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Justice from the Perspective of the Poor and Homeless

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Thesis Summary

Justice from the Perspective of the Poor and Homeless is a report that reflects both an academic review of homelessness and qualitative reporting on how the Columbia homeless and poor populations interact with society. The aim of the thesis is to provide a wider look of just what homeless people face as they move through life in Columbia. To do this, I look through the lens of “rule of law” and use qualitative interviewing of homeless/poor and provide the conversations as a foundation to explain how homeless people interact with medical rights, employment rights and other areas of interest. As a resident of Columbia, this thesis serves to educate the reader and local population of the pertinent issues that many in the city currently face thereby informing how we react individually and collectively towards homelessness. Knowing this, the thesis does not serve to *find* as much as *tell*.

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Justice from the Perspective of the Poor and Homeless

Introduction

Each January a “point in time count” is made around the United States. A point in time count tries to best measure the number of sheltered and unsheltered homeless people at a given time. This initiative is spearheaded by HUD (Department of Housing and Urban Development) and is emblematic of other studies that seek to measure and define the homeless population. For the South Carolina 2018 HUD report, they found (among many other things¹) that there were 3,933 homeless persons in the state (CoC Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Reports). Studies like this explain the homeless population based on general trends and themes such as medical care use, employment statistics, and incarceration rates. These studies are extremely helpful and useful in understanding the homeless population. However, in what ways are homeless people systemically left out of large, numerical studies? How might nuance be overlooked in studies that focus on large trends? How do homeless people navigate housing in Columbia? How might homeless people in Columbia describe their own experience devoid of top-down reports? This project addresses these questions among many others. While mindful and appreciate of high-level quantitative assessment, it is dually important to understand the needs and perspectives of homeless people from the voices of those who have lived and are living that very experience.

¹ The report details information about gender, race, household type, among other demographic questions

Homelessness can seemingly be like a Chinese finger trap in that once you're in, the grip just gets tighter and tighter. The fact of the matter is that Americans are closer to experiencing homelessness than many people believe. An analysis of the financial statistics of Americans reveals that 39% said that they have enough in savings to cover a \$1000 emergency, while 34% had no savings at all (Martin 2018). While there is access to short term loans and personal loans, the barrier between homelessness and having a home is thinner than people may realize.

Ultimately, this thesis is a report of the sobering reality of what it can mean to be homeless while also providing an understanding of how homeless people interact with society and rule of law in a broad sense. In addition, this thesis also expands knowledge for the reader through the process of discussing various aspects of homeless and poor people's lives in Columbia and how this might be at odds with what is commonly written and reported. To do this, I have conducted interviews with people who were homeless or have been at some point². This project began the spring of 2018 while taking the SCHC course "Advancing Rule of Law and Human Rights in a Turbulent World" taught by Dr. Smith. Through conversations with Professor Gordon Smith, I began to question how homeless people experience different parts of society. Importantly, in the class we discussed top down versus bottom up approaches to social interventions. While not specifically tied to this issue, I began to think about how homeless issues could be understood by listening to the voices of those who are homeless in place of using macro-level analysis. What might homeless people say about change brought by the city

² All of these interviews were conducted at Fresh Start at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Columbia, SC and was approved by the IRB. No personal identifying information was collected from the homeless.

of Columbia? How might their experience differ from what the literature or common thinking generally presents?

After discussing how the thesis could be completed, Professor Smith directed me to Fresh Start in Columbia which serves as a haven for homeless people, particularly residents of the historic Waverly neighborhood. Every Thursday and alternating Saturdays, they offer food, clothes, bathing, laundry, bus passes and HIV testing to anyone of need. The leader of the initiative, the Reverend Deacon Dianna Deaderick³, connected me with people at Fresh Start to interview.

The interview portion of the project consisted of half hour conversations⁴ (ranging from 15 to 45 minutes). All the names used in the report are not the true names of those interviewed so as to protect their identity. Through the advice of my second reader Dr. Bret Kloos, I decided to format this thesis by outlining the interview I had with each person and then incorporate a related topic following the interview. By being involved in academic research in Political Science I came to appreciate the need for pure, objective fact-driven research. The combination of the subjective portion of the interviews paired with objective academic style writing ultimately is a mixture that works for this topic and thesis. At times, I will be using a *personal* tone as I will also include personal reflection following the interviews.

