

Summer 2020 Focus Groups: Key Findings and Implications

A Qualitative Report

by the Global Health Justice Partnership of the
Yale Law School and Yale School of Public Health

Prepared for

Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen (DESK)

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Contributors

Yale Global Health Justice Partnership

The Yale Global Health Justice Partnership (GHJP) is a joint initiative between Yale Law School (YLS) and Yale School of Public Health (YSPH) that trains the next generation of scholars and practitioners to tackle the complex interdisciplinary challenges of global health. GHJP works with local and global partners at the interface of law and governance, public health, and medicine to theorize, build analytical frameworks, create knowledge, and mobilize research to help drive the social change necessary for improving the health and wellness of people in the U.S. and around the world. Learn more at www.yaleghjp.org.

GHJP offers a practicum course each year that engages students in real-world projects with scholars, activists, lawyers, and other practitioners on issues of health justice. Working papers are produced as a part of these projects, with students as lead authors. Final papers reflect input and revisions by GHJP faculty, partners, staff, and other readers.

Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen

The Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen (DESK) is a New Haven based non-profit organization providing food assistance and services to people experiencing homelessness or living in poverty. DESK operates an Evening Meals program, offering a hot dinner and bagged lunches, as well as weekly Food Pantry and a Summer Kids Pantry program. Learn more at www.deskct.org.

Table of Contents

Contributors	2
Table of Contents	3
Background	4
Process	4
Key Recommendations	7
Theme: COVID-19 Impact	8
Implications For DESK	9
Theme: Daily Routines	9
Implications For DESK	10
Theme: Bare Necessities	10
Implications For DESK	11
Theme: Considerations for the Physical Space	11
Implications for DESK	12
Theme: Safety and Security	12
Implications for DESK	13
Theme: Client Treatment	13
Implications for DESK	14
Theme: Health	14
Implications for DESK	15
Theme: Transportation	15
Implications for DESK	15
Theme: Barriers and Facilitators to Entry	16
Implications for DESK	16
Theme: Perceptions and Interactions	17
Implications for DESK	18
Theme: Services	19
Implications for DESK	19
A Final Note on Language	20
Next Steps	20

Background

This report is the product of a request for assistance from DESK to GHJP. Since early 2020, GHJP [has worked to support DESK](#) in their ongoing efforts to establish a low barrier, wrap-around drop-in service center in New Haven. As part of our research support work, in July 2020 we published an analytic research paper titled [The Case for Low-Barrier, Wrap Around Drop-in Centers in New Haven, Connecticut](#), which outlined the need, best practices, and evaluation metrics for drop-in centers. The current report presents results from a series of focus groups conducted with current clients of DESK's dinner services, as part of the participatory planning process to inform considerations for the services, design, and operation of a wrap-around drop-in center soon to be opened by DESK on State St., New Haven. The focus group interviews were jointly developed by DESK and GHJP and conducted by DESK, with special protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Process

Prior to planning and conducting focus groups, this project was reviewed by the Yale Institutional Review Board (IRB) in March 2020 and designated as Not Human Subjects Research. A team of GHJP students that included Mariah Frank (YSPH 2021), Casey Gilfoil (YLS 2021), Lily Kofke (YSPH 2021), Francesca Maviglia (YSPH 2020), and Ohvia Muraleetharan (YSPH 2020) prepared an initial focus group guide and protocol in early 2020 and conducted the first focus group at the beginning of March 2020. Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus groups were temporarily halted.

In consultation with research ethics scholars at Yale University, it was determined that with specific measures in place (such as social distancing, mandatory masking, outdoor interview locations, and a reduction of focus group size to two participants) the interviews could be safely conducted. The research protocol was then revised to incorporate COVID-19 safety measures and COVID-19 related questions into the focus group guide. Additionally, we determined that the focus groups should be conducted by DESK staff and volunteers, rather than by GHJP students, in order to avoid introducing new individuals to the social network of DESK clients,

staff, and volunteers and to further minimize safety risks for participants. Thus, all focus groups except for the initial one were conducted in the summer of 2020 following these protocols.

