. To incentivize participation, we provided each person with a $25 Visa gift card provided by the GCIL program. We changed our survey after the first 3 respondents, because “hygiene services” was defined as “showers and running water”, which we found could be misleading since our proposal was not able to provide that service. We updated hygiene services to say “toiletries such as toothbrushes, toothpaste, wet wipes, tampons/pads”. From the surveys, youth reported that their top four weekend services in no particular order are WiFi, Hygiene (defined as showers and eventually amended to toiletries), meals, and charging stations. Additionally, youth report that COVID-19 has not significantly changed their access to services.

- **UW students**: From a digital survey, we gained insight into current attitudes and beliefs about our proposal and youth experiencing homelessness. From the 14 survey responses, 79% were current Greek community members, and 79% identified as Caucasian/White. Almost 29% of respondents expressed they were “Very Likely” to participate in our proposal, and another 36% said they were “Somewhat Likely”. In a qualitative section of our survey, respondents expressed great interest in helping the community of those experiencing homelessness. Upon describing our proposal, respondents stated it sounded like gratifying volunteer work. The main reason respondents expressed reservations was due to the large individual time commitment of the weekend service table.
In order to test the effectiveness of our solution, we would plan to conduct pre- and post-interviews with the clients who utilize the weekend services as well as the Greek Life students who volunteer to provide the services. For clients who use the service, the post-interview would focus on the usefulness of services provided, relations with the members of Greek Life, and potential for improvement. For UW students who run the service, the post-interview will focus on ease of running the service, relations with the clients who use the service, changes in perceptions of homelessness, and potential for how to make the service better for them and the clients. The purpose of the pre-interview in addition to the post-interview is to understand if the weekend service pop-up truly impacted individuals in the way we hoped. If we asked participants to do a pre- and post-survey after each weekend they attend the service then we could get information over a long period of time as well for the return participants.

Regarding the financial sustainability of this solution, our aim was to leave the least burden on UDYC staff. Therefore, when we interviewed fraternity and sorority members we discussed the feasibility of them being responsible for the supplies to limit the financial burden. The fraternity president we interviewed mentioned that his fraternity could receive community donations and grants from national organizations in order to get the supplies necessary to make the weekend pop-up happen. At the same time, the sorority member stated that many of the houses support local programs that do these types of events by volunteering and using their funds from their donors. They both believed that this was an event that they would be able to run and support over a continued period of time.

Some additional feedback that we would have regarding our solution is from additional members of Greek life. We want this additional feedback in order to ensure that our solution is one that Greek community members will commit to for a sustained period of time. In order to get this feedback we had a plan to present our solution to the UW Panhellenic council at their monthly meetings. This would advertise our proposed solution to many fraternities and sororities at once and get us the widest exposure possible. Other feedback we'd like to get is from youth who use UDYC. While we interviewed them on their major needs in order to come up with our solution, we did not get their opinions on our proposed solution specifically. A plan to get this feedback would be to create another short survey and distribute it to clients of UDYC to determine their impressions of the solution and how useful they believe it will be.

In order for UDYC to implement the proposed solution, the next steps would be for our mentor RJ or someone else within the organization to reach out to the fraternity and sorority members we interviewed to form a formal connection. By having the organization itself reach out, there would be a solidified agreement between the two groups allowing the process of implementation to begin. Once UDYC reaches out to the members of Greek Life, the fraternities and sororities would need to begin fundraising, collecting supplies, and coordinating volunteers for the weekend pop-up. Once Greek Life students have begun bringing those things together, then advertising the pop-up and spreading the word could begin.

This would be done through distributing flyers to UDYC and other organizations in the U-District to get the widest exposure possible. By following these next steps we fully believe that our weekend pop-up to provide needed services can be a sustainable way to benefit the community of youth facing homelessness in UDistrict as well as breaking the barriers between UW Students and UDYC clients due to stigma.
APPENDIX

Empathy Maps:
- Youth Experiencing Homelessness: https://prezi.com/view/M9KqkJSCITSFZHB0h6OY/
- UW Students: https://prezi.com/view/OQbXZtl2wYaBp0chllB/

Empathy Map: Youth Experiencing Homelessness
1. What are we experiencing? We are the people who need to understand what it's like to be homeless. What is the core of their situation or what is the reason for homelessness? We need to understand the needs of individuals who have experienced homelessness. What is the reason for their situation or what is the cause of homelessness? We can ask people who are currently homeless or have experienced homelessness.
2. What do they think? They think that homelessness is a problem that needs to be addressed. They think that they are in a desperate situation and that they need help. They think that they need to find a place to stay and that they need to get their lives back on track.
3. What do they need? They need a place to stay, food, clothing, and medical care. They need a stable living environment and stability.
4. What do they say? They say that they need help. They say that they need a place to sleep. They say that they need food and clothing.
5. What do we do today? We can create a plan to help them. We can create a plan to help them find a place to stay. We can create a plan to help them get food and clothing.