It is important to note that the information collected through my conversations with homeless people reflect certain response bias. By this, I mean that the people I interviewed had the option to reveal or not reveal whatever information they choose. I cannot guess what they

³ Dianna Deaderick will be the final interview of the project

⁴ Interview Questions can be read in the Appendix, page 48

did not tell me, what they may have exaggerated, or what was misleading. Also, as a self-described student at U of SC doing a report on homelessness for a thesis, I am sure that this itself brings about certain response bias.

Lastly, all of the interviews will be notated in italics and constitute a short synopsis of the content of the interview. I found this to be the best way to relate their story since it best represents their perspective, without compromising their identity and security (if I recorded and relayed exact quotes). I collected all of the information by taking physical notes during each interview as I did not want to audio record the conversations in respect to privacy and to ensure the highest level of comfort for the participants. After each interview I wrote down extensive notes on protected word documents, which I then transposed to the thesis. I plan on distributing copies of the thesis to Fresh Start for the participants to be able to read the work they contributed to making. Any quote directly from the participant will contain quotes while everything else in italics is a reconstruction of what was said. My final section in the thesis will be highlighting an interview with Dianna Deaderick who runs the Fresh Start Ministry, helped me set up the interviews, and is an active member in the homeless services community.

I would like to thank Professor Gordon Smith for the mentorship he has provided throughout this project as well as the class he teaches that sparked my interest in this topic. Professor Bret Kloos (second reader) was also instrumental in helping me learn how to interview and go through the IRB and interviewing process. I would also like to thank Dr. Tobias Heinrich with whom I have conducted research with during my time at U of SC as he helped me grow as an academic researcher.

1: Interview with Shay

Shay⁵ is an older homeless man from Columbia. He has been living in a camp by a river in Columbia for the past few years – winter and all. Shay said that this was a choice after he decided to leave his job in the restaurant service industry. He worked for years as a chef but experienced neck trouble and could not afford healthcare. He said that the pain and ailment became too much to work so he decided to quit his job and became homeless shortly thereafter.

Shay went on to say that he hopes that he can work again in the future and be a cook. While he said that he is happy with his living situation, he acknowledged that he knows he cannot live in a camp forever. He said that water, bathing and exposure are the main problems he faces. In retrospect, he said he wishes he took his education more seriously as he said when people get to be his age, they realize what they wish they took advantage of in the past.

Shay has been incarcerated before. He does not think that society has failed him; instead, he said that he has been his own worst enemy and that he could not blame the justice system for his own mistakes. With respect to services available in Columbia, Shay said that public transport has gotten better in recent years but that medical care for homeless people is lacking. He says that hospitals will treat him for certain things but that clinics fail in regard to availability and scope for the homeless populations. While he may be living in a camp for now, he is hopeful he can get on disability and have income in the near future.

⁵ Again, all names used are not real.

Personal Reflection / Impact of Criminal History

Shay's self-awareness of his past actions and situation was illuminating. I found this evocative and important to understand and highlight. One generalization of homeless people is that they are looking for handouts and generally have not taken responsibility. Yet, multiple people I talked to (including Shay) repeated to me that they made their own bad decisions and that ultimately they were responsible.

While the acknowledgement of personal responsibility is novel and good to hear, it does not erase the influence of their criminal history on their present situation. In truth, many people are still facing consequences for their past criminal actions through a criminal record's impact on the ability to find employment. The impact of a criminal record on employment can be crippling and can mirror the punishment already incurred during time spent behind bars. While the punishment for severe crimes results in time spent in jail, this issue begs the question of how criminals might still be receiving punishment years down the line in terms of employment application judgement.

Related to this topic is a scary trend that homeless people can at times feel forced to commit crimes to get off the streets for the winter. In fact, it is reported that out of a survey population of homeless, 30% said that they had committed a petty crime in hopes of being able to spend the night or more in shelter i.e. jail (Ramesh and editor 2010). The relationship between homelessness and the prison system runs both ways in that those imprisoned run a high risk of recidivism or leaving jail and immediately becoming homeless. In a study in Norway, a third of inmates were homeless prior to jail time, but two-thirds entered homelessness upon leaving jail (Dyb 2009). This article made an interesting point in that imprisonment and

homelessness are two forms of social marginalization. Looked at through this light, the two can be better understood and compared. While to many it will seem extreme for a person to commit a crime to go to jail, to a homeless person facing extreme decisions this can seem quite rational.