In order to prepare this report, a team of GHJP students jointly carried out the project of reviewing and synthesizing the focus group recordings throughout the fall of 2020. The team that worked on this report includes Mariah Frank (YSPH 2021), Jessica Tueller (YLS 2021), Lily Kofke (YSPH 2021), Mary Tate (YSPH 2022), and Tag Quijano (YSPH 2022). Alice M. Miller (GHJP Co-Director) supervised students and participated in every stage of the planning, implementation, analysis, and presentation of results of the focus groups, together with Poonam Daryani (former GHJP Clinical Fellow) in Spring and Summer 2020, and Francesca Maviglia (acting GHJP Clinical Fellow) in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021.

Per our agreement with DESK and our understanding of the uses of the report, we followed the basic principles of coding social science data, but with a slightly simplified transcription process and no peer review process. We are producing a ‘good for use’ report in this spirit: accurate, reflective, and usable by DESK to develop, implement, and monitor for availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality the services of a low barrier drop-in center in New Haven.

We received the recordings late in August 2020 and began transcriptions of the interview recordings in September. We agreed that each team member would do an initial round of reading through one or two pre-assigned transcripts to code for themes; this is a version of qualitative coding wherein text is indexed or categorized to establish thematic patterns or ideas. We then rotated transcripts and re-coded, with every transcriber coding someone else’s transcript. From these twice-coded transcripts, we compiled interview quotes by code and organized them into thematic buckets. The themes and definitions we applied are as follows:

Table 1. Themes and Definitions

Theme	Definition
COVID-19 impact	Additional difficulty finding/accessing services, housing, shelters, employment, warm spaces, entertainment, etc. due to COVID-19
Daily routine	Daily routines of guests (i.e., what spaces they access, where they go, and what they do during a typical day) (focus on pre-COVID-19)
Bare necessities	Day-to-day needs of guests accessing the drop-in center (i.e., Wi-Fi, warm food, entertainment, comfort, socializing)
Physical space considerations	Aspects to consider including in the physical space of the drop-in center (i.e., physical comfort, temperature, center hours)
Safety and security	Guests feeling or not feeling safe and secure in the space (i.e., feeling unsafe/uncomfortable, policing, privacy)
Guest treatment	How guests want and do not want to be treated (i.e., discrimination, trust, respect, judgment)
Health	Accessing health services and resources in general and on premises, including guest medication
Transportation	How people get to services and navigate New Haven (e.g., bus, walk)
Barriers and facilitators to entry	What concrete factors would encourage or deter a guest from accessing or entering the drop-in center (i.e., association with DESK)
Perceptions and interactions	Inter-personal interactions at the drop-in center and in New Haven; perceptions of others using services (i.e., people who use substances are unsafe)
Services	Description of services (i.e., MAT, case management), outside of "bare necessities," indicated by guests that they would like to see in a drop-in center

Using the above codebook as our guide, we again re-coded all transcripts.

While each code references a particular theme, there is clear overlap among many of the themes and the use of discrete thematic buckets is not an indication of mutually exclusive findings. For example, COVID-19 Implications are undeniably tied to Guest Health and Daily Routines. The

nanced differences between and among themes allowed us to tailor the specific implications and recommendations for DESK, but we recognize the interconnectedness of many of these factors and aim to provide recommendations that address these intersections and overlaps. Earlier versions of the draft were shared with DESK over the course of Winter 2020-2021 for feedback and to assist with their on-going work. While the findings at time of publication of this report are shaped by recent exigencies, we believe that the core concerns of the recommendations are still applicable to current and future DESK activities.

