

## Lessons Learned from Outreach Workers

**[00:00:04] Graphic:** Lessons Learned from Outreach Workers

**Audio: Narrator:** Lessons learned from outreach workers will focus on what works. Key strategies and an approach to address harm reduction in housing first.

**[00:00:13] \*Pause\***

**[00:00:18] Graphic:** The Real Experts: Hear from street outreach workers with lived experiences of unsheltered homelessness.

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**Audio: Narrator:** People with lived experience of homelessness are critical to every aspect of the planning, decision making and activities within the Continuum of Care. This includes street outreach. Today, we get to hear from the real experts.

**[00:00:36] Graphic:** Michael Eckhart: Nation's Finest (California). Career: Outreach Worker and Military Veteran. Lived Expertise: Previously unhoused and unsheltered for 12+ years. Specialty: Engaging and housing unsheltered Veterans.

**[00:00:51] Graphic:** Meet Mike

**Audio: Mike Eckhart:** Outreach was brought to me through means of lived experience. I spent 12 years homeless myself, my family and I. Through that time period, I was able to meet different entities and a group people that kind of open the doors for me for this career. This career is probably the best career I've had with nation's finest. Working with people, working with unhoused vets particularly is just rewarding in itself.

**[00:01:28] Graphic:** Mitch Watson: Hunger & Homeless Coalition of Collier County (Florida). Career: Outreach Coordinator. Lived Expertise: Previously unhoused and unsheltered for 10 years. Specialty: Housing unsheltered Veterans and seniors from encampments.

**[00:01:44] Graphic:** Meet Mitch

**Audio: Mitch Watson:** I was the first outreach coordinator for the coalition that they've ever had in 20 years of existence, so we just started outreach. Prior to that, there was one deputy, essentially just one deputy in the county that was...took it upon himself to act as a liaison between, you know, available services and the...and...the homeless clients out there. So when I started, he showed me the ropes and showed me a lot, showed me where the camps were at. And, you know, in addition to his help, I grew up in Naples, I grew up in this area. So, you know, I have a general idea where the homeless - homeless populations exist. And also, because, again, going back to my experience, I was homeless in Naples for so many years. You know, I don't know where everybody's at, but I got a pretty good idea.

**[00:02:43] Graphic:** Outline of a light bulb. Key Strategies: Including harm reduction and Housing First.

**[00:02:57] Graphic:** "We are all human..."

**[00:02:58] Graphic:** "We are all human..."

**Audio: Mike Eckhart:** Human side of it is a struggle because society today has put stigmas on the homeless generation or the homeless population. For example, here in California, a homeless person is automatically looked at as a drug user, a criminal, somebody who doesn't belong in your community, somebody who just doesn't... Then they're looked at down at, their looked at as somebody who just doesn't want to produce, want to succeed in life and simply looked at as a loser. And that's sad. Because we're all human. We all have human qualities. We all have needs. We all have pretty much the same things that drive us to do our day to day needs. Unfortunately, a homeless person doesn't have the basic structure that somebody with a house does. Somebody with a roof over their head who wakes up not freezing and hungry every day, has a little bit more of an edge than somebody who is homeless. It's a struggle. It's a situation that once you're in,

it's very hard to find yourself being out of just because of the way society is formed. It is. It's built to keep you down once you're homeless. And that's what really is sad.

**[00:04:34] Graphic and audio \*audio starts at [00:04:35]\*: People First: Narrator:**

People experiencing homelessness are people first. Street outreach should use a person-centered approach, focusing on the individual's strengths and resources, never making assumptions about what a person might need or want. Street outreach efforts are respectful and responsive to the beliefs and practices, sexual orientations, disability statuses, age, gender identities, cultural preferences and linguistic needs. Street outreach workers use problem-solving techniques to identify strengths and existing support networks, explore possible safe housing options outside the homelessness service system, such as reunification with family, and connect the individual to community supports and services.

**[00:05:26] Graphic:** "Communication and sharing ideas."

**Audio: Narrator: Mike Eckhart:** Outreach is coordinated in Santa Clara County through different entities. There are different nonprofits that also specialize in outreach, and we find that by communicating and sharing our ideas with each other, we are able to set a platform like the standard platform for outreach to go and engage these individuals. There are different, like when I see different entities, there's the shelters that we utilize to find homeless people, the encampments, word of mouth, like I said, and the experience of other outreach is very important. You must communicate with other outreach teams in order to be successful in this realm.