Statistically, racial disparities worsen the existing problem of employment outcomes. For a black male, the effects of a criminal record when applying for a job affects them 40% more than a white male applicant (Pager 2003). And this is not to say that the white population's employment opportunities are not also hurt; white candidates with a criminal record received 50% fewer callbacks than the white population without a criminal record (Pager 2003). While the effect of a criminal record hurts most if not all applicants, it especially targets the black population – which statistically already faces more incarceration than the white population thus worsening their employment outcomes as a whole. In the same study, an experimental audit was run using actual employment applications to best study the phenomena (Pager 2003). These facts are revealing as the homeless population can easily accrue a record through jail seeking behavior and this follows them through life as they apply for jobs.

The infrastructure behind job applications is weighted against poor populations. The majority of employers now use public or private firms to initiate background checks of applicants (Uggen et al. 2014). Yet, sometimes background checks reveal not only convictions but also arrests that may not have even led to any charges or convictions. As a college student, it is rather normal to hear of a college student getting a minor crime "expunged" or removed from his/her record. For more serious crimes, people with access to money can hire a lawyer to represent them and work to make sure their record is clean. The stark truth is that people on

the street do not have the means to fight their criminal records. This raises important questions about the equity of access in regard to the rule of law. It seems that employment background laws disproportionately target those unable to defend themselves in the court of law – at least to the same extent that others are able to. This, again, adds to the web of homelessness.

The backdrop for background checks is based in a case brought before the Supreme Court in 1976⁶ where the topic of arrest/criminal records was brought before the court. The question at hand was whether a city could essentially post a list of shoplifters across a town. Ultimately, the majority of the court found that criminal or arrest records were not subject to a citizen's right to privacy. Certain cases could be tried for defamation, but this opened the door to allow arrest and background records to be publicly available. More than ever background checks are being used, particularly in private renting applications (Thacher 2008).

Recently a movement called “Ban the Box” has gained popularity around the United States. This initiative seeks to delay inquiries and questions about criminal records until later in the hiring process. The reason behind this is to first look at an applicant’s qualifications before ruling them out based on a background check (Ban the Box n.d.).

Connected to the analogy of the “web of homelessness”, in the literature there exists an idea of situational delinquency. Situational delinquency describes crimes that can at least partly occur as a result of adverse situations like extreme poverty or homelessness (McCarthy and Hagan 1992). This challenges beliefs that crime occurs on a sole basis of choice devoid of environmental and external factors. In point of fact, there is evidence that hunger produces

⁶ Paul v. Davis 424 U.S. 693 (1976)

petty theft, and being on the streets induces crimes like theft and prostitution (McCarthy and Hagan 1992). With this in mind, the previous discussion on employment issues is even more salient. The second a person falls into homelessness they become more likely to build a criminal record based on environment. This topic provides a foundation for discourse about ideas of fairness, justice, and how society works to reprimand and rehabilitate those who have committed crimes.

As a community, lawmakers and community advocates have to come to a compromise that discourages crime without hampering future employment opportunities. If not, as shown through previous research, crime will only continue to flourish if people stagnate in homelessness with lessened opportunity for work.

2: Interview with Carl

Carl, a middle-aged black man, was born and raised in Columbia. Carl had been employed for a long time as a receiving clerk in Columbia. The recession hit in 2008 and around that time he lost his job and became homeless for 2.5 years. He ended up hearing about an abandoned car from people he knew in the area. From then, he began staying in the abandoned car. At one point, he said he almost died from the flu while staying in the car without any heat during the winter. He eventually found housing once he started receiving government benefits that he could receive once he turned a certain age. While he has looked for employment, he thinks his age has been a factor in his inability to find work.

Speaking from his experience being homeless, he said that food was never a concern in Columbia. In fact, he described the food situation as candy falling from the sky. However, what he did have concern over was safety. Carl thinks that safety has gotten markedly worse in Columbia over time. While safety was a concern, Carl said that particular areas are known to be unsafe and that knowing to avoid certain areas is important. Related to this, he had positive interactions with the police, who he said, understood his plight. When he spoke about safety, it was clear that this was a main concern of his while he was homeless.