Key Recommendations

Our key recommendations are as follows:

- DESK should prioritize transparent and proactive communication with guests regarding the opening hours of the drop-in center as well as hours of other warming centers and services. Drop-in center protocols in event of inclement weather should also be shared with guests.
- DESK should coordinate opening hours with other service providers to ensure consistent access to basic services and indoor spaces for clients throughout the day.
- DESK should work with drop-in center clients in crafting guidelines (including best practices for COVID-19 safety measures) for use of bathrooms and other shared items like microwaves in a drop-in center space.
- DESK should continue discussions with clients about the layout and features of the drop-in center and consider clients' input regarding couches, chairs, and storage for backpacks.
- DESK should consider options such as a coat-check system for storing client belongings, particularly valuable possessions such as medications.
- DESK should be aware of and look into Connecticut laws regarding drugs and paraphernalia for items being stored on DESK property.
- DESK should hold regular community meetings to establish community guidelines and expectations; communicate transparently about the services that the drop-in center is able to offer; and discuss expectations for relations between DESK clients and DESK staff, DESK clients and staff from other service providers who may offer services in the drop-in center spaces, and DESK clients with one another.

- DESK should include access to case management services in the drop-in center space regularly.
- DESK should discuss with the city options for putting directions to the drop-in center at nearby bus stations.
- DESK should reach out to law enforcement representatives to establish rights-respecting principles, workable guidelines, and mutually agreed expectations on how the drop-in center, including nearby outside space, is going to be policed.

We recognize that some of these recommendations may be challenging or impossible to implement in full while limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic persist. Nonetheless, we include them as goals that DESK can work towards as the capacity of the drop-in center grows and public health restrictions are progressively lifted.

Theme: COVID-19 Impact

As the COVID-19 pandemic raged in the spring and summer of 2020, it was important for the focus groups to investigate how the virus had impacted the day to day lives of respondents. Respondents reported a range of challenges due to COVID-19, many having to do with reduced access to services and, crucially, reduced access to indoor spaces.

“The biggest problem during the pandemic [. . .] is that there is literally nowhere to go.”

Fractured service provision and unclear guidelines led to larger problems for respondents. Several respondents indicated that COVID-19 resulted in restricted hours and access to various services. Respondents indicated that these restrictions lead to challenges in obtaining certain types of formal identification, which in turn presented challenges for accessing other services that required identification such as food stamps. Another respondent explained that they effectively lost their case management for being unwilling or unable to hold appointments over the phone. Overall, respondents reported decreased or no shelter access, and decreased access to food, the library,

and computers. Respondents were all concerned for the coming winter and the increased exposure to the cold, as indoor spaces may remain closed or limited due to COVID-19.

“I just missed the list for people at the shelters who got hotels; I slipped through the cracks ‘cause I don’t know too much about all this stuff yet.”

Implications For DESK

The main purpose of this theme was to gather information about respondents’ experiences, even though the potential for operationalization by DESK is limited by the broader context of the pandemic. All focus group participants reported concern for the winter when cold weather would further limit the spaces accessible for those who are street-based and/or homeless. This recurring theme implies the need for DESK to have up-to-date and consistent communication with potential guests about the spaces and resources that will be available in the winter months and across seasons, in light of COVID-19 and adverse weather. DESK should make clear the COVID-19 protocols and requirements for the drop-in center, as they have done with current dinner service and food pantry services, and provide resources for those who need them (e.g., masks, hand sanitizer, access to hand washing, etc.).

As the policies guiding social practices evolve with the changing scope of the COVID-19 pandemic, DESK will need to continually seek information on impacts, re-evaluate policies and practices, and communicate changes to all concerned actors: DESK staff and volunteers, the community using the services, and collaborating service providers.

Theme: Daily Routines

DESK expressed interest in learning about respondents’ daily routines, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Disruptions in daily routine and access to spaces caused by COVID-19 were coded separately (see “COVID-19 Implications” section above). Unsurprisingly, many of the focus group respondents indicated that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, they spent much of their time during the day accessing public spaces, such as the New Haven Green, other parks

in the city, and the library. Respondents were seeking out public indoor spaces in order to charge their phones, stay up to date on news, and access the internet to set up appointments, work on finding housing, and access other services. Respondents also indicated that they visit various food service providers around the city but did not name specific service providers.

“Lot of time at the library for Wi-Fi, find housing and help...sometimes fly a sign to try and make a few bucks.”

