



ELEVATING THE NEEDS OF THE HOMELESS SERVICES WORKFORCE

Joy Moses
(National Alliance to End
Homelessness)

BACKGROUND STORY

A Clear Need to Step Up the Alliance's Focus on the Workforce:

- Anecdotal Information—e.g., meetings, conferences, advocacy, and workgroups
- Growing conversations in other human services spaces—e.g., healthcare, education, childcare
- Surveys and Focus Groups During the Pandemic
 - Reports of Being Understaffed
 - Not Being Able to Fully Use Increased Gov't Resources
- Culhane and An Studied Average Salaries of Non-Profit Homeless Services Workers
 - Alliance (Julie Pagaduan) created an interactive tool to illustrate the limits of existing salaries
 - Alliance (Nicole Dubois and Ann Oliva) calculated the housing wage gap at \$4.8 billion
- Next Step: Survey the field to gather information about the well-being of the workforce and impacts on people experiencing and the nation's efforts to end homelessness
 - Help understand the challenges
 - Help shape policy and practice
 - Help with advocacy

METHODOLOGY

- Created an online survey
- Open between July 17 – September 15
- Promoted through the Alliance’s newsletter, social media, and announcements at the July 2023 national conference. Staff and friends found additional ways to let people know about the survey. Thank you!
- Limitation—not a chosen sample



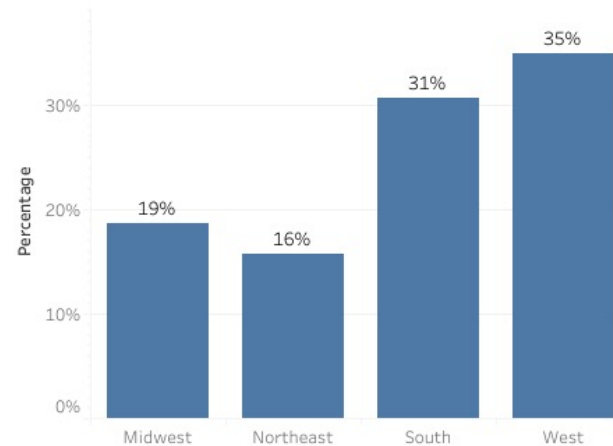
RESPONDENTS: WHERE THEY WORK

- From all 50 states and the District of Columbia
- Western and southern states had the largest representation—however, these areas have the largest populations of people experiencing homelessness.
- Urban areas also significantly represented—matches population concentrations

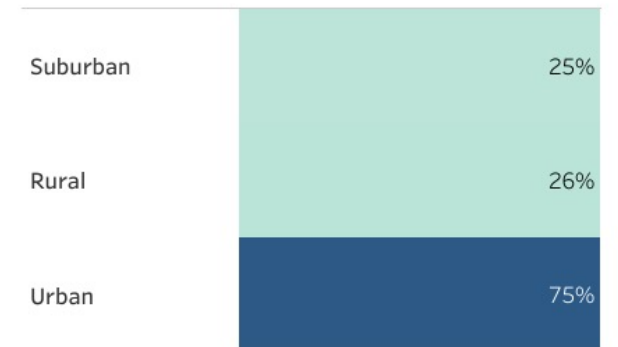
Where Respondents Work



Region of the Country



Community Type

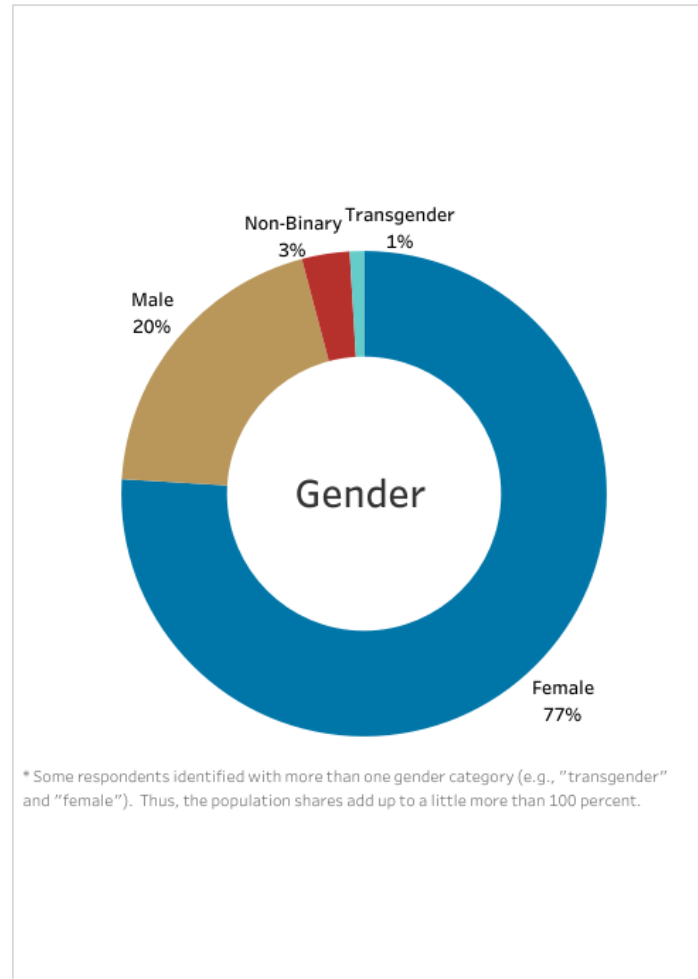


* Numbers do not add up to 100%. Some workers are serving areas wit..

RESPONDENTS: DEMOGRAPHICS

- Unclear the degree to which our sample matches the larger workforce--no available Census
- Largely Female—77%
- Racially Diverse—Over- or Under-Representation of Black Respondents
- Most have participated in higher education—92% had at least some college or an Associate's degree and 68% had at least a Bachelor's degree

Survey Respondent Demographics



Race/Ethnicity

American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous	2%
Asian or Asian American	2%
Black, African American, or African	18%
Hispanic/Latino	15%
Multi-Racial	5%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1%
White	60%
Other	1%

* This chart merges the responses related to race and ethnicity. Some Hispanics/Latinos also identified with a specific racial group such as "white". Thus, the population shares add up to more than 100 percent.