Carl spoke at length about how homeless people can be better served in Columbia. He said that a main tenet should be to have a mix of independence and guidance. Building on this, he stated that some homeless people hate to follow rules, but that steps and guidance are necessary in order to get people up off of their feet. Yet, the balance between guidance and freedom is a complex relationship. Carl questioned why people wait till it freezes to help out homeless people. Related to this, Carl said it is common for homeless people to commit crimes

to be incarcerated for a very specific amount of time- the length of winter. He said it is not uncommon for homeless to commit a crime so that they can be arrested and put in jail for the winter so that they have housing, food, and warmth. The last important thing Carl and I discussed was money management. He commented on how it is very risky to carry cash as a homeless person but it is difficult to have a bank account while homeless and potentially without documents.

Personal Reflection / Integration into Society

Unfortunately, it is hard to criticize people's logic to commit crimes to have shelter during the winter. The point of incarceration is to disincentivize bad behavior and crime, not encourage it. While this is a small sample, it does show the length to which homeless people will go to find safety and stability as previously discussed after the conversation with Shay.

There are a couple of things wrong with this behavior. First of all, this adds to cyclical homelessness by being incarcerated for much of the year, not being able to improve their situation, and building a criminal record. Secondly, on a societal basis this is a bad reflection of services for those who need it that they resort to being incarcerated in order to feel safe and healthy. Lastly, the government ultimately pays for incarceration, yet if they were to take these funds and channel them to help homeless people, crime can be markedly reduced.

Another topic that Carl and I discussed was money management. While I offer no solid solution to money management for homeless people, it is a rarely discussed issue how homeless people manage important documents and banking. To a larger extent than just banking, in order to receive certain help from the government or other resources, people need

to be able to identify who they are. Simply stated, it is hard for some homeless people to prove who they are without documentation on hand. Many government benefits as well as basic money management requires an address. Other interactions with society like voting also require an address. As a society, a basic upgrade for homeless people would be to allow them to have a permanent address be it a postal service box or local churches, etc in order to provide a gateway to interface with parts of society.

Many homeless people in Columbia are natives to the city. If the city belongs to anyone, these people who have lived their entire lives here have a big stake. With this in mind, it widened my eyes to hear a homeless man rhetorically ask why people wait till homeless people are freezing for the city to help them. The truth of the matter is, like anything, until something is urgent there is something else that is a higher priority. But the reality is that everyday living on the streets is an urgent, pressing matter to the individual and community.

With this in mind, it is important to discuss how homeless people interface with society. Homeless people inarguably go through what can be described as a split from everyday society. Carl spoke about how there has to be a middle ground between guiding homeless people by the hand and having a lot of independence in how society helps homeless people. This subject is key- what services and actions best fit the majority of homeless people? In order to answer questions like this it is first necessary to know how being homeless changes interactions with society.

In one follow up study of rehoused homeless people in Milan, Hanover and Dublin, researchers found that newly housed homeless people experienced social isolation and loneliness when leaving homelessness and moving into housing. However, the newly-housed

people strived in having independent, autonomous housing. Importantly, the researchers noted that housing is a requirement for homeless people to begin a road up, but other factors such as employment, health and financial responsibility need to also be addressed (Busch-Geertsema 2005). Social integration remains a centerpiece of proper health but can lead to bad consequence as well. Many of the conversations referenced letting the bad people they hang around go and that helped them get out of their circumstance.

These conclusions echo the sentiment from Carl and others later in the conversations. There seem to be certain truths in respect to homelessness, but at the end of the day each person is homeless for very specific reasons. While there are similar denominators like the need for housing and income, the means by which they are needed differs by person. So, while a broad range of services can help certain aspects of people's lives, individual attention seems to be a key to completely understand a homeless person's needs. Unlike other large issues, homelessness has diverse causes and equally diverse solutions.