Implications For DESK

Given the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the daily routines of DESK guests, it will be crucial for the drop-in center to provide resources to meet some of the needs that guests were fulfilling in public spaces prior to the pandemic. Resources may include access to chargers, computers, and Wi-Fi. DESK may want to consider coordinating with other food service providers in the city to ensure consistent food access, especially if COVID-19 has had an impact on their meal frequency, delivery methods, or ability to serve food indoors. With breakfast, lunch, and dinner services offered in discrete areas of the city, a significant amount of time, energy, and planning can be required simply for someone to feed themselves throughout the day. Additionally, knowledge of spaces that are frequently accessed by current guests may also indicate where people who are not currently DESK guests spend their time as well. These could be places where DESK may want to conduct advertising for the drop-in center when it opens (or once those spaces, such as the library, are open to the public again).

Theme: Bare Necessities

With the knowledge that a drop-in center will provide a variety of services, understanding what guests consider the ‘bare necessities’ that should be minimally available to them is important to planning a responsive drop-in center. When asked about what day-to-day needs respondents would want to meet through a drop-in-center, almost all focus group respondents mentioned the need for Wi-Fi and power outlets for charging phones. Additionally, access to bathrooms and a space to relax were both recurring themes. Many respondents felt a drop-in center should be an

access point for necessities like toilet paper, soap, clothes, shoes, and blankets, in addition to activities such as working with service providers, accessing treatment, watching movies, and microwaving food (see “Health” and “Services” sections for further details on the kinds of services and treatment sought by respondents).

“These are my needs: shelter, food, toilet paper, soap. Necessities are my friends. I don't need no extra, I just need what I can get.”

Implications For DESK

To the extent to which DESK can provide these necessities, the drop-in center will be effectively responding to the clearly articulated needs of community members. It may be helpful to work with guests to establish community guidelines and agreed upon rules regarding access to microwaves, outlets, Wi-Fi, and other resources, following best practices for COVID-19 safety guidelines. Additionally, the guidelines for use of communal spaces, such as bathrooms, will need to comply with COVID-19 protocols.

“I’m currently homeless and need to charge my phone to be in contact with people about housing [...] finding electricity, Wi-Fi, and food and getting housing.”

Theme: Considerations for the Physical Space

Respondents were asked how they want the physical space of a future drop-in center to look and feel. Many respondents talked about how a drop-in center would ideally have a combination of comfortable couches, chairs, and pillows. Importantly, there should be comfortable places for guests to sit down, with different types of music available -- a place to “kick my shoes off,” as one respondent said. It was important to respondents that the space be a comfortable break in contrast to how they often experience service provision. Some respondents suggested that the space and walls could serve as a creative outlet, with community murals and art supplies available. Respondents referred to the Poseidon Center and Amistad as models, the latter for its family-like setting.

“[...] something cool, like get the artistic kids to paint murals on the walls. Get people involved in it and just cool stuff to let people want to express themselves.”

Respondents expressed different preferences for drop-in center hours. Many favored 24 hour access, while some wanted daytime hours and others stressed the need for morning and evening hours.

“Somewhere [to] sit down and be treated well, somewhere with warm drinks, somewhere [to] charge phones, warm inviting atmosphere, equality.”

Implications for DESK

Given the clear and concrete descriptions of what guests are seeking in a drop-in center, DESK should be fully transparent with guests regarding what is and is not feasible, while implementing as many of these suggestions as possible. DESK may want to ensure the communal spaces of the drop-in center are equipped with comfortable couches and chairs. Additionally, DESK could provide headphones for people to listen to music without potentially disrupting others, magazines, art supplies, and other items to engage guests while at the drop-in center. Given the desire for guests to have a space away from the “herd of backpacks” often found at service provision sites, providing storage space for guests may be of use (see notes on lockers in the “Safety and Security” section below).

Theme: Safety and Security

All respondents expressed safety and security as priorities, many wanting to be sure that their medications and belongings are not taken from them by other guests or staff. One respondent proposed self-defense classes for women, while another suggested having a security guard, and another wanted cameras to watch people and their belongings. One respondent was concerned about being separated from friends, and another expressed concern about other guests bringing guns to the center.

