

Interview with Genevieve Miller

This is an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved research study surrounding the encampment of people experiencing street homelessness in South Bend, IN. This research will inform the creation of a dynamic digital case study for poverty studies students and others interested in exploring the causes, consequences, and potential interventions to address encampments of people experiencing homelessness in any city. The case study will include perspectives from various stakeholders to encourage students to develop empathy and understanding for everyone impacted by this complex issue.

Genevieve Miller

Deputy Chief of Staff, Policy Director
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1. Please provide the working definition of homelessness the City uses.

There are different definitions used based on funding requirements. They are as follows:

- 24 CFR 576.2 for Emergency Solutions Grant
- 24 CFR 576.104 for Rapid Re-Housing

The Regional Planning Council is a member of Balance of State and as such is allowed to make adjustments to the prioritization according to local needs and capacity. Region 2a (St. Joseph County) approved the following prioritization:

- VI-SPDAT score
- Chronically Homeless
- Length of Time Homeless
- Active DV
- Veterans (must serve at least one day of active duty and Discharges other than honorable (including dishonorable) are accepted.
- Families

- Youth
- Single Adult

2. Please list and describe the ways the City responds to homelessness, both reactively and proactively.

Under Mayor Pete's leadership, the City has devoted more attention and funding to homelessness since the founding of the Center for the Homeless in 1988. Here is a list of some things the City has done to address homelessness:

- Established and funded a Coordinated Entry position to support the development, assessment, data collection, and management of the Coordinated Entry process and list
- Funded the expansion of addiction recovery peer coaching resources
- Supported cold-weather amnesty shelter with building and operation funds
- Committed federal Emergency Solutions grants to local shelter providers and Rapid Re-Housing efforts
- Convened a Working Group on Chronic Homelessness to generate recommendations for action and budgeted more than \$1 million to establish a temporary low-barrier homeless facility and expanded permanent supportive housing in response to those recommendations
- Participated in two PSH Institutes with community partners and the State of Indiana to develop additional permanent supportive housing: committed \$700,000 for 32 units and , committing \$1.3M for 20 units and 40 vouchers
- Provided funding for 3 case managers and leasing costs for 18 PSH units in collaboration with the Center for the Homeless
- Addiction recovery coach funding

3. Describe in more detail how the City addressed the most recent encampment of persons experiencing homelessness under the bridge downtown? What structures were in place to address this issue? What actions were taken? How were those actions discerned?

Typically the Department of Code Enforcement reaches out and assesses these situations. They reach out to DTSB (in particular, the DTSB homelessness liaison whose position is City-funded) to ensure that resources are offered. If it seems like they are planning to stay for a longer period of time, Code Enforcement lets them know that the area needs to stay clear for passersby and free of trash and litter.

If Code Enforcement needs to address the trash and litter, etc., they post a notice that reads "Notice, Violation. This area constitutes a public nuisance as defined under Municipal Code Sec. 16-53. All real or personal property must be removed within 48hrs or it will be removed by the City." They do this because they know that one person's trash is another person's treasure, and therefore they do not want to throw away something that is a personal belonging. They do not store items for anyone due to feasibility and health hazards.

4. Who were all the stakeholders in the case of this encampment? Do you think the media included the voices of all stakeholders in this issue?

In addition to the City, stakeholders included: local businesses in the area, travelers through the area, service providers, advocates of the homeless, and the people experiencing homelessness that were part of the encampment.

Code Enforcement and Police conferred on several occasions in order to handle the cleaning of the area. Police assistance was used to clear the area to allow the work to be done and to address any difficult issues if a person experiencing homelessness became upset. Code also met with Engineering to see if they had ideas for different lighting, music, changes to the sidewalk under the bridge, barricading, etc.

The media over-amplified the voices of self-described homelessness advocates and rarely highlighted the voices and work of homelessness service providers. This led to confusion about which parties were true experts on this matter.

5. Was the City's path of action always clear? If not, at what point was there the most debate regarding how to handle the situation?

The City's path of action was discussed internally and shared with the encampment and advocates. The Mayor's Office, Legal, Police and Code were the main departments that dealt with the encampment, each having a respective role: the Mayor's Office and Legal defined the policy; Code Enforcement addressed trash and litter; Police assisted by working to diffuse and difficult situations.

Well-intentioned advocates who wanted to serve the persons experiencing homelessness often did not understand or agree with the City's actions. As advocates, they prioritize who they are serving, while the City has a responsibility to understand and take action to address the broader public health and community issues.

6. Was there any response that was completely unexpected? Did this regard action or inaction? The primary response that was unexpected was the lack of

emphasis from the media on the expertise and voices of service providers. Who do you think has the power to address homelessness in this community? Did those people use that power effectively in this situation? How would you want them to use it if an encampment happened in downtown South Bend again? What could be done differently? What still needs to happen?

Mayor Pete took action on homelessness in response to crisis, leading the City to step in to make it possible for an overnight shelter to open in winter 2016. The City's steps to find and rehab a downtown building, expedite fire code inspection, and build capacity among local service providers prevented cold-weather fatalities in the South Bend winter. That intervention - characterized by moral urgency and quick action - then catalyzed the City's work to assemble the appropriate technical resources and partnerships for long-term solutions, including best-in-class facilities for permanent supportive housing. This is a regional problem - affecting many cities in our area and across the US - and is a public health, safety, and human services issue that demands county and federal solutions. Priorities moving forward include:

- Housing-first shelter provision (low-barrier intake, permanent supportive housing) is best-practice and what the City has prioritized
- Expanded funding for opioid and other substance detox and rehabilitation, which have been cut in Indiana, and the lessening of caseload restrictions for medication assisted therapy
- Bigger set of policy questions (availability of high-quality affordable housing, mental health resources, etc.)

7. What is the status of the Mayor's Working Group on Homelessness? Is it still active? How have the group's recommendations been addressed?

The Mayor charged the Working Group with defining the scope of the homelessness issue in South Bend and prioritizing needs, evaluating the City's existing assets and exploring solutions in housing, shelter, mental health and substance services, and developing a strategy and implementation guide for stakeholders. The Working Group report is a guiding document for the City's work on chronic homelessness, and the Mayor has been working consistently to deliver solutions that are both concurrent with and build upon those recommendations.

The working group recommended establishing additional permanent supportive housing and establishing a low-barrier "gateway center." The City has done the former, allocated funding for the latter, performed formal evaluation of multiple sites, and participated in multiple community discussions. Siting services for vulnerable residents

is a complex issue in any City, and the Mayor and community stakeholders have made steady progress over the past two years.

The Working Group had a defined timeframe and task. The report with recommendations was delivered in August 2017. The efforts to date have addressed pursuing more permanent supportive housing units and financial support, as well as formalizing the Coordinated entry process.

8. Anything else you want to add to this conversation before we stop? Do you have any new thoughts on homelessness at this point?

The responses above have provided a comprehensive overview of the City's previous and current work, as well as priorities for the future, related to addressing chronic homelessness in our community.