

Homelessness Solidarity Network & U-M CTAC Partnership Overview (By Brianna Christy, May 2024)

In July 2023, HSN (Homelessness Solidarity Network) began a partnership with CTAC (Community Technical Assistance Collaborative) to lay the groundwork for the successful launch of an interview project: Exploring Experiences and Suggestions Regarding the Impacts of Housing Insecurity or Homelessness. One of the main goals of this project is to generate guided conversations around solutions towards community change around housing insecurity.

Recognizing the importance of an intentionally crafted protocol, we embarked on a journey to glean insights from existing literature. The dedicated CTAC team conducted a [literature review](#), delving into both the root causes of homelessness and the effectiveness of available services.

Armed with a deep understanding gleaned from the literature, our collaboration pivoted towards a crucial step: mapping available resources within the Washtenaw County area. This endeavor was not merely about data collection but about creating a tangible tool that could be wielded by HSN and its network of stakeholders. The resulting resource [map](#), curated by the CTAC team in December 2023, serves as a resource any community member can use. To date, it has been accessed over 2800 times, a testament to its relevance and impact in addressing the needs of those experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity within our community. It's proof that when we come together, we can make a real difference for our neighbors who need it most.

In addition to the literature review and resource map, HSN and CTAC collaborated to develop a protocol that would allow us to answer:

1. What are the lived experiences of individuals before, during, and after periods of being unhoused?
2. How can these narratives inform the transformation of community support systems?

Considerable effort was devoted to crafting an [interview protocol](#) that offered the necessary flexibility to accommodate the unique circumstances of each interviewee.

Recognizing the invaluable perspective of individuals with lived experiences of housing insecurity or homelessness, we seized the opportunity to provide training. A comprehensive training program spanning two sessions, totaling 5 hours, was designed to equip community members with the skills needed to conduct interviews effectively. Community members were paid to attend the training. The sessions were thoughtfully structured to delve into two critical areas:

1. [Exploring Relationality and Empathic Listening & Responding](#): This segment focused on the importance of building rapport and fostering empathetic connections with interviewees. We emphasized the significance of understanding and validating the lived experiences of marginalized individuals, recognizing that shared identities or life experiences can enhance rapport and trust during interviews.

2. [Conducting Interviews for Data Collection](#): This component equipped participants with practical strategies for conducting interviews in a manner that ensures comprehensive data collection while respecting the dignity and autonomy of interviewees.

This initiative underscores our commitment to amplifying diverse voices and fostering inclusive support mechanisms within our community. By prioritizing training that acknowledges the value of shared identities and experiences, we strive to create a more empathetic and effective support network for marginalized individuals facing housing insecurity.

HSN acknowledged that ICPJ (Interfaith Council for Peace & Justice) was engaged in a project that could intersect with our interviewing initiative. Recognizing the potential synergy, pooling our resources, and embracing a collaborative approach felt essential to this project's success. While ICPJ's interview project spanned more population and topic areas, it was clear that sharing the stories collected with one another would be beneficial for both organizations.

In keeping with our commitment to honoring community voices, the project hit some roadblocks in February 2024. While we had planned the dates for the training, it was clear that there were some community concerns that needed to be addressed prior to the project moving forward. We rescheduled the training to take place at the end of March, allowing for the community members and organizations involved in the project to work through their conflict. Taking the needed time to listen and respond to those who had concerns was paramount to a successful interview project.

ICPJ took on the logistics of organizing the interviews. Between April 2 and May 3, 39 interviews were conducted. All interviews will be run through a transcription service. The CTAC team will then listen to each interview and ensure the transcription matches the audio recording. From there, the team will use Dedoose to qualitative code and theme the interviews. Once this is done, the team will analyze the data and provide a report back to HSN on the findings.