Implications for DESK

DESK staff, as well as volunteers, should continue to receive de-escalation training as one tool for helping maintain a safe environment for guests. Having front desk personnel and/or another designated staff member available specifically for security concerns is one approach to creating an environment of safety and security. Guests should be made aware of any and all staff and protocols related to safety procedures, including protocols regarding guns and calls to the police or crisis response services; DESK may want to consider developing such protocols with input from guests, as well as coordinating with New Haven Police, Emergency Medical Services, and response teams across the city.

“As long as there’s no bullies or bouncers.”

Additionally, when considering the safety and security of guests’ belongings, DESK may want to consider having lockers or some sort of “coat check” system in the drop-in center where guests can leave their belongings, without fear of losing anything or having their belongings rifled through in their absence. If a guest were to have drug paraphernalia, or any of a wide range of materials of concern to the state, in their belongings, providing a storage system or space may have implications for Connecticut drug paraphernalia laws, gun laws, and the like that DESK may want to consider.

Theme: Client Treatment

In addition to opinions about the drop-in center’s physical look and feel, respondents also had specific comments on how they prefer to be treated. Many respondents discussed the need for human kindness, respect, and lack of judgement from service providers.

“Someone to show you human kindness... Everyone needs love and human kindness.”

Respondents were asked what would get them to walk through the doors of a drop-in center. One interviewee indicated that people saying, “come on in, we’ll help you,” would make them want to access the space. A recurring concern was facing bias, double standards, and gaslighting behaviors from service providers who do not recognize guests’ valid concerns. All of these were expressed as reasons someone would not use the drop-in center.

“Drop-in center is a privilege so it should feel safe, welcom[ing] regardless of where you come from, everyone treated with the same respect and integrity, somewhere to shield from the weather.”

Implications for DESK

In order to maintain the respectful community environment DESK has worked hard to cultivate, staff should continue to receive regular training, including but not limited to training on anti-racism, guest-centered approaches, and harm reduction. These trainings could also be offered to other service providers who will use the drop-in center. Additionally, DESK could hold regular community meetings to discuss guest treatment and create drop boxes for anonymous concerns. DESK may also want to consider working on a contract of care with other service providers who will use the space and interface with guests in the drop-in center: outlining agreed upon principles so that providers can offer, and guests can expect, compassionate, harm reduction informed, non-judgmental care while in the DESK space, even if the care is not specifically from DESK staff.

Theme: Health

When asked what they would like to see in a drop-in center, many respondents indicated a need for health related services, including mental health services, access to medication, and medical case management. In practice, it seems that respondents want health services at the drop-in center to be as comprehensive as possible.

“I would like to have a walk in place like a clinic [...] and I need better health care and better information for my psyche.”

Respondents called for DESK to ensure confidentiality at the drop-in center, specifically around physical and mental health treatments. One respondent stated that the DESK drop-in center “needs space for people to feel comfortable to talk and have it be confidential.”

Implications for DESK

Although the initial opening of the drop-in center and in-house clinic may not be able to include all the health services that guests are asking for, it will still be important for staff at DESK and the DESK clinic to ensure confidentiality for their guests and prioritize both privacy for services and transparency about what they can and cannot offer. It also seems crucial to prioritize guests’ calls for support with case management. Although the clinic within the drop-in center may not feasibly be a one-stop shop for all health needs, providing case management to guests could help ensure that they are connecting to and accessing other health services throughout New Haven.

Theme: Transportation

Respondents were specifically asked about their transportation use on a typical day, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. When asked how they arrived at DESK for dinners, many respondents said they took the bus or walked. Of those who took the bus, many said that they took the bus both before and during the pandemic. Some mentioned that although they used to take the bus, they preferred to walk during the pandemic due to public health concerns or because they did not want to comply with the mask requirement on the bus. One respondent raised concerns about safety when trying to catch the bus on the Green but did not specify if this was safety from violence, police, or some other factor.

