
Thinking Matters Symposium

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The Effect of the Relocation of the Oxford Street Shelter on Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

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Introduction

Increasingly, the voices of individuals experiencing homelessness are excluded from policy decisions that directly impact their lives. This study explores the opinions held by individuals experiencing homelessness in Portland, Maine, towards the City Council's recent decision to relocate the Oxford Street shelter, the area's only municipal shelter, from the city center to a site on the city limits.

Research Question

What are the narratives held by individuals experiencing homelessness regarding the relocation of the Oxford Street Shelter?

Methods

- This qualitative study was conducted on eight participants (N=8) from the homeless community that both utilize services provided by a local non-profit organization and are aware of the relocation of the Oxford Street Shelter, using availability-based nonrandom sampling.
- Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit participant perspectives on the relocation of the shelter. With the participants' permission, these interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed.
- Researchers utilized qualitative analytic strategies including grounded theory coding to identify themes.

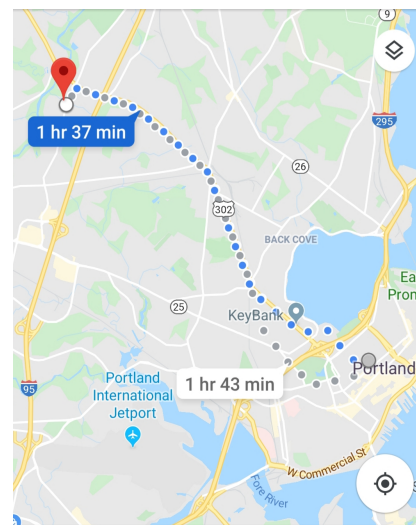
Mixed Feelings

"I do not want to hit on it before it's actually there, you never know what will happen, but this can sound promising and scary."

Transportation

"If it moves out of town or to riverside, whatever they are talking about, uh wherever they're talking about moving to, it will be harder to get food, a meal when I need one. It's like three dollars for a bus or a two hour walk each way to get a meal or a pair of pants or whatever."

Results



Ongoing Concerns

"We need better opportunities to improve our lives and leave the shelter or the streets. I don't think this was a good solution to the problem."

Lack of empowerment

"They have a bus schedule, but it never is following the schedule, it never follows the schedule, If I'm still staying at the shelter when it moves, I'mma lose my job because the bus is not timely or I can just show up super early and look crazy waiting around, you know what I'm saying?"

Discussion

This study discovered complications with both the current city shelter and the proposed new shelter location. Individuals experiencing homelessness remain unclear of what the shelter relocation means for their future. Limitations on this study include sample size; as only eight participants were interviewed. There is a lack of inclusion of homeless individuals on city choices that impact them the most. While this study was conducted locally, the results that were found mirror current national concerns.