Empathy Map: UW Greek Students
1. What are we experiencing? We are the people who need to understand what it's like to be a student at UW. What is the core of their situation or what is the reason for being a student? We need to understand the needs of students at UW. What is the reason for their situation or what is the cause of being a student? We can ask students about their experiences.
2. What do they think? They think that they need to get good grades. They think that they need to make new friends. They think that they need to have fun.
3. What do they need? They need good grades. They need to make new friends. They need to have fun.
4. What do they say? They say that they need good grades. They say that they need to make new friends. They say that they need to have fun.
5. What do we do today? We can create a plan to help them. We can create a plan to help them get good grades. We can create a plan to help them make new friends.

Empathy Maps for Youth Experiencing Homelessness and UW Students are available for further study.
I want to clarify my priorities by defining my goals and the path to reach them.

**Theory of Change:**

**What is the problem you are trying to solve?**

Creating Community and Healing Stigma: How to better serve and support our peers, neighbors, and service providers needing to create more services on the weekends when the agencies are not available.

**Who is your key audience?**

Youth ranging from early teens to young adults.

**What is your entry point to reaching your audience?**

To use existing rapport between UDYC staff and youth to reach youth and inform them of new services. To use a partnership between U-District service providers like UDYC and UW groups like Fraternities, Sororities, and those who live in dorms to make weekend services available to youth.

**What steps are needed to bring about change?**

Services like hygiene products and food need to be consistently collected and dispersed. This will require work on behalf of key stakeholders. Youth will need to (1) hear about and (2) use the provided services.

**What is the measurable effect of your work?**

The first measurable effect of our work would be to see if individuals are actually using our services. We would be able to measure this by tracking and counting either how many people come by to receive resources or by calculating how much of the resources we have were used after a given event.

**What are the wider benefits of your work?**

Wider benefits? The wider benefits of our work should reverberate through the community if done correctly. If U-District communities such as homeless youth and UW students are able to interact and understand each other it will better allow these individuals to feel safer in their community and avoid the stereotypes that they may have for each other.

**What is the long-term change you see as your goal?**

The long-term change that we see as our goal is to have a sustainable source of weekend meals and hygiene services for the youth facing homelessness in the U-District. Key assumptions that we are making is not only that students will want to be involved in this upon its inception but also that students will continue to want to be a part of this project in the future as well.

**Key Assumptions**

- Giving questionnaires random peers that use the services at UDYC and it consist of a demographic question.
- Measuring the results and outcomes of the beneficiaries.
- Youth are receptive to hearing about new services and the partnership between service providers and LW is strong enough to collect and supply resources to youth.
- Service youth can be assessed and tracked to assure the program is aware and will benefit from the efforts of these things and have information about the amount of resources they have been able to bring.
- All the communities within the U-District including but not limited to homeless youth and University of Washington Students are willing to interact and break down these barriers.

**Stakeholders**

- UW Parhelion, UDYC, other shelters in the U-District area.
Story in Seven Sentences:

(1) Once upon a time, on a rainy May day, a young person named Kai was walking down the street in the University District in Seattle, Washington, passing University of Washington students on their way to class. 
(2) Kai is a person experiencing homelessness and every day they must find shelter, food, water, and warmth, which are not consistently available in the U-District.
(3) Service delivery centers like the University District Youth Center are closed on the weekends, so Kai is unable to access their drop-in services like food, water, showers, daytime shelter, and opportunities to interact with other youth experiencing homelessness.
(4) Until one day, Kai reads a flyer at UDYC that advertises a new outdoor weekend service table provided by the UW Greek system that provides free hygiene products, non-perishable foods, clothes, power strips, and space to interact with housed and unhoused youth from the U-District.
(5) Because of this, Kai and their peers visit the table every weekend to use the provided services, interact with other unhoused youth and build community with the UW Greek students.
(6) And ever since then, Kai’s consistent access to these resources and community on the weekend has improved their quality of life, in addition to reducing stigma and bias about homelessness among the UW Greek community.
(7) Because of this increase in comfort, Kai now has the mental and physical energy to focus on attaining steady employment, increasing their chances of finding housing and exiting homelessness forever.
Supporting Youth Homelessness digital pamphlet:

The Scope of the Problem

- Approximately 4.2 million youth and young adults experience homelessness every year in the U.S. Youth homelessness is distinct from adult homelessness as youth often couch-surf between friends and family and may not identify as homeless. Additionally, homeless youth are more susceptible to trafficking and violence.