Implications for DESK

Given the indication that many current DESK guests utilize public transportation, as will likely future guests of the drop-in center, DESK may want to do what they can to assist guests with information and access to public transportation. Concerns about accessibility of the drop-in center by bus or on foot have already informed DESK's choice of location for the new drop-in center; in addition, the drop-in center could have a posted bus schedule and indicate that there is a bus

stop down the street from the drop-in center. The drop-in center could help guests with the process of receiving discounted or free bus passes. If allowed, bus stations or bus stops may also be useful places to have information and signage about the drop-in center and how to get there.

Theme: Barriers and Facilitators to Entry

This theme importantly illuminated what respondents considered to be either barriers or facilitators to their use of a drop-in center. Several factors were recurring within this theme. Respondents indicated they would be inclined to access a drop-in center if it was affiliated with DESK and expressed a high level of comfort with DESK staff; having DESK run the drop-in center was indicated as a strong incentive to use the space. While this was a notable finding from the focus groups, we want to note that the manner in which the focus group sample was selected introduces some bias. Participants were individuals who already access DESK's dinner services, indicating a baseline level of comfort with DESK.

Respondents also indicated that they wanted a comfortable space that was welcoming and not intimidating, noting that the opposite would be a deterrent. When asked specifically about deterrents, one respondent indicated that, "having your meds taken from you, having your things stolen, being intimidated, being separated from friends, and having your personal things invaded" were all factors that would dissuade them from coming to the drop-in center. A final but important factor that respondents indicated as a barrier to entry was the presence of police, outside of or around the drop-in center.

“Cops get pissed if you’re in a line for 2-3 hours and people start fights so the cops want to get you for vagrancy, but you’re outside the building where you’re trying to wait to get in.”

Implications for DESK

DESK should move forward with a plan to make the drop-in center as low-barrier as possible, without requirements to turn over any personal belongings or present identification. Exceptions

may arise if DESK has reason to believe that a guest's personal belongings and/or presence is a threat to other guests, staff, or volunteers of the drop-in center. DESK may want to engage guests in establishing community guidelines for the drop-in center, incorporating their input on what behaviors are expected while using the space. With regard to medication, DESK should consider creating a protocol on guest medications that is respectful of client privacy and security to ensure that clients do not have medications taken from them by staff, volunteers, or other guests.

Given the importance of a prior relationship with DESK in encouraging potential clients to access the drop-in center, DESK may want to consider how they can bring in and be welcoming to people who are not already DESK guests, including signage in public spaces, word of mouth from current guests, etc. In order to address police presence as a potential barrier, as well as considering the potential for concerns raised by neighbors, DESK may want to find ways to mitigate lines outside the drop-in center. Although a representative from the New Haven Police Department (NHPD) was present at the *DESK Co-Design workshop*¹, DESK may want to reach out to NHPD to discuss expectations about the policing of the drop-in center so that DESK can plan ahead, propose alternatives, and negotiate on behalf of their guests (or with their guests). DESK currently operates with minimal police presence and, given the feedback from guests, it would do well for this practice to be carried over to the drop-in center. It may also be helpful for DESK to discuss protocols with Amistad and Poseidon Center to learn how they navigate their relationships with police.

Theme: Perceptions and Interactions

In addition to discussing their hopes for the new drop-in center, some respondents who participated in focus groups also discussed how they interact with and perceive other guests or potential guests of the drop-in center. Respondents reported both positive and negative perceptions and interactions. Some indicated that other guests were their friends, made them feel safe, and that they were excited about the opportunity to have a community atmosphere where they could hang out with friends. Negative perceptions were shared in regard to people who are

¹ See DESK, *Co-Designing a Downtown Drop-In Center* (2020).
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/17YCyGJ9v3lYmCvajlbgOTy8LH8yioCMq/view?usp=sharing>

seeking services in an entitled manner and people who use drugs. Although these perceptions were not articulated by many respondents, we felt it was important to be aware that certain guests of the drop-in center may hold these feelings.

“They make everyone the social enemy, it’s not society it’s them, they want everything free everything free, this free that free. Why haven't you evolved? Into getting yourself maturely and adult into your own things?”

Finally, one respondent commented on how the environment at a drop-in center could impact how guests interact with one another. They indicated that it is important for guests not to feel that they are fighting over resources.