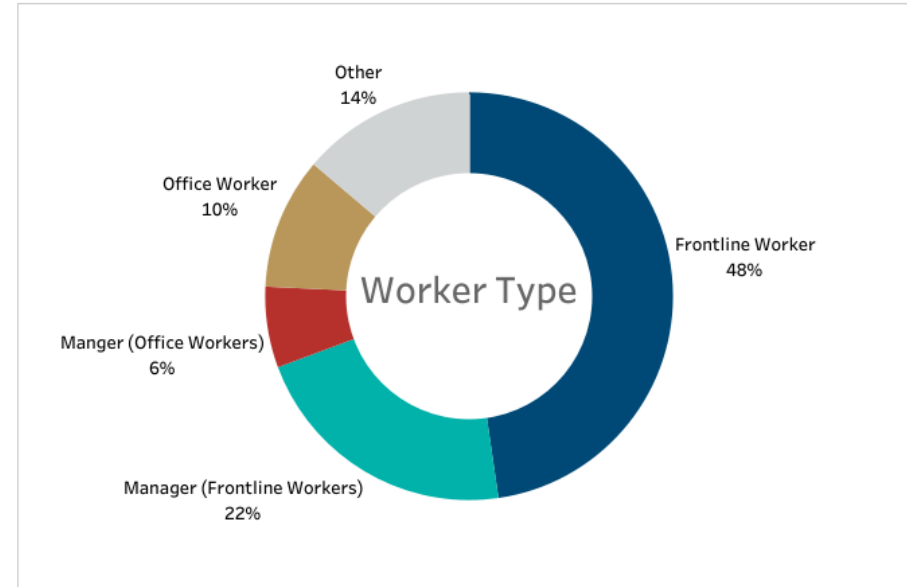
Educational Attainment

A Grade Between 1 and 11	1%
High School Diploma or GED	8%
Some College or Associates Degree	24%
Bachelor's Degree	39%
Master's Degree	26%
Professional Degree	1%
Doctorate Degree	2%

RESPONDENTS: JOB INFORMATION

- 70% identified as frontline workers or managers of frontline workers
- Others worked in other settings like working in a CoC agency or education setting
- Somewhat expected distribution of employer types
- Diversity in years of experience—except for a dip among those working 6-9 years
- Majority (55%) had salaries equal to or under \$50,000 per year—putting them at risk of being able to afford housing.

Work-Related Characteristics



Employer Type

Permanent Housing Program	27%
Emergency Shelter or Transitional Hous..	23%
Street Outreach Program	10%
Continuum of Care Lead Agency	9%
Service Provider Agency	7%
Coordinated Entry Access Point	5%
Drop-In Center	4%
Hotel/Motel/Non-Congregate Shelter Pr..	1%
Other	14%

Length of Service

5 years or less	21%
6-9 years	11%
10-19 years	23%
20-29 years	21%
30 or more years	23%

Salaries

≤ \$30,000/yr	6%
≤ \$50,000/yr	55%
≤ \$75,000/yr	79%

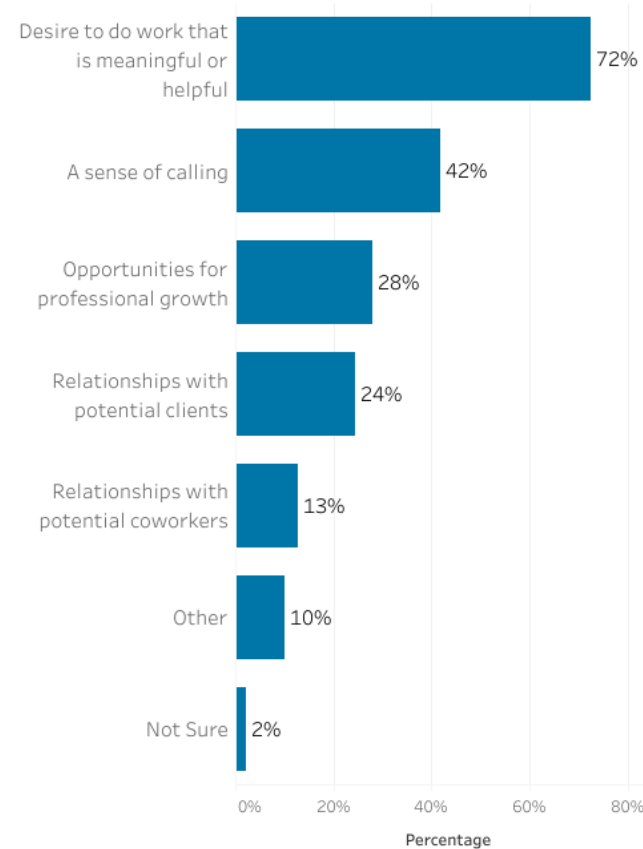
WHY DO PEOPLE WORK IN THIS FIELD

- Altruism—sense of calling, wanting meaningful work
 - “No one else was stepping up to do the necessary work.”
- Lived experience that drew them to helping others in similar circumstances—at least 182 people
- Connections to other professions—veterans, human trafficking, children and youth
- Practical reasons—job loss and needing a new income, work-life balance, desired career change from corporate America