- In King County, of the 955 homeless youth, 1/3 have been in foster care and leave without stable housing, 1/4 have been kicked out of their homes due to abuse, family dysfunction, or poverty, and 1/3 are coping with mental health challenges in a setting of limited access to resources.

- 1/2 of homeless adults experience homelessness before the age of 25. Helping this population move forward and thrive is an effective strategy to help end adult homelessness.

- It is vital for us to better understand how we can help this population. In the context of a college campus, this means understanding the biases and myths under which students and homeless youth interact, and working to disassemble stigma and work toward community and wellbeing for all.

Source: https://youthcare.org/why-are-youth-homeless/

Service Delivery Gaps for U-District Youth

- Although there are many different resources available for youth experiencing homelessness to obtain necessary supplies and materials, like extra clothing or toiletries, we have recognized that there is a lack of services during the weekend.

- Our proposal hopes to (1) provide services for youth experiencing homelessness at these critical moments where they may not have access to the resources that they need to improve their lives and exit homelessness.

- We recognize that the experience of homelessness exposes one to the negative effects of societal stigma. This is exacerbated for youth experiencing homelessness in the U-District where they interact with university students who hold these biases.

- We hope to reduce the negative stigma associated with experiencing homelessness by providing (2) interaction and community between the youth experiencing homelessness and local youth in the U-District.

How UW Panhellenic Can Help

The Greek system at UW has a unique opportunity to assist a local population of youth experiencing homelessness literally right outside their doors.

Benefits of adopting this service proposal include a more positive social climate, a sense of pride in helping the community, and leading a driving force of leaders who can work to end homelessness for youth.

To build community and support youth experiencing homelessness fill in their service needs gaps on the weekends, we propose the UW Panhellenic groups organize a Saturday table that provides food, hygiene products, and chances for community engagement. To incentivize this involvement, consider using this as an opportunity to fulfill philanthropy requirements.
Supporting Youth Homelessness digital pamphlet:

**Setup, event structure, activities**

Example Materials and Costs:  
(Based on Amazon Prices)

- Foldable Table - $50
- Portable Canopy - $100
- 400 count Nametags - $10
- 100 count Toothbrush - $20
- 144 count 0.6 oz Toothpaste - $27
- 50 count Snack pack cookies - $15, or by donation
- 40 count Chips - $18, or by donation
- 24 count Water - $4, or by donation
- Power cord and power strips
- Clothing: by donation
- Bluetooth Speaker - $30

Many of these expenses are one-time and reusable, some may also not be necessary or already available. This is an example of the possible costs.

**Set Up**

Volunteers will need to locate a suitable location with a lot of space to set up the canopy and table. This would be best placed outside of an existing service center to make it easy for youth to locate. All services will be provided at the table under the canopy, while activities will be led outside and around this central location.

**Setup, event structure, activities continued**

- Minimum 5 volunteers, or as many as would like to participate
  - 1 greeter that directs youth
  - 2 people working on handing out services
  - 2 people stocking the service table

1. Youth will first interact with the greeter who will assist them in finding the services they need that day.

2. Youth will move in a line through the canopy where they will be provided with their desired services.

3. Volunteer staff will conduct themselves in a professional manner prioritizing friendliness, openness, and sincere compassion.

- Ideally volunteers will wear nametags and return week-to-week whereby they eventually build relationships with returning youth (i.e. remembering their names and their services of choice).

- Once the event is over volunteers will disassemble the area and bring the materials to a proper storage location.

**Sample Saturday Timeline**

- **Friday:** event organizer gathers service supplies for the next day
- **Saturday:** 9:00 AM: Volunteers meet and gather the necessary supplies from Greek house storage area
- 9:30 AM: Volunteers walk to service site and begin set-up at the event spot
- 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM: Handing out of services, allowing youth to linger to charge their devices, eat, talk, etc.
- 2:00 PM – 2:30 PM: clean-up and tear-down of table and canopy. Supplies get walked back to Greek house storage

**Sample Recruiting Poster**

BE A FORCE FOR GOOD

Join Chi-Omega in a unique opportunity to support youth experiencing homelessness in the U-District

To learn more contact Jon Snow at jsnow24@uw.edu

"FULFILLS QUARTERLY PHILANTHROPY HOURS!"
APPENDIX CONT.

Supporting Youth Homelessness digital pamphlet:

Additional Resources

Please review the following resources if you would like to learn more about youth homelessness or are needing additional support at this time.

• UW Counseling Center:
  https://www.washington.edu/counseling/services/how-to-schedule-an-appointment/

• UW Mindfulness Program:
  https://www.washington.edu/ima/classes/mindfulness/

• The Doorway Project:
  http://doorwayproject.org/

• University District Youth Center:
  https://youthcare.org/homeless-youth-services/engagement-services/university-district-youth-center/