**[00:06:22] Graphic and Audio \*audio starts at [00:06:24]: Coordination: Narrator:**

Knowledge of and engagement with all partners implementing street outreach leads to more strategic use of resources and more comprehensive coverage and identification of all people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Street outreach should be coordinated among various providers and across different entities, including a broader network of programs, services or staff who are likely to encounter individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. This includes law enforcement, first responders, hospitals, health and behavioral health care providers, child welfare agencies, homeless education liaisons, workforce systems, faith-based organizations and other community-based providers.

**[00:07:13] Graphic:** "The homeless population...is not just a blight..."

**Audio: Mitch Watson:** The Collier County Sheriff's Department here in Naples is run by a progressive thinking, forward thinking sheriff, and he understands that the home...the homeless population... isn't just...is not what they would consider just a blight on the population. You know, they realize that we criminalize mental health issues, and he understands that. And he does not want to - to have his officers, his officers excuse me, officers, valuable time spent on pulling somebody or sweeping homeless camps only to have them, you know, turn back around 24 to 48 hours later and find a new spot. He understands the long ra - the long range, you know, goals that we all have, which is decriminalizing mental health and finding solutions for these people that are homeless in the county.

**[00:08:19] Graphic:** Meaningful Partnerships: Law Enforcement:

The justice system as a whole - but law enforcement particularly - can both be part of and strengthen the safety net for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, criminalization does not prevent or end homelessness.

Criminalization does not prevent or end homelessness.

After people experiencing homelessness are arrested, they return to the community - still experiencing homelessness.

Criminal convictions can create barriers to obtaining public benefits, employment and housing.

**Audio: Narrator:** The justice system as a whole - but law enforcement particularly - can both be part of and strengthen the safety net for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, criminalization does not prevent or end homelessness. In fact, after people experiencing homelessness are arrested, they returned to the community, still experiencing homelessness. Criminal convictions can create barriers to obtaining public benefits, employment and, most importantly, housing. The cost of homelessness, including the cost of criminal justice involvement compared with the cost of providing housing to people experiencing homelessness, shows that housing is the most affordable option.

**[00:09:10] Graphic:** “We all want to end homelessness...you can’t do this through a vacuum.”

**Audio: Mitch Watson:** We all want to get rid of homelessness, we all want to end homelessness, but it can't be... this not... you can't do this through a vacuum. It takes it takes a different viewpoint and it takes different methodologies. And important part of that is CIT and harm reduction.

**[00:09:36] Graphic and audio \*audio starts on [00:09:38]**

**Harm Reduction: Narrator:** Street outreach providers have protocols in place to ensure the safety of all individuals seeking assistance. These protocols help ensure that people fleeing domestic violence, as well as dating violence, sexual assault, trafficking, or stalking have safe and confidential access to the coordinated entry process and domestic violence services. Street outreach efforts use non-judgmental, non-coercive provision of services and resources and accept that some individuals may not initially accept offers of emergency shelter or housing assistance. Street outreach workers establish rapport and reduce harm by providing critical saving resources such as food, water, clothing, blankets, and other necessities.

**[00:10:28] Graphic:** “Housing First is how I became a part of society...”

**Audio: Woman:** How do you do it?

**[00:10:31] Graphic:** “Housing First is how I became a part of society...”

**Audio: Mike Eckhart:** Housing first is how I became a part of society. Housing first is a structure that we don't look at the individual's habits – habit traits. We look at the need of the unhoused. Once we have an individual housed, we can slowly work on those habits that are keeping them unhoused. We call them the restrictions of permanent housing in our curriculum.

And those restrictions come up in: substance abuse, just abuse period. People who have been abused physically or mentally, sexually, find that - that root of homelessness - is those doors open a lot easier for those individuals then than not. We find that housing first gives you a security, a structure, gives you an opportunity that individuals should definitely take advantage of.

**[00:11:33] Graphic and audio \*audio starts at [00:11:34] Housing Focus and Housing**

**First: Narrator:** The goal of street outreach is to make connections to stable housing with tailored services and supports of their choice, such as health and behavioral health care, transportation, access to benefits and more. Street outreach does not require individuals to enter emergency shelter or transitional housing as an “interim step” or prerequisite to accessing stable housing. Street outreach uses housing first approaches that do not impose preconditions to make referrals to permanent housing, shelter or other temporary housing such as sobriety, minimum income requirements, absence of justice involvement, history, completion of treatment, participation in services or other unnecessary conditions.

**[00:12:25] Graphic:** Credits

**[00:12:27] Graphic:** Credits. Interviews

**[00:12:30] Graphic:** Credits. Interviews: Michael Eckhart | Nation’s Finest  
Mitch Watson | Hunger and Homeless Coalition of Collier County

**[00:12:32] Graphic:** Content

**[00:12:34]** Content: Core Elements of Effective Street Outreach to People Experiencing Homelessness | USICH