Worcester Youth Point in Time Count

Step by Step Planning Procedure

Each year, the Worcester Teen Housing Task Force, in collaboration with Clark University, conducts a Point in Time Count of homeless youth and young adults in the city. Our main population of interested is unaccompanied homeless young people. Surveys are distributed on a single day to youth ages 13 to 25 throughout Worcester. Young people are accessed through community agencies such as shelters, and youth service providers, as well as through street outreach.

This packet includes an outline of the steps involved in conducting the count, including the procedure for initial planning as well as survey distribution. Conducting the Youth Point in Time Count is a process and involves a number steps, making early planning, clear communication, and task delegation critical to the overall success of the count.

Procedure for Initial Planning

1. Convene a core group of individuals to lead the logistical planning and coordination of the count. The skill sets of individuals represented in this group should include volunteer organizing capacity, expertise in the areas of youth and young adult homelessness and housing, excellent proof-reading skills, ability to tabulate and analyze data, ability to speak publically and be representatives in the media. In the past, this has included representatives from the Teen Housing Task Force, the Compass Project, Clark University, and Central MA Housing Alliance.
2. This core planning group should begin meeting at least two months prior to the day of the survey. At the initial meeting(s) of this core planning group, the overall procedure should be discussed and a timeline should be established. During this discussion, several initial tasks should be accomplished:
   a) Set the date(s) for the Point in Time Count. Be sure to select a rain-date.[1]
   b) Develop and/or review a list of providers that should be contacted to participate in the count. This list should include homeless service providers, shelters for individuals and families, youth serving organizations, schools (if possible), feeding sites, housing organizations, and other institutions that young people may be involved with. When creating this list, think out of the box and include any institution that "hard to reach" or disconnected young people may come into contact with (hair dressing school, community colleges, etc.). This step should also entail a discussion of ways to increase organizational participation (both with the surveying and engagement with the core planning group), and consider the possibility of trying to survey in Worcester's high schools.
   c) Discuss strategies for street outreach, which includes identifying "hot spot" locations to survey youth. Successful outreach relies on a lot of volunteers covering many parts of the city and coordinating outreach training. One person should be assigned the task of volunteer recruitment and coordination. It is important to develop a large, solid base of street outreach volunteers, as past surveys have revealed that a large percentage of the unaccompanied homeless population was surveyed by the street outreach workers, as they are often not connected to an organization or service providers.
      - In the past, important locations for street outreach include: Worcester Public Library, the Downtown Common and in front of City Hall, the train station, parks and sidewalks

1 In the past, we have scheduled the count for mid-October, so that planning will align with the course schedule of participating Clark University graduate students. If the survey is put off for too long, it will likely be too cold and youth will hesitate to help fill out surveys if they're encountered outside. If the count is not conducted in conjunction with the Clark class there is much more flexibility in setting a date, but many more volunteers would be needed to plan, do outreach, conduct the survey, enter the data, analyze the data, and write the report.

where youth are walking after school hours. The emergency room has also been suggested as a place to try to do surveys.

- In the past volunteer training sessions have been held to make volunteers comfortable approaching young people on the streets. They have also been used to help decrease anxiety of not knowing how to handle a situation in which a young person presents as being homeless and how to connect them to services.
- Volunteer coordinators have drawn on existing teams of street outreach workers (LUK, Community Healthlink, and Stand Up For Kids) as well as Clark students who have been previously involved in the count as well as by asking the graduate students to reach out to their own networks.
- Develop a simple, brief resource guide to hand out during the outreach process to young people who may need help.

d) Decide how organizations will be contacted (phone, email, etc.) and who will be in charge of contacting which organizations. In the past, the procedure for contacting agencies has involved:
  - First create a list of service agencies if it has not been established previously. Gather contact information for the agency (see the attachments for the contact information used in 2011).
  - Next, make initial contact with agencies, via phone, about one month before the count. During this call, be sure to:
    - Identify and speak to the most appropriate contact person, and be sure to get their email address and direct phone number (update or record these in an excel spreadsheet for reference);
    - Describe the purpose of the count if the organization or staff person participating is new;
    - Provide the contact with the date of the count;
    - Tell them you will follow up a week prior with an electronic reminder (if this is not preferable indicate the need to call them);
    - Ask whether they would prefer to receive an electronic copy of the survey (for them to then copy themselves) or to have hard copies dropped off at their location (be sure to ask how many copies they will need, if they need copies in Spanish, and where/to whom they should be dropped off);
    - Ask if they will need volunteers to help in distribution, and if so, establish how many, what times, and who they should work with on the day(s) of the count;
    - Explain the procedure and timeframe for returning surveys.
  - Contact the same agencies, via email or phone, about one-week prior to the count. This communication should include:
    - An electronic copy of the survey (if they're not receiving hard copies) or if hard copies are being dropped off, provide information on when the surveys will be delivered;
    - A clear set of instructions for survey distribution (including a prompt of how to describe the survey to youth) and instructions for returning surveys;
    - Appropriate contact information should they have any questions/issues.
  - Follow up via email/phone after the count, to ensure that surveys have been returned and to thank them for their participation. Let them know about your plans for the dissemination of survey results (past examples included a press conference and articles

in both the Worcester Mag and Telegram and Gazette.) This helps to facilitate the process in later years.