“When there aren’t so many angry people fighting for the same resource; you’re not helping if we’re all butting heads against each other.”

Implications for DESK

It will be important for DESK to provide a nonjudgmental space wherein guests feel respected, valued, and heard. In line with DESK’s current practices, integrating a harm- and stigma-reducing approach to service provision will be one concrete step towards modeling positive and productive interactions among community members. This is an opportunity for DESK to create community guidelines or agreements based on non-judgmental practices and expectations that would apply to staff, service providers, and guests accessing the drop-in center.²

² The encampment that was established earlier in the year in New Haven was able to communally establish their own guidelines and expectations for their space, including how to regulate substance use. It may be helpful to talk to representatives from Amistad Catholic Workers House, who have logistically and financially supported self-organized communities in NHVN. For more info on the encampment, see: Zahn, B. (2020, December 5). *Living in tents as COVID surges, some of New Haven’s homeless prep for winter*—CTInsider.com.
<https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:xv-WpI2I2X4J:https://www.ctinsider.com/news/nhregister/article/It-s-protecting-the-people-New-Haven-15777542.php+&cd=3&hl=it&ct=clnk&gl=us=>

Theme: Services

Respondents who participated in the focus group interviews offered various insights regarding which services they felt the drop-in center should offer. This “Services” theme included services in domains other than health and the bare necessities of a drop-in center (see relevant sections above for health- and bare necessities-related services). Respondents indicated that the drop-in center should house as many representatives from service organizations around New Haven as possible.

“Best thing in a drop-in center would be to have the administrators of all organizations that help homeless people in the drop-in center. Ought to have at least one person from each of the orgs dealing with homelessness. Including city hall staff who deals with homelessness. A drop-in center would be invaluable if you could have access to all the orgs.”

Implications for DESK

While setting up a complete one-stop shop may not be feasible for the drop-in center, it may be helpful for guests if the drop-in center had regular days and/or times that service representatives would be present (similar to how organizations attended DESK dinner services prior to COVID-19) in order to provide guests with access to those services. In addition to bringing in other services, one respondent indicated a desire for self-defense classes to be offered at the drop-in center. DESK may want to consider offering or connecting guests to external educational opportunities, wherein DESK staff and/or other content specialists could provide learning opportunities for guests at the drop-in center. In considering the development of future participatory processes (discussed below), the opportunity to request external education services should also be a chance for guests to voice their preferences regarding what skills and content may or may not be helpful to them to learn.

A Final Note on Language

While language concerns were not expressly included in the survey, in listening to the recordings we noticed that non-native English speakers had difficulty understanding and responding to the focus group questions. DESK should be working toward greater inclusivity of Spanish speakers wherever possible. It would be helpful to have Spanish-speaking staff at the drop-in center, as well as bilingual drop-in center signage and information. Additionally, efforts should be made so that Spanish-speaking visitors to the drop-in center can participate in any participatory monitoring and evaluation activities in Spanish. Assessment of guests' language needs should be done on a continuing basis to ensure effective inclusion and participation of all guests, regardless of language spoken.

Next Steps

As the development and implementation of the drop-in center progresses, DESK should begin establishing their monitoring and evaluation frameworks as soon as possible. With the drop-in center serving as a day-time warming center during the spring of 2021, DESK may want to capitalize on the opportunity to develop a process of getting feedback about the drop-in center, the implementation, and the evaluation with guests. Additional focus groups, surveys, or interviews informed by the data from these initial focus groups are all possible ways to continue including guest perspectives. Guests should be both providing regular feedback and involved in determining any future processes of monitoring and evaluation. For example, if DESK wished to have regular or semi-regular meetings regarding the performance of the drop-in center, guests could be invited to those meetings and have a voice in how often they take place, the setting, and agenda for the meetings. All results or notes from such meetings should be made public to guests to inform those who could not attend and promote additional accountability. Establishing the Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation (PM&E) strategy, tools, and accountability structures are the crucial next steps in developing a responsive, guest informed drop-in center.