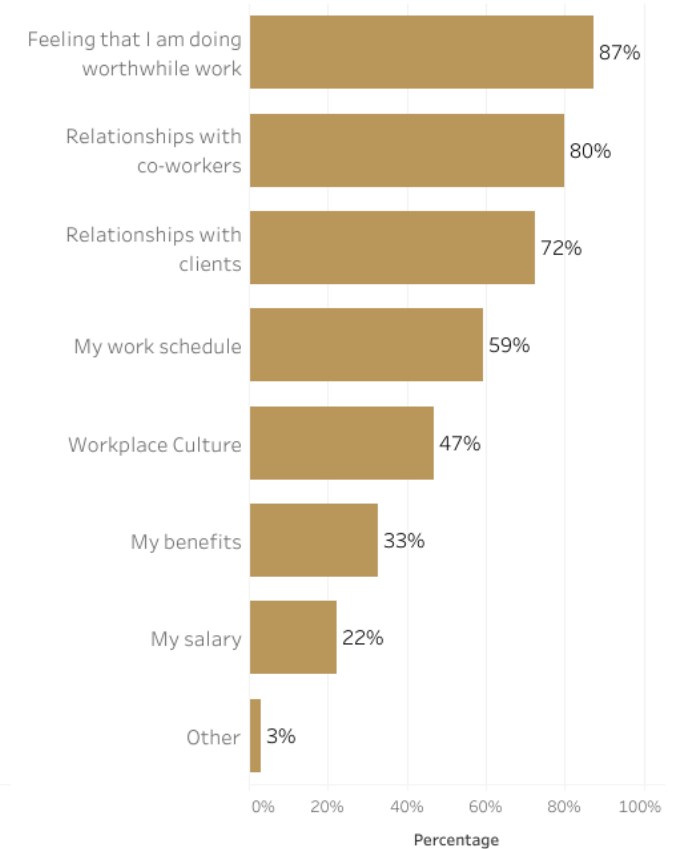
Reasons for Working in Homelessness

(The answer options for these two questions were similar but not identical. Please see the appendix for the exact wording of the questions.)

Why I Started Working in Homelessness



What I Now Like About My Job



CHALLENGING WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Understaffed—Unable to Serve Everyone or Meet Goals

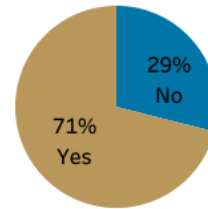
- 74% said their agencies didn't have enough people

High Employee Turnover

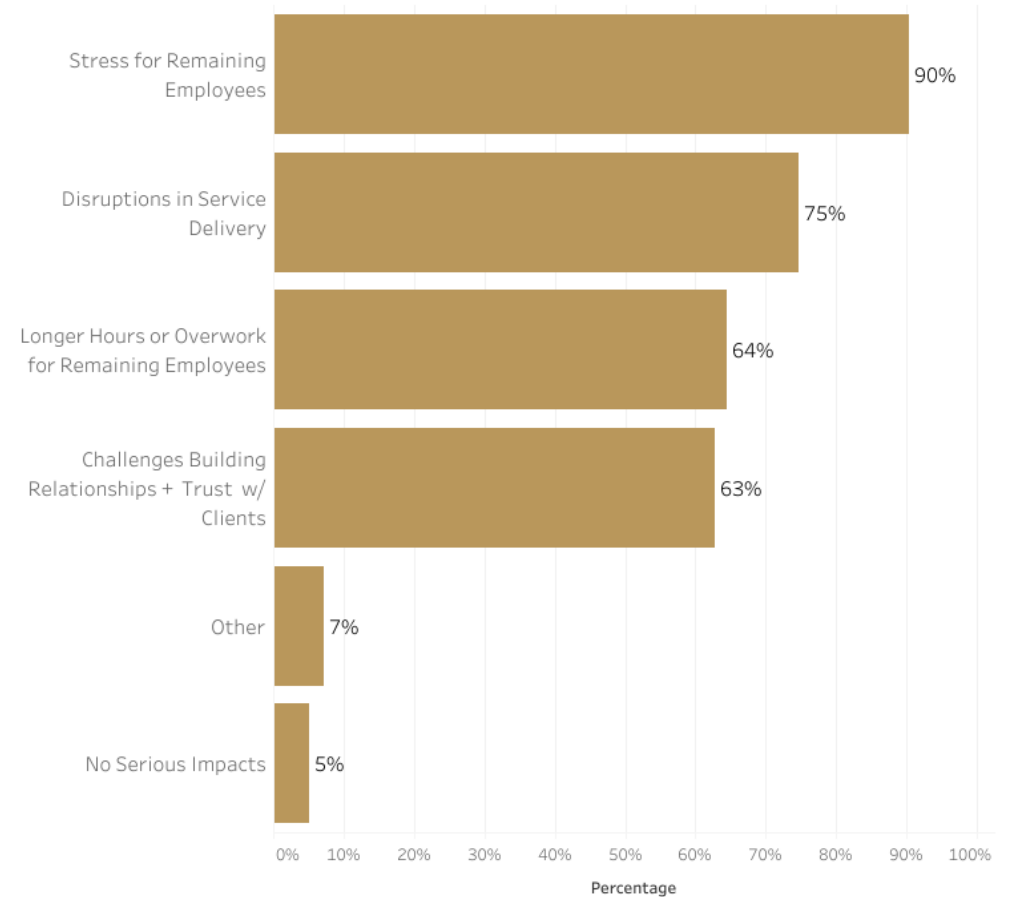
- 71% said their organization/agency was experiencing this challenge

High Employee Turnover

High Turnover in Your Workplace?



High Turnover is Leading To . . .



STATED IMPACTS OF HIGH TURNOVER

Responses:

- Increased Stress (90%)
- Overwork (64%)
- Signs of Despondency—“burnout”, “low morale”, “underappreciated”, and “hopelessness”
- Threats to Funding—preventing completion of service contracts or grant deliverables
- Sometimes Lower Quality Staffing
 - “We keep toxic staff due to staffing issues because it’s hard to fill positions.”
- Inefficient Use of Resources—specifically, money spent on constant new employee trainings
- Leadership Challenges--building staff cohesion
 - “Leadership can’t make strategic plans because they only think in crisis mode.”
- Losses of Institutional Knowledge