- Although multiple people may be involved making the initial calls to organizations, it is best if one person is assigned the task of overseeing this process, sending out the week-before emails, and maintaining a spreadsheet of all agencies contacted and their needs for assistance in administering the survey.

e) Briefly discuss the survey tool and what changes/edits (if any) the group would like the Clark University graduate students to accomplish during the fall semester. This should include a plan for translating the survey to Spanish if any changes are made. Also, discuss procedures for data entry at this time.

f) Discuss any additional changes the group would like to see to the overall count process, and plan accordingly.

3. Delegate tasks and follow the timeline as outlined in the initial planning meeting (Attachment A).

Procedure for Week-Of Survey Distribution

By this point, the participating agencies should have been contacted, the survey tool should be finalized in both English and Spanish, and there should a solid group of trained volunteers on board. Now it's time to think about survey distribution!

1. Email an electronic copy of the survey to providers one week prior to the count, or physically drop off copies of the surveys to the agencies a day or two prior to the start of the count (depending on agency preference, as discussed in step 2e above).
2. Create a schedule of volunteers for the various sites identified, and help coordinate a carpooling schedule if volunteers do not have their own transportation.
3. Gather supplies needed for street outreach: copies of surveys, t-shirts, clipboards, pens, and youth service resource guides.
4. Be sure to give all volunteers the phone number of a lead person should they have any questions/issues while distributing surveys and the name of contact liaisons at agencies if volunteers are helping at a site. It is also important to identify an experienced case manager of youth homeless outreach worker who is willing to be on call the day of the count in case volunteers encounter a young people in need of immediate help.
5. Consider scheduling a time for volunteers to 'debrief' with each other after doing interviews and street outreach. Sometimes volunteers need to talk about the experience, particularly if they encountered young people in need of help.
6. The day after the count, follow-up with volunteers and agencies to debrief and thank them for their participation. Be sure to update any contact information that is needed for coordinating next year's count.
7. Now that the surveys have been completed, survey data will need to be reviewed and entered into a database. This involves creating a database for data entry and a system for survey coding.
8. Once that the data is analyzed, the report can written and findings disseminated.
   - Use November, as homelessness awareness month, to help publicize the severity of the issue of youth homelessness and present the findings if they are available, invite volunteers to attend a press conference where the results are presented.

Attachment A: Initial Meeting Checklist and Sample Timeline

INITIAL MEETING CHECKLIST		
√	**TASK**	**POINT PERSON (if applicable)**
	Set date for count.	
	Develop list of potential sites for survey distribution and ways to expand organizational participation; identify which agencies will require more extensive and strategic recruitment.	
	Discuss street outreach: identify locations, volunteer recruitment (where from? How many needed?), street outreach training, agencies to lead street outreach, and assign a person as Volunteer Coordinator.	
	Decide on a procedure for contacting agencies, who will be contacting which agencies, and assign a person as Site Coordinator.	
	Decide who will be the primary contact person if persons contacted have issues/questions.	
	Briefly discuss the survey tool and what edits (if any) the group would like the Clark University graduate students to accomplish during the fall semester. This should include a plan for translating the survey to Spanish if any changes are made.	
	Discuss procedures for data entry.	
	Discuss any additional changes the group would like to see to the overall count process, and plan accordingly.	
	Solidify timeline and delegated tasks.	
	Schedule next meeting.	

TASK	BY WHEN	WHO	PROGRESS
Hold preliminary planning meeting: accomplish tasks on check-list (above), finalize timeline and delegate tasks.			
Finalize list of potential sites and who will be making the initial call to each site			
Contact new sites that may require more extensive and strategic recruitment			
Make initial contact via phone with participating sites, track phone calls in spreadsheet and send to Site Coordinator			
Contact and recruit volunteers			
Clark University students send draft of edited survey to core planning group for review			
Survey is finalized and translated to Spanish			
Develop written materials, including letter with instructions to providers and resource guide for surveyed youth who are in need of services			
Email surveys and instructions to participating agencies, continue to track contacts in spreadsheet			
Volunteer Training for street outreach, where volunteer schedule (and carpooling) will be finalized			
Supplies for street outreach are secured: copies of surveys, Point in Time Count t-shirts, clipboards, pens, and resource guides			
Distribute hard copies of surveys to designated organizations			
Point in Time Count			
Follow-up with agencies and volunteers to debrief, thank them, and discuss how to return surveys (this may require continued follow-up until all surveys are returned)			
All surveys are coded and data is entered			
Secondary data compiled and use to contextualize findings			
Data analysis			
Report dissemination			

Attachment B: 2011 Contacts

Worcester Youth Point in Time Count Sites Contacted
Updated October 2011

Agency/Program Name	Contact Person	Phone Number	Email Address
HOUSING SITES			
YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS			
GED Programs			
TRAINING PROGRAMS			
STREET OUTREACH AGENCIES			