

L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library

Temporary Location:

2725 Mall Drive

Eau Claire, WI 54701

www.ecpubliclibrary.info

(715) 839-5061



L.E. Phillips Memorial
Public Library

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Downtown Eau Claire. (2016). [Photograph].
<https://www.visiteauc Claire.com/listing/downtown-eau-claire-inc/916/>

Strategies to Address Homelessness in Downtown Eau Claire

May 2022

Allie Ulness | Social Work Intern from UWEC
at L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library

Dear Downtown Business Owners,

We are Social Workers (Community Resource Specialist) at the L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library. Welcome to the Strategies to Address Homelessness in Eau Claire guide. We want to help the public have a better understanding of people experiencing homeless and how you could help our Eau Claire community.

We appreciate your time and interest in looking at this packet of information. As we are aware businesses in downtown Eau Claire have been struggling with people experiencing homelessness on their premises and not knowing how to respond and support this clientele.

This informational packet is intended to engage you in a dialogue on this issue, to share Eau Claire's efforts that are underway to address problem and to invite you to be involved in the solution. We are committed to serving those who are in need of resources and services.

As we continue to see the growth of people experiencing homelessness here in Eau Claire, we want to help create awareness on the issue as well as provide you with some guidance.

This informational packet has information on people experiencing homelessness, terms/definitions, advice on how to help someone, the do's and do not's, and information on the services that are provided in Eau Claire for people experiencing homelessness.

Please read through this document and let us know if you have questions. We are more than happy to help clarify things.

Sincerely,

**Allie Ulness
Social Work Intern**

About People Experiencing Homelessness

Experiencing homelessness in one of the richest nations is proven to adversely affect three components that create our self-value which are; self-perception, social comparison, and reflected appraisals. For instance, this is the way we perceive others as perceiving us. As you can imagine, this mental portrait doesn't hold up well to daily problems that people experiencing homeless face. Poverty stricken individuals have less confidence in their own abilities. As many state about feeling unsafe, uncared for, and invisible.

Everyday people experiencing homelessness face many challenges, both emotionally and physically, which that can make it even more difficult for them to get back on their feet. If the basic needs food, water, clothing, sleep, and shelter are not being met it can be nearly be impossible to function adequately. These are the bare necessities for anyone's survival as an individual. There are many barriers that come with people experiencing homelessness. One example being, not having a permanent address as this can be an issue for people experiencing homelessness, when they are trying to obtain employment or other types of income. Other barriers that people have are: people experiencing homelessness are receiving tickets for minor offences which may lead to landlords denying them housing, organizations do not have sufficient funding, unaffordable housing, lack of open units, etc. As you can see these barriers can make it difficult for anyone to get off the streets.

Why are People Experiencing Homelessness?

- Lack of affordable housing
 - Evictions, foreclosures, etc.
- Lack of affordable health care
 - ex: Medical bills - Bankruptcy
- Poverty
 - Low wages, food insecurity, lay-offs, etc.
- Mental health and physical disabilities
- Addiction and lack of services/ support
- Domestic violence
- Lack of support networks
- Loss of a loved one or divorce
- Natural disasters (i.e. floods, fires, tornados)

Why it is important to not refer to a person as "homeless"?

The word "homeless" comes with a lot of harmful stereotypes, assumptions, and accusations. What many people don't understand is that homelessness is much more complex and complicated. That is why we recognize these individuals as "people experiencing homelessness." As the people-first language puts a person before a diagnosis or other descriptions. For example, instead of labeling someone "crippled" we would say "person with a disability." As we are describing something a person is going through rather than defining them by it. This type of language humanizes and values the dignity and worth of a person.

"Homelessness is not a choice, but rather a journey that many find themselves in." – **Asa Don Brown**

"When life gets hard, try to remember: the life you complain about is only a dream to some people." – **Anonymous**

"Whether one is rich or poor, educated or illiterate, religious or nonbelieving, man or woman, black, white, or brown, we are all the same. Physically, emotionally, and mentally, we are all equal. We all share basic needs for food, shelter, safety, and love. We all aspire to happiness and we all shun suffering. Each of us has hopes, worries, fears, and dreams. Each of us wants the best for our family and loved ones. We all experience pain when we suffer loss and joy when we achieve what we seek. On this fundamental level, religion, ethnicity, culture, and language make no difference." - **Dalai Lama**

TYPES OF HOMELESSNESS

Definitions or Terms

Chronic Homelessness: is used to describe people who have experienced homelessness for at least a year — or repeatedly — while struggling with a disabling condition such as a mental illness, substance use disorder, or physical disability.