SALARY-RELATED HARDSHIPS

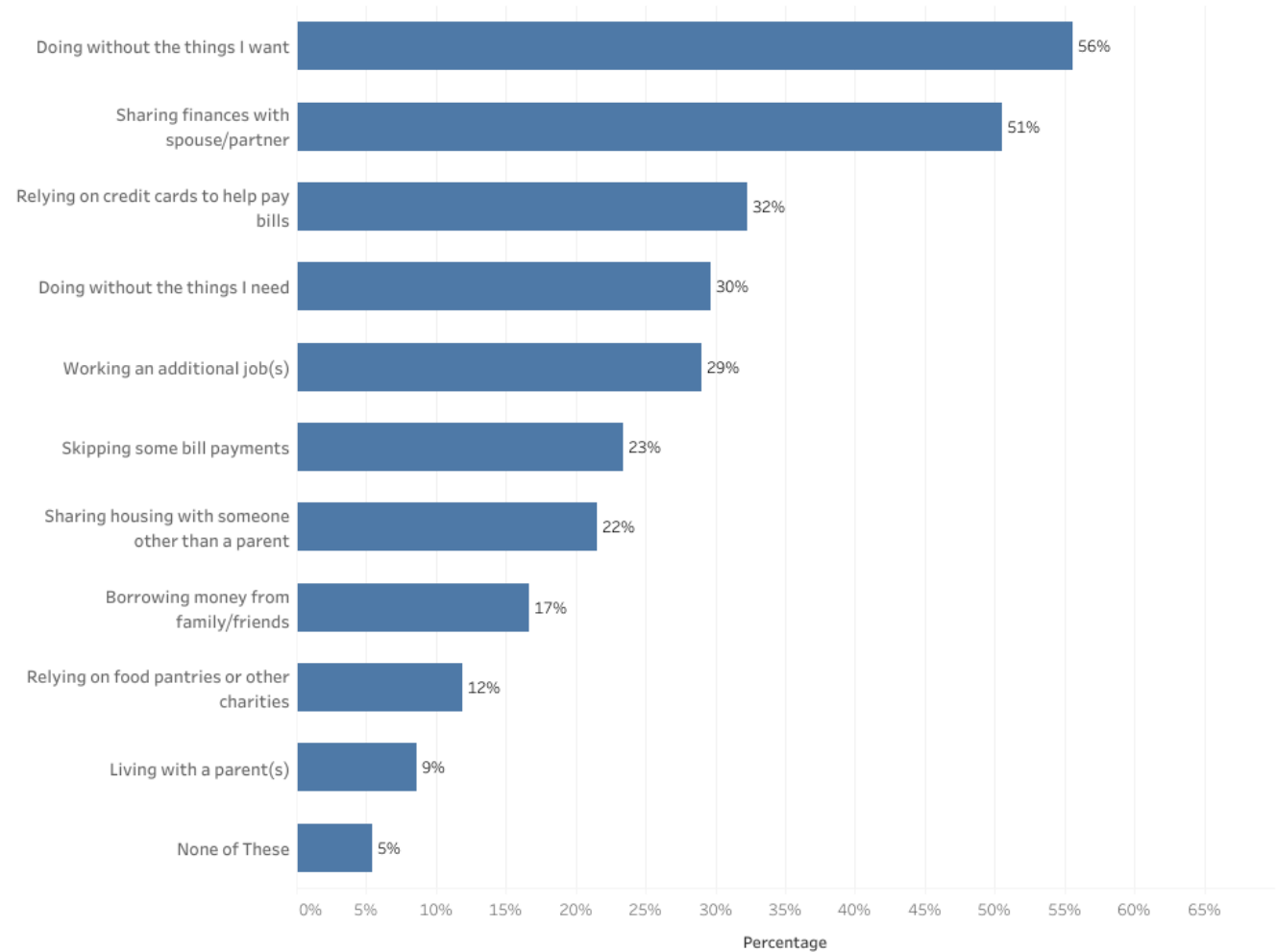
My salary is:

- Not enough for basic needs (34%)
- Just enough for basic needs (52%)
- Enough to live well (14%)

Making Ends Meet:

1. Relatively less harmful--sharing finances with a spouse/partner or parent.
2. Clearly struggling financially:
 - Relying on Credit Cards (32 percent)
 - Relying on Charities (12 percent)
 - Personal loans
 - Teenage children taking jobs
 - Donating plasma
 - Skipping meals
 - Filing for bankruptcy

The Following Allow Me to Make Ends Meet . . .