In general, a theme of the conversations has been the importance of individual attention and specialization of services and needs. In the previously mentioned case study in Milan, Hanover and Dublin, researchers found the importance of social networks among homeless people:

“All three studies underlined the heterogeneity of the target group and revealed significant differences, even though a ‘pre-selection’ had taken place (i.e. a focus on single homeless people with special difficulties). The need for flexibility and individually tailored support both before and after re-housing in a flat was evident. This corroborates the criticism against rigid staircase-systems with fixed and relatively long

periods of stay in special schemes, as well as against any other standardized model for reintegration. There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution (Busch-Geertsema 2005)”

For Fresh Start (where the interviews were held) the two people who started the initiative not only put a face to the service, but place expectations on the clients who come to Fresh Start. There seems to be a need for personal interaction within the homeless population’s support system and a lot of it may come from external sources being able to hold homeless people somewhat accountable⁷.

There are two main takeaways from the case study on re-housed homeless people in Milan, Hanover and Dublin. First, many of the people interviewed say that what helped them in the uphill battle out of homelessness was to get away from people who are bad influences. In the Milan case study, the theme of the interpersonal interactions was the focus on the individual. While homeless initiatives are group-based ventures, what homeless people seem to need is individual attention and help. In fact, even if the substantial help is the same, it seems to be important if it comes from an individual or friend. I think most people would agree that help from a friend or family member often is more helpful and long-lasting. However, there is a need for nuance as some homeless people lack both close family and friends.

Another reason this may be so effective is the wide causes of homelessness. In a study of homelessness, researchers find how widely homelessness causes can vary by public crowding and housing, mental illness, and the labor market (Honig and Filer 1993). Ultimately, people fall through the cracks for a number of reasons. An analogy can be made medical treatments-

⁷ Shown both through literature and the interviews

treating a symptom not the cause does not help the patient. Similarly, giving a homeless person help without helping their root cause is a temporary fix to a long-term problem.

3: Interview with John

John is a veteran and a black man in his 60s who has been homeless but is not currently. He now volunteers at Fresh Start. One of the first things he said is that homeless people have to be willing to help themselves otherwise nothing will bring them up out of their position. John himself came back from homelessness and is now successfully off of the streets. The second thing he wanted to clear up was that the perception of homeless people is not accurate to who they actually are. One of his thoughts is that people have to show homeless people how to improve their situation, not ask why they are homeless in the first place. By this, he was talking about how people tend to complain or point to their position in society and not show them how to improve their own life. With this in mind, he said that often homeless people and society have the same thoughts about homeless people- and someone has to be the difference-maker in that equation.

In reference to the difference making, he said that food was not the problem in Columbia. Related to this, he said that giving money to homeless people on the street does not help anything and is not a good idea. He said that the best result that places like Fresh Start can give is to have homeless people leave in better spirits. He spoke to the importance of mental health of homeless people and how that impacts everyday life. In regard to hygiene, he questioned how a homeless person could get a job while looking bad, smelling bad and feeling poorly about themselves. Appearance is critical to him as he said it affects what other people see and what homeless people think about themselves.

John spoke at length about the paradox of being homeless. He said that people will not help, or look poorly upon homeless people, which helps no one. As he said earlier, these

thoughts reinforce ideas homeless people already have about themselves. This idea impacts the job search as he says that it is very common for employers immediately to turn away a job candidate once they realize that he/she is homeless. John wanted to let the reader know a piece of advice: don't look down on a brother unless you are helping him up.

Another important conversation topic was about the high price of low-income housing in Columbia. The normal going rate for weekly housing is around \$150, or around \$600 a month according to John. In response, John said he feels that the attitude of city government is to put homeless away not help them. He referenced certain closures and rejections of proposals for helping downtown as he said that the government wants to push impoverished people out of the downtown areas.

Personal Reflection / Analysis of Scarlett Letter of Homelessness

My conversation with John was one of the more illuminating interviews. At the beginning, John spoke about common perceptions of homeless people and the presumptions people hold. I found this compelling in that we assign a story or reason to people on the street without knowing what and who they are. John had a lot of insight on how people can better understand and help the homeless population. John's message about the paradox of homelessness is important to note as it connects with larger themes of the thesis. John's observation of the judgement among homeless people and from the outside population connects to a theme that closely resembles a "Scarlett Letter". Simply being homeless can manifest problems as a result of the surrounding stigma. Earlier I stated that this distinction has

been historical, and indeed it has – in some cases poor people receiving public assistance have had to wear certain badges or shirts (Phelan et al. 1997). This is quite literally a mark on the person and distinction from society. Phelan shows that homelessness and mental hospitalization are shown to be negative even compared to a poor person, and warrant “social distance”. Yet, they also say that mental hospitalization invokes compassion while homelessness does not (Phelan et al. 1997).