Episodic Homelessness: refers to individuals, often with disabling conditions, who are currently homeless and have experienced three or more episodes of homelessness in the past year.

Transitional Homelessness: is defined as affecting a person that is going through a major life change or catastrophic event. Those life events could include losing a job, a medical condition, divorce, domestic abuse, and more. People experiencing transitional homelessness have been homeless for less than a year.

Hidden Homelessness: where individuals have no guarantee of long-term housing and no immediate prospects for acquiring it. They often stay with friends or relatives because they don't have other options, or in a hotel.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU WANT TO HELP SOMEONE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS:

- Be informed, homelessness comes in all forms, shapes, and sizes. Everyone has a story, no one individual is the same.
- Get to know the people living on the streets in your area and treat them like any neighbor. We all need human interaction and connection.
- Exercise empathy, remembering the humanity of each person you see, treat each person with dignity and respect.
 - Remember that even small acts of kindness can have huge positive repercussions in lives of others.
- If a person requests medical help or is unconscious, call 911 immediately. However, make it clear that is a call for medical and not a police emergency.
- Familiarize yourself with homeless services and providers in your area.

KEEP IN MIND:

- Even those without homes have the same rights as everyone else.
- These people experiencing homelessness are there because they have nowhere to go, not because they are trying to be a nuisance.
- Avoid perpetuating stereotypes, stigma, and myths about people experiencing homelessness.
- Many organizations are working together to help people experiencing homelessness. One thing you can keep in mind as a business owner is you can find an organization to help support, and ask them what they need.
- Advocate within your circle of influence to help make things better for our neighbors who are experiencing homelessness. This may help your business community as well.
- Mental health is NOT an emergency in itself. It might be uncomfortable, but it is only a 911 call if someone is at imminent risk of harming themselves or others.



Business Resource Guide: The Basic Do's and Do Not's

The Do's -

- Act with compassion look all customers in the eyes, smiling, and offering kindness at a time when people may need it the most.
- Start building a relationship, as more positive interactions will outweigh the negative interactions.
- If someone is being disruptive, homeless or not, try to de-escalate the situation if possible.
- If someone is threatening harm to self or others, acting recklessly, having delusions, call 911 and ask for the Crisis Intervention team or ask for a trained mental health officer.
- Let people know your boundaries on your property. If people are doing something illegal and won't leave, call non-emergency police line.

The Do Not's -

- Don't assume people know your expectations.
- Don't assume everyone experiencing homelessness is addicted to drugs or alcohol.
 - Instead... understand that there are many paths to homelessness.
- Don't avoid eye contact when you encounter a person experiencing homelessness.
 - Instead... get to know them and enter a conversation.
- Don't assume that people want to remain homeless because of stereotypes that they are lazy, must be an addict, or they are too proud to ask for help.
- Avoid giving out sugary foods as most people experiencing homelessness have little access to dental care. As well as poses a health hazard for those with diabetes or underlying conditions.

HOW SHOULD I RESPOND...?

How should I respond when a person experiencing homelessness on the streets asks me for money?

- Giving money is a personal choice.
 - When someone asks you for money, you can politely refuse, give them some money, or offer to help them in some other way like referring them to resources.
 - If you don't feel comfortable giving cash you can offer other things like gift cards, water, hygiene kits, snacks, etc.
 - If you don't feel comfortable giving money to a neighbor who is experiencing homelessness, it is important to still acknowledge and treat them respectfully.
 - So, a good response can be, "I'm sorry, I do not have any money on me." or even "I'm sorry, I don't ever carry cash on me."
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What should I do if a person experiencing homelessness is experiencing a psychiatric emergency or acting robustly in my business?