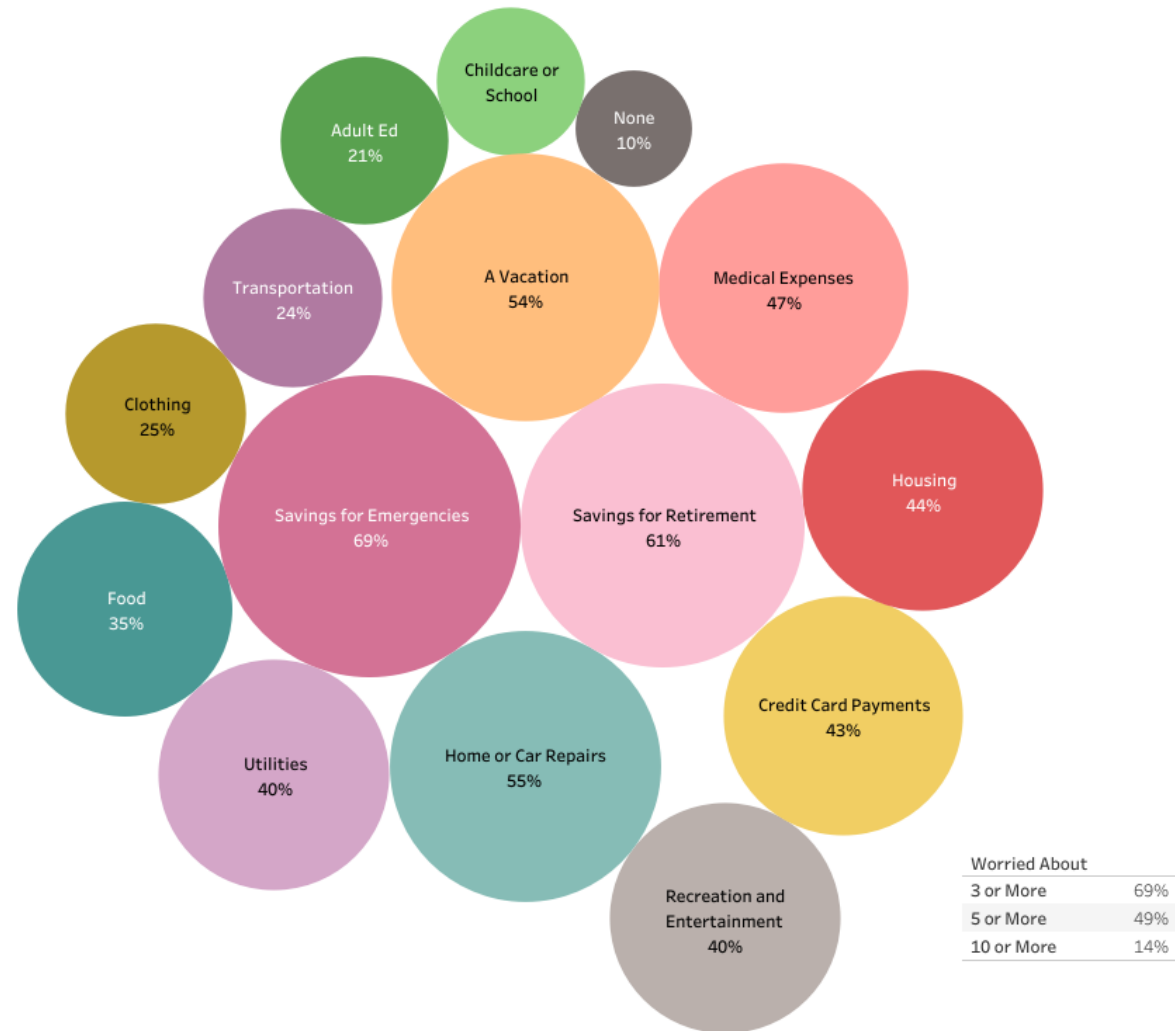


WORRIED ABOUT PAYING

Responses:

- Threats to financial security like savings for emergencies (69%)
- Threats to a balanced and happy life like savings for vacations (54%)
- Basic necessities like food (35%) and housing (40%)
- Many have multiple worries

Over the Last Year, I've Worried About Paying For . . .



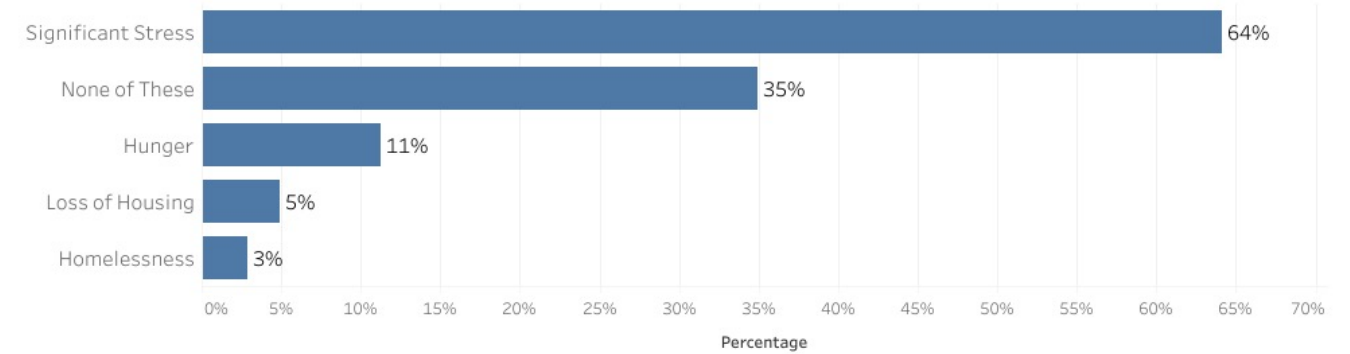
POVERTY INDICATORS

Responses:

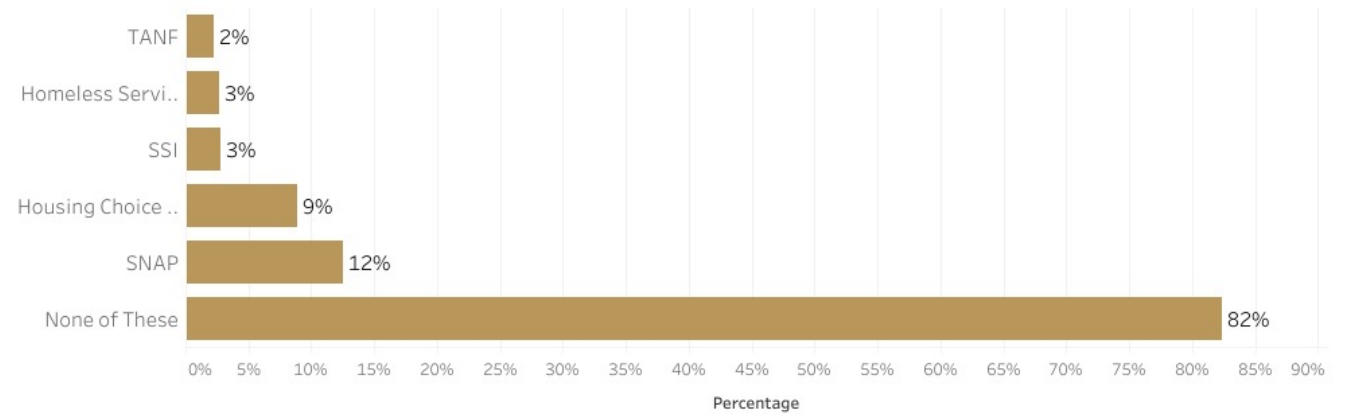
- Significant Stress
- Hunger
- Homelessness
- Participating or Potentially Qualifying for Gov't Anti-Poverty Programs

Poverty Indicators Rooted in Current Salary

Over the Last Year, I Have Experienced . .



I Participate In (or Believe I'm Eligible For) . . .

