

Dr. James Girard Summer Undergraduate Research Program

Faculty Mentor – Project Application

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observations of community events, we seek to answer several research questions: 1) How do employees at these nonprofits understand homelessness, including causes and solutions to homelessness, and how does this affect the services they provide? and 2) How do these nonprofit organizations sustain the support of individual and organizational actors within a suburban community, and how might this affect services? Our goal is to better understand how nonprofit organizations serving a marginalized population provide services in a community that may not always be supportive of their work.

Literature Review

Nonprofit human services providers in suburban communities face challenges in responding to increasing need (Allard, 2017), including limited public transit infrastructure and fewer human services (Whitzman, 2006). These issues around suburban poverty, including homelessness, remain as “policy blind spots” (Murphy, 2010). With socioeconomic and political differences between urban and suburban communities, suburban nonprofits will have different opportunities and challenges. For instance, suburban communities may have more trust in criminal justice institutions than do urban communities, which has implications in how services are provided to marginalized populations (Simes & Tichenor, 2022). Additionally, suburban residents may not view homelessness as a social problem in their community, and may oppose the presence of services (Takahashi & Dear, 1997). Community organizers also face different challenges when working in a suburban environment (Geraty, 2017) compared to urban areas that have more of a history of community organizing. While both urban and suburban residents were opposed to low-income housing development, Moore (2022) found that suburban residents had a greater opposition to housing development than urban residents. All of this has implications for how homeless service nonprofits work within a suburban environment.

Despite the need for homeless services and nonprofits’ key role in providing resources, scholars have noted that these “caring sites” can be sources of control and oppression (e.g. Hennigan & Speer, 2019). Stuart (2016) describes how larger service organizations framed homelessness as due to individual failing and included punitive approaches when community members did not meet requirements. Murphy (2009) described homeless service provision at a municipal level as ambivalent poverty management where the city of San Francisco had compassionate rhetoric but with punitive approaches that did not match their “language of compassion” (p. 305). Smaller organizations may challenge these individual narratives of homelessness and punitive approaches through activism that emphasizes structural causes and radical mutual aid (Rivera et al., 2022; Stuart, 2016), although these organizations are often in the minority of homeless services. Many of these studies focus on services in urban settings, which may also be more open to radical types of activism and mutual aid structures. Suburban providers may be working in communities where people experiencing homelessness are stigmatized, and the predominant assumption within a community is that they are homeless due to their own individual choices (Okomoto & Peterson, 2022), which could shape how an organization provides services.

This research will contribute to theory on the role of nonprofits and how organizations navigate the combination of caring and punitive spaces, bringing this research to a more suburban environment. Recent scholarship on poverty and homelessness has shown that there has been an increase in policing of behaviors associated with homelessness, including sleeping in parks, loitering, panhandling, and food sharing, among others (Fisher et al., 2015; Herring et al., 2020). These laws, often at a municipal level, criminalize survival activities for people experiencing homelessness (Herring et al., 2020). Sociologists and geographers have discussed this criminalization of poverty and homelessness in conjunction with providing service and how supportive and punitive spaces coexist (e.g. DeVertuil, 2015). These supportive and punitive approaches are not necessarily exclusive as Stuart (2016) describes homeless services organizations that operate with “coercive benevolence” where criminal justice methods are used as an intake process for social services or punitive approaches are part of the helping process. This project will also look at how homeless service nonprofits may perpetuate or resist these ideas around homeless governance, and how this might look differently in suburban communities than the more commonly studied urban areas.

While nonprofits can play a role in reinforcing stigma around homelessness, nonprofit organizations can also help to address the stigmatization of people experiencing homelessness (Okamoto & Peterson, 2022). This project hopes to help scholars and activists better understand the role that nonprofits play in perpetuating or offering new ideas around homelessness. The way that homeless service providers perceive homelessness can affect how services are provided, and how they serve as resource brokers in a policy area often ignored by policy makers. How do these organizations negotiate their relationships with other organizational actors in the community? In this negotiation, are they also able to be part of debates or change perceptions of stigmatized populations? We hope that these contributions to the nonprofit literature will improve our collective nonprofit and policy response.

Approach/Methodology

This Summer Undergraduate Research Experience will be part of a joint research partnership with a researcher at Washington University. For this study, we will conduct a qualitative case study of homeless service nonprofits in four suburban counties that includes semi-structured interviews and participant observation of community events. TBT/?55.36ls Tfv3a1 0 60.00000912 0 612 7a612 7

organizational budget, type of funding, religious affiliation (or lack thereof), demographics of executive director, and types of homeless services provided (outreach, permanent housing, emergency shelter). We will primarily outreach through each county's Continuum of Care meeting- a federally mandated local planning body that includes all organizations in that county receiving federal funding for homeless services- but will conduct additional follow-up to organizations not part of Continuum of Care meetings. We currently have made connections with Continuum of Care leadership in two counties, so this will assist in contacting nonprofit organizations. Interview questions include the history and mission of the organization, how they understand homelessness as a problem, their proposed solutions to homelessness, the relationship to other organizations in the community, the challenges and opportunities of being located in a suburban environment, among others. All interviews will be recorded with the permission of the respondent and transcribed.