- Avoid criminalization, if possible, as it can lead to further complications. It can prolong a person's homelessness and trauma.
 - Call 911, and request medical assistance.
 - Northwest Connections is our local 24/7 hotline and crisis worker dispatch line for mental health emergencies 1-888-552-6642
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What to do if someone is sleeping/loitering at your front door...

- Establish a friendly relationship, introduce yourself and ask the person's name. Ask them if they are in need of any assistance.
- Politely ask them to leave using empathetic language to help in future interactions.
- You should let them know where they can be, as opposed to only where they cannot be.
- If they are not cooperative, tell them you may have to call the police, but that you would rather not.

What to do if you want to get involved with reducing homelessness in our community?

Places to Volunteer

- Warming Center
- Community Table
- Sojourner House
- Bolton Refuge House
- Feed my People Food Bank
- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- St. Francis Food Pantry
- Western Dairyland Homeless Services
- Hope Gospel Mission
- Salvation Army
- And many more options these are just a few.

Donations

- Monetary donations
 - Cash
 - Gas cards - Ok for "fuel only"
 - Food cards for fast food, convenience stores, etc.
- Clothing donations
 - Cold and warm weather clothing
 - Socks and underwear
 - Backpacks (larger size, not child/youth size)
 - Tennis shoes, especially in sizes 10, 11, 12, 13
- General Hygiene Products
 - Feminine Hygiene Items

Advocacy

- Follow local politics
- Educate your leaders
- Write letters to your Local, State, and Federal leaders
- Attend neighborhood and public meetings and speak up in favor of low-income housing, group homes, shelters, and homelessness prevention programs.

Examples of things to advocate for in our community -

- Affordable housing
- Public restrooms
- Mental health services
- Day time resource center

Warming Center Information

Look on the website and Facebook page for more information on when the Warming Center will be open. Making changes for the warm weather and planning on having a Cooling Center.

Location: At the Christ's Cathedral's Property
502 S. Farwell St, Eau Claire, WI 54701

Contact Information: Submit on the website your request for information and contact information.

Who is served?

Single adults (18 years and older)

Website Information:

<https://www.ecwarmingcenter.com/faqs.php>

Access to Quick Resources

Emergency

Police Non-Emergency | Ph: (715) 839-4972

Can ask for crisis Intervention team???

Northwest Connections | Ph: (888) 552-6642

24/7 local mental health crisis line.

Shelter

Sojourner House 618 S. Barstow St. | Ph: (715) 514-5556

Catholic Charities Emergency shelter for individuals

Beacon House | 309 E. Lake St. | Ph: (715) 834-4357

Shelter for families with children

Bolton Refuge House | 807 S. Farwell St. | Ph: (715) 834-9578

Shelter for individuals who are in immanent danger due to domestic or sexual abuse

Hope Gospel Mission | 2650 Mercantile Dr. | Ph: (715) 552-5566

Various Housing Programs for men, women, and children, must apply

Support

St. Lawrence Community Services | 618 S. Barstow St. | Ph: (715) 450-0074

Financial counseling, security deposit support.

L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library | 400 Eau Claire St | Ph: (715) 839-5004

Community Resource Specialist provides individualized resource referrals for anyone.

Gaining Ground/ LSS | 306 & 618 S. Barstow St. | Ph: (715) 214-7334

Connections to homelessness outreach, addiction support, and more.

Western Dairyland E.O.C | 418 Wisconsin St. | Ph: (715) 836-7511

Homeless services for individuals and families; street outreach; prevention.

Eau Claire Dept. of Human Services | 721 Oxford Ave. | Ph: (715) 839-2300

Support with enrollment in various county and state programs

Chippewa Valley Street Ministry | Email: cvsminfo@gmail.com

Food

Community Table | 320 Putnam St. | Ph: (715) 835-4977

Free daily meals

Health

Chippewa Valley Free Clinic | 1030 Oakridge Dr. | Ph: (715) 839-8477

Free physical health, mental health, and dental care to those without insurance

Veteran Specific

Center for Veterans Issues | Ph: (715) 559-9392

Chippewa Valley VA Clinic | Ph: (715) 720-3780

Useful Information about Services to Help Provide Information to People Experiencing Homelessness: Look at the Documents Attached

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