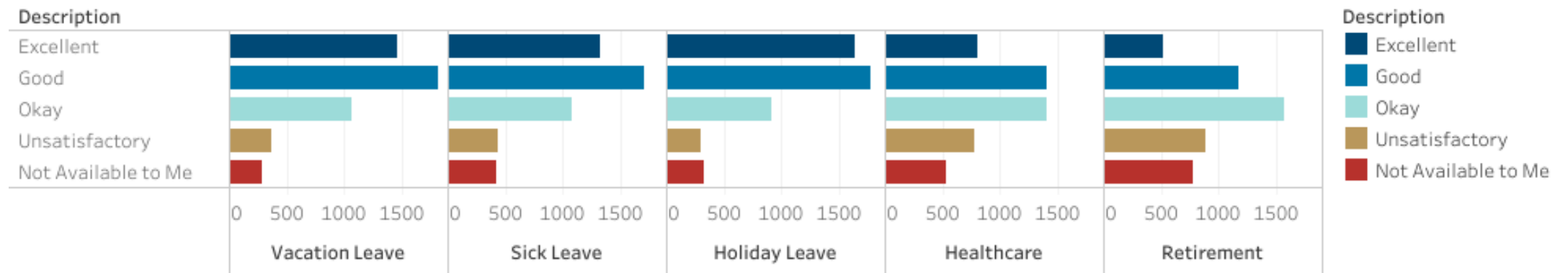


BENEFITS

Respondents:

- Largely content with existing benefits
- But some lack access to important offerings

When it comes to my benefits, I would rate each as follows:



CHALLENGES

Notably:

- Bureaucracy—e.g., funding requirements
- Discrimination—including age, disability, religion, and lived experience.
- Worries About Coworkers
- Job Insecurity
- Public Perceptions and Lack of Support from communities

Workplace Challenges

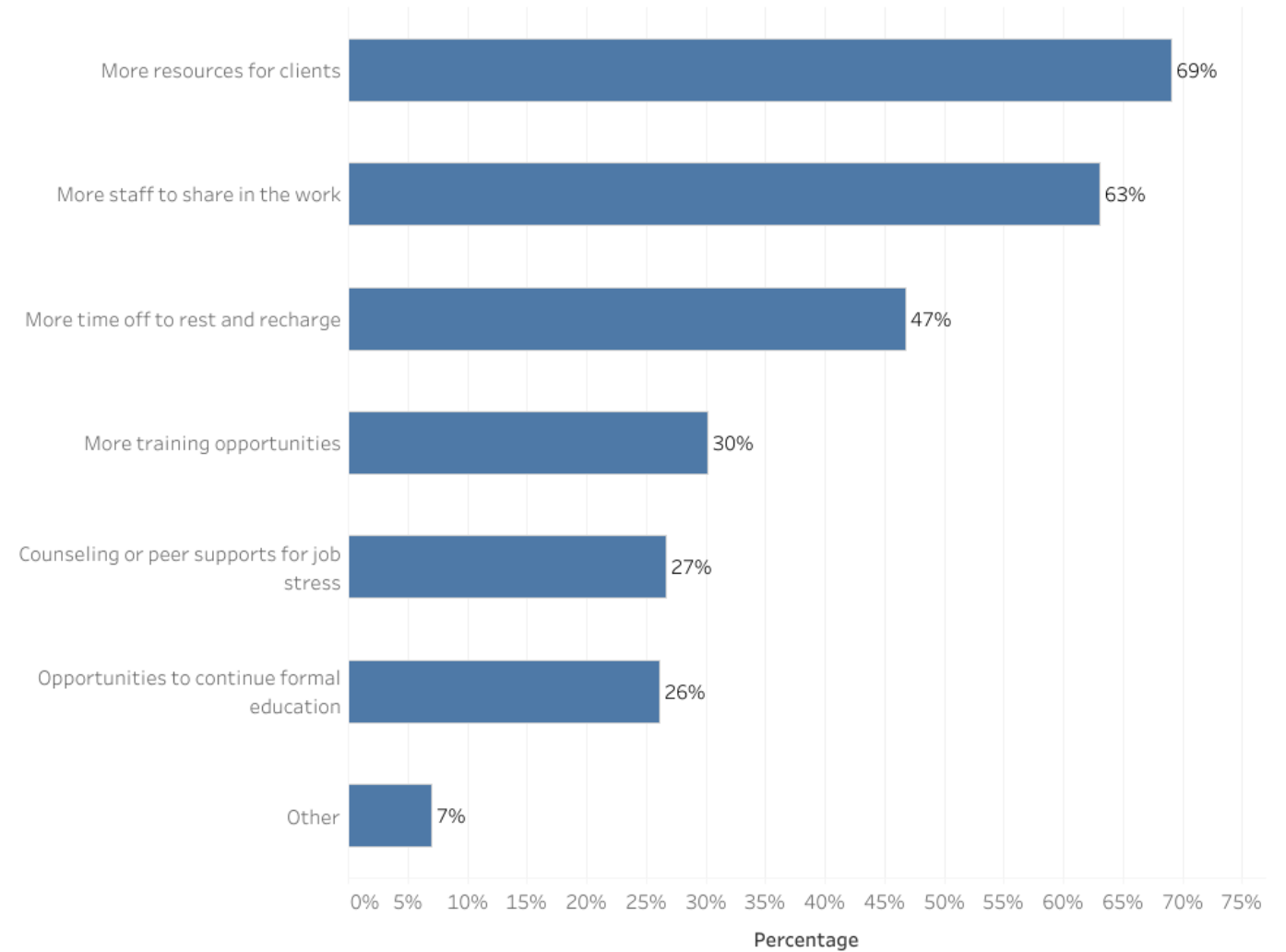
Frustration (Can't give more people housing and services)	69%
Stress/worry about the well-being of clients	60%
Being overworked	46%
Limited rewards or wins tied to work	37%
Overly burdensome paperwork requirements	36%
Limited opportunities to advance in my career	35%
Limited authority to make decisions	25%
Lack of respect for my opinions and contributions	21%
Fears for my safety	13%
None of these	9%
Other	6%
Discrimination or uncomfortable situations (Race/Ethnicity)	6%
Discrimination or uncomfortable situations (Gender)	5%
Discrimination or uncomfortable situations (LGBTQ identity)	3%

NEEDS

Notably:

- Funding stability for organizations
- Student loan repayment assistance
- Executive and other types of mentorship
- Adequate physical workspaces
- Mental health leave
- Technology upgrades
- New types of staffing
- Career ladders
- Appreciation
- Home buying programs for employees