Participant observation will include Continuum of Care meetings, conferences and trainings for service providers, and community events in the four counties. The goal of observations will be to better understand how homeless service organizations engage in their community, how discussions of homelessness are framed, and how organizations might serve as resource brokers within suburban communities. Field notes will only be collected with permission and will include direct observations, as well as reflections by the observers. We will also document asides and commentaries that arise during field notes in a separate section (Emerson et al., 2011).

NVIVO qualitative software will be used to categorize and analyze data. We will use a combination of inductive and deductive approaches to coding, the process of labeling qualitative data as the first step in qualitative analysis, as outlined in the "twenty-first century" approach to flexible coding (Deterding and Waters, 2017). This approach is appropriate for larger studies with multiple coders and allows for the combination of deductive theory-based coding with pre-determined codes based on theoretical frameworks, along with inductive coding with new codes to capture new insights. All members of the research team will code interviews and field notes and will meet virtually to discuss discrepancies, along with questions, insights, and patterns that emerge. We will write memos throughout data collection, including memos of emergent findings and initial patterns; memos that recorded impressions and key themes from interviews; and integrative memos that made connections between fieldnotes and interview excerpts and emerging findings. Since interviews occur during a time when many political events are happening, including a presidential election, we will document the time period in which the interview or event occurred and how that may have influenced content.

Following the coding process, we will categorize the coded data into relevant themes, checking to see if the themes work within the data set (Clarke et al, 2015). This dataset will provide an opportunity to identify variation between and within counties and states. Through analysis, we will compare challenges, key decisions, and discourse between organizations and geographic locations as well as identify key themes. Drawing from critical theory, we include an evaluation of our role in this research and how positionalities shaped data collection and analysis (Madison, 2011). We will meet and share emerging findings with key nonprofits as a form of member-checking and then share a report of findings with respondents

As an outcome of this research, we plan to develop manuscripts- either for Social Work journals that include an organizational focus- Social Service Review or Human Services Organization: Management, Leadership, & Governance, or leading interdisciplinary journals for nonprofit research, such as Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly. After the 2024-2025 year, in addition to manuscript preparation, we have several outcomes to contribute to social work teaching and practice. Through this project, we will develop case studies to be used in courses that examine service provision in a suburban environment. In addition to academic presentations, we will share findings with funders, government, and community organizations through National Alliance to End Homelessness annual meeting in July 2025 as well as statewide homelessness convenings.

Mentorship Plan

This summer research experience is designed for students who are interested in qualitative research in the social sciences and research at the organizational and community level. In undergraduate research courses, students are often only briefly introduced to qualitative research project, so this will give a student an opportunity to better understand the different components of qualitative research and gain hands-on experience with these components. We will meet weekly throughout the time period, either zoom or in-person. During these meetings, we will discuss goals, debrief from previous research activities, and discuss key research topics. Students will also have the opportunity to be part of larger research team meetings that include researchers from Lewis University and Washington University.

As part of ongoing training and mentorship, I will first provide an introduction around housing and homeless and then discuss the process of conducting literature reviews and data collection methods, including participant observation and interviews. In the beginning, students will also have the opportunity to shadow researchers on interviews and observations before conducting interviews themselves, and we will debrief after data collection is completed. After data collection and transcription is underway, we will discuss methods for data analysis, including developing a coding scheme; working on analysis as part of a research team; and how coding can be used to generate themes.

Towards the end of the summer research mentorship, we will discuss initial finding and prepare presentation abstracts. If students are interested in continuing with this work and being part of papers during the 2024-2025 school year, there will be a small paid research opportunity through a Lewis Research Initiation Award to continue with transcription and interview coding as well as manuscript preparation.

Proposed Timeline that includes Aims and/or Goals

Researchers at Lewis University and Washington University will secure IRB approval and begin initial contacts during the spring semester. Once the student is selected, we will have them begin their IRB application and complete the necessary CITI models. This is a larger project that will continue into the 2024-2025 academic year, but through the summer activities, students will be able to experience all aspects of a qualitative research project.

We will begin with an overview of the project and having the student first shadow during interviews. The month of June would be focused on literature reviews, data collection, and transcription. During July, while continuing to work on data collection and transcription, we will also begin data analysis. As part of data analysis discussions, the student researcher will participate in larger research team meetings to develop the coding scheme. In early August, we will also discuss emerging themes; any changes to analysis; and preparing abstracts for publication.

10 weeks would not be enough time to complete a qualitative research project, but we have the following goals:

- Developing a literature review for one potential manuscript (primarily in June)
- Transcription, memo-writing, and coding for 4-5 interviews (ongoing; coding will begin in mid-July)
- Participation in developing a coding scheme (July)
- Development of preliminary findings and preparation of presentation abstract

Based on students' interest and transportation, we will also develop goals as to how many interviews and community events they would like to attend and complete. These aims help to lay the groundwork for continuing research and preparing publications during the 2024-2025 year.

Okamoto, K. E., & Peterson, B. L. (2022). Resurrecting and appending identities: The role of nonprofits in managing stigmatized identity. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 51(2), 389-409.

Rivera, I., Elwood, S., & Lawson, V. (2022). Portraits for change: Refusal politics and liberatory futures. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 40(4), 627-645.

including Preparing for Graduate or Professional School, Presentation Skills, Interview Skills, Resume Writing and Marketing, or Mock Presentation