Things I Still Need to Do My Job Well

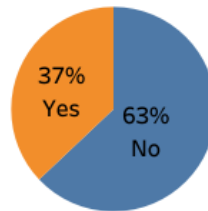


FUTURE PLANS

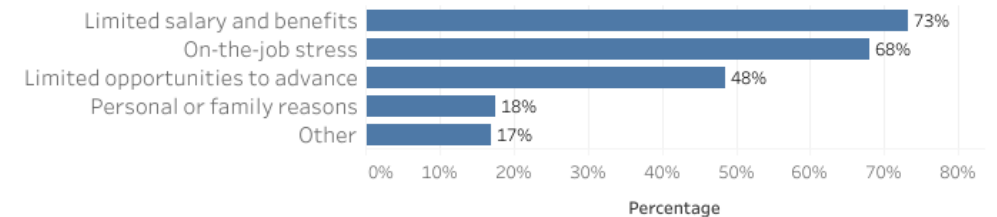
- Considerable Share Considering Leaving their Jobs
- . . . But Also a Considerable Share Looking to Stay
- Similar responses to other questions:
 - “Financial need. I’ll lose my house if I can’t make more.”
 - “[Stresses of] witnessing participants pass away and seeing participants cycle back through the shelter system after being housed.”
 - “I love this work. This work is my calling. But I should be paid fairly. And I get dismissed when I even bring it up. As someone with over 15 years [of experience] . . . my salary should be more than 50k a year. And our board of supervisors and leaders act like this is unreasonable.”

Future Plans

Considering Leaving Job?



Why are you considering leaving your job?



WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

- Much Work Ahead
- Securing Funds from Multiple Directions—but Congress is Significantly Important
- Work with national-level partners and the field to further develop solutions



CONTACT INFORMATION

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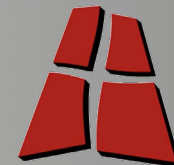
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Prioritizing Social Workers Recruitment to Address the Homeless Sector Workforce Deficit

**Donna Gallup, Ed.D., LSW
Associate Professor
University of Nebraska Kearney/Azusa Pacific University**

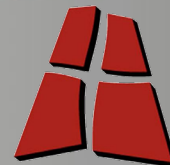
**Dara (Papel) Weinger
Senior Program Manager
Corporation for Supportive Housing**

**Benjamin F. Henwood, PhD, MSW
Associate Professor
Director, Center for Homelessness, Housing and Health Equity Research**



The Problem

- 69,144 homeless individuals in Los Angeles County (2022 PIT Count)
- Significant # **vacant positions** in the homeless services and supportive housing sector with influx of funding and programming
- At project conception -high homeless count and **significant funding** through Measure H (voter approved sales tax for homeless services)
- Nonprofit **providers at maximum capacity** to serve the volume of high-need, homeless individuals and families
- Homeless services & supportive housing is **not always a desirable career pathway** for master of social work graduates
- According to Bureau of Labor statistics-**only about 1%** of social workers are employed in homeless sector



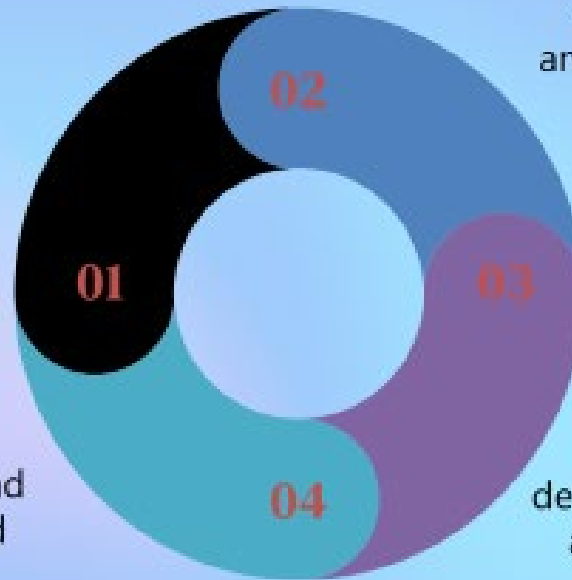
Recruitment and Retention Challenges Summary

01
Difficulty with work conditions and turnover in the homeless sector

02
Underfunding and lack of organized systemic efforts

03
Comparison with pay and targeted incentives in other sectors

04
Impact of mental health deterioration/burnout and increased stress and workload

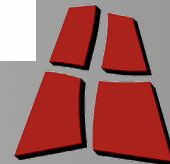


Homeless Social Work Education Program

- Started in 2017- Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) lead
- Hilton Foundation Funded Grant (1st 2 years):
 - *Creating Career Pathways with Underserved Populations Through Collaborative Training and Field Placements*
 - Challenges hiring clinical staff and need for capacity building in the homeless sector
 - Advance partnerships among social work programs and providers
 - Focus on master of social work (MSW) recruitment
- After grant ended, CSH and I kept program going
- Ben Henwood from USC joined us...

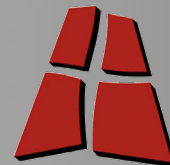


Grand Challenges
for Social Work
End Homelessness



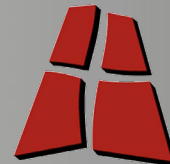
Homeless Social Work Education Program

- SoCal University Social Work Program Partners
 - Azusa Pacific University (APU)
 - University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)
 - University of Southern California (USC)
 - California State Universities: Northridge (CSUN), Dominguez Hills (CSUDH), Long Beach (CSULB) & Los Angeles (CSULA)
 - UMass Global
- *Challenge recruiting interns:*
 - ***competing with funded/paid internship programs***
 - ***overcoming the stigma***



Homeless Social Work Education Program

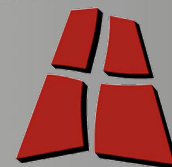
- 43 participating LA County homeless providers or organizations serving unhoused to date
- *Challenge to placement of interns*
 - *Capacity*
 - *lack of qualified social work field/practicum instructors and preceptors*



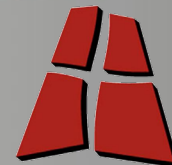
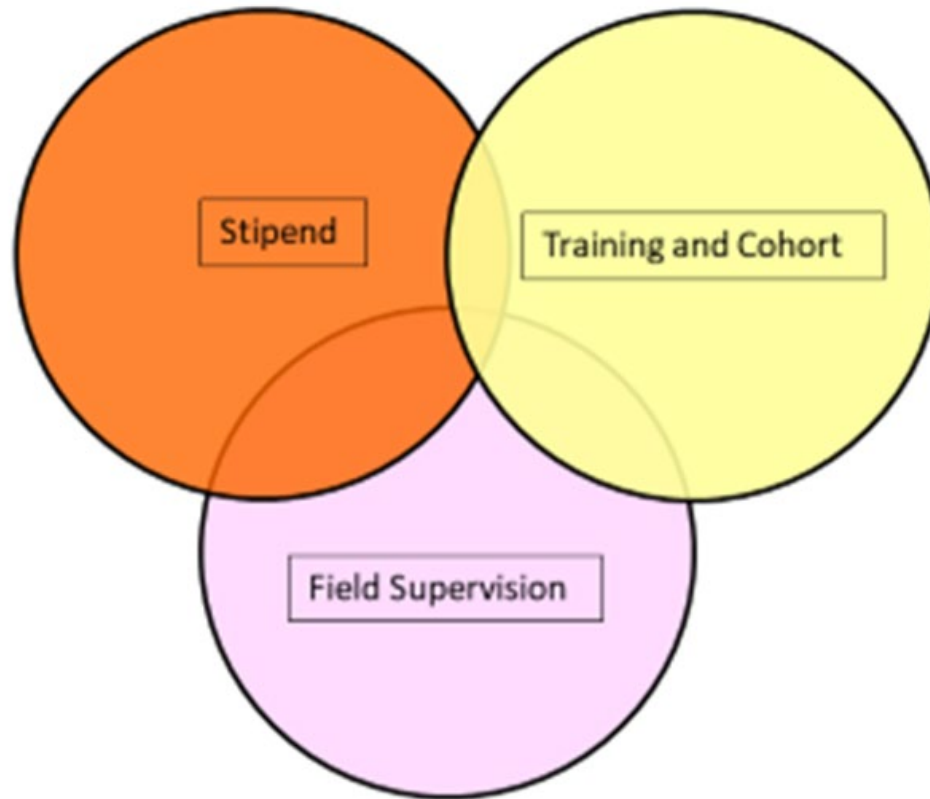
MSW Interns



- Student participation:
 - Must be in final year/specialization year of MSW program
 - Willing to participate in all trainings and evaluation
 - Field placement with homeless provider or working with homeless populations
- Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (CoC Lead) has provided a stipend per graduate \$500-\$1000
- 72 MSW interns graduated Cohorts 1-5



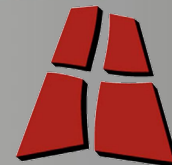
Program Components



Training Components*

Training	Date	Topic
1	September	Program Overview & Homeless Systems (pre-evaluation)
2	October	Racial Equity in Homeless Sector and Social Work
3	November	State Policy on Homelessness and Healthcare
4	December	Alumni Experiences
5	January	Youth Homelessness
6	February	LGBTQIA2S+ Homelessness
7	March	Life After Graduation
8	April	Graduation (post-evaluation)

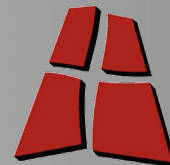
*includes self-directed specialized components in spring based on student survey



Program Evaluation

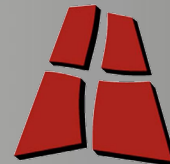
- Validated tool utilized: Attitudes Toward Homelessness Inventory (ATHI)*: 26 questions measured on first day and last day of the program
- Measure student attitudes toward homelessness
- Training evaluation also completed

* Kingree J. & Daves W. (1997). Preliminary Validation of the Attitudes Toward Homelessness Inventory. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 25(3), 265- 288.



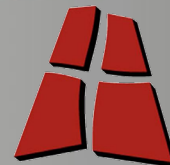
Evaluation Findings

- Most significant shifts in attitudes found in the following areas:
 - Toward direct work with homeless populations
 - Beliefs about homeless people and discrimination against homeless
 - Understanding of program costs to address homelessness
 - Role of government in addressing the homeless problem
 - Interest in pursuing a career in the homeless sector



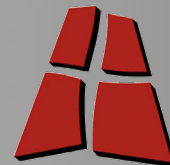
Evaluation Findings

- Program humanizes people experiencing homelessness
- University MSW Field Programs and providers continue to support the training and the program
- But the big question is always...
 - *Does a change in attitude toward homeless influence social worker career trajectory?*



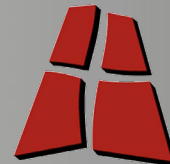
2023 Alumni Survey Preliminary Findings

- Almost 50% (n=35) alumni completed a career survey
- All alumni Cohorts 1-5 sent an online survey
- Highlights:
 - 80%: “currently working in the homeless sector” or report “always work with homeless”
 - 80%: responded agree or strongly agree “the training prepared me for a career in the homeless sector”
 - 60%: reported “the program influenced their career decision”



2023 Alumni Survey Preliminary Findings

- Highlights Those Not Working in the Homeless Sector:
 - 29%: “often work with homeless”
 - 47%: “occasionally work with homeless”



Alumni Comments

"I hope there continues to be programs encouraging people to work in homeless services."

"It gave a great foundation and understanding of the homeless sector."

"The program helped me with understanding the homeless sector which gave me an advantage over others who did not participate in the program."

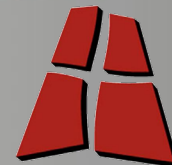
"The program provided me with support and knowledge I needed as my role as a social worker. I appreciate all the training and opportunities that were given to us to help us understand how to serve the homeless population and other marginalized communities."

"Helped me realize how much the system and the history of the homeless system affects services today."

"I hope the program continues. As a program recipient, I learned effective strategies to understanding the biases a variety of unhoused individuals face."

"The program provided a greater understanding of the homeless population."

"I seek to ultimately work with individuals experiencing homelessness. "



Looking Forward

Cohort 6:

- 24 second year/specialization year MSW Interns
- 17 unique LA County homeless placements
- 5 Southern California participating universities
- USC, CSH, APU leads of training
- Stipend pending

Grant Funding Pending:

- Examination of Homeless and Poverty specialization area for UC and CSU systems
- Compensation analysis for homeless & housing sector