These results are shocking for a couple of reasons. First of all, the causes of homelessness are vast, ranging from housing markets to labor markets (Honig and Filer 1993). Yet people usually blame homelessness on individual failings like laziness, alcoholism or things of similar nature. Perhaps most confusing is the "mark" of homelessness is seen as a permanent disgrace not an opportunity for rehabilitation and reintroduction to society. When a hard criminal goes to jail, it seems natural to have a goal of rehabilitation. However, when someone loses a home and starts living on the streets, it seems too often the mindset is that it is impossible to move back up into the world: particularly with respect to employment. Recently, there has been an upsurge in people with felonies being able to get jobs and employment (Mullaney 2018). I think that this same endeavor can spread to that homelessness and everyone can see a positive benefit – homeless people will be able to have more income; the economy will benefit.

The idea of writing off homeless people is harmful for a number of reasons. One of the first things that is important to highlight is that some of the volunteers at Fresh Start have been homeless in the past. The same people who once would have been on the receiving end of homeless services are the ones giving back to the community. Not only did they overcome their

circumstances, a lot of them did so by relying on the people they knew like Carl who slept in a car his friends let him sleep in, or the people at Fresh Start who assist some people who desperately need money for rent.

Ultimately, John's ability to describe the plain discrepancy is clear: the perceptions facing homeless people are harmful to the population. A recognition of the possibility of people who are homeless dignifies their humanity and can ultimately lead to better service provided by society.

4: Interview with Jack and Jill

Jack and Jill are a married couple who have experienced off and on homelessness since 2008 mainly in Columbia but also in Kansas. The main storyline from Jack and Jill is demystifying the concept of the saving nature of employment. Jill has been employed by a food service employer for much of this time. Yet, that was not enough. And, when she became pregnant, and could not work towards the end of her pregnancy, they both became homeless. Once she gave birth, she lost custody of her newborn as she did not have current permanent housing.

Jack and Jill both feel that one bad apple spoils the bunch in respect to homelessness. They both feel that some homeless people define the whole population through bad behavior. They lament that they are working hard to improve their situation and feel as though they are marginalized on account of a group that does not define who they are. To describe how they feel, they made the analogy that society has a one size fits all approach to homelessness with no one going deep into why people are experiencing homelessness. Rather than focusing on landlords, Jack and Jill have the most dissatisfaction with the state of the economy in Columbia. They both expressed incredible frustration at the high prices of Columbia housing. Fortunately, they now have a place to live.

When they were homeless, they lived underneath a bridge and Jack, the husband, would stay up nights to keep an eye out for Jill while she slept. Most mornings they described how they would be shooed off by police officers around 5-6 AM. Jack and Jill talked about the extreme nature of being homeless and the toll this has on everyday living. Jill talked about the importance of bus transportation in the city and uses an unlimited bus pass that she pays for monthly. They reiterated a common theme that food is not an issue for Columbia homeless.

Instead, they wish that there would be more support for job searches. While in Kansas, they felt that the services were more personalized and job focused. They both said that this approach could help Columbia and that there should be less general guidance and more individual support and dialogue.

Personal Reflection and Analysis of Medical Care for homeless people

Going into the conversations and projects I thought that landlords would be a prime area of contention. However, Jack and Jill (like others) point to the economy in the Columbia housing market, not individual landlords as the root of the housing problem. Ultimately, this theme extended throughout the project and will be discussed later on in this thesis.

Another main point from our conversation was the extraordinary everyday responsibilities of homeless people including essentially night watch while they lived underneath a bridge. While this is one example, living on the streets does not coincide with more time, something some people like to think about homeless i.e. why not go get a job. The minute a person gets on the streets considerable time is spent planning nights, moving, walking, finding food wherever that may be. The road out is tough, complicated and long. For me, the scariest part is hearing stories of people like Jack and Jill who now have a place but are still on the edge. The real question is how to help people get out of homelessness and the edge between stability and the streets.

However, most importantly this conversation leads into an overview of how medical rights seen in the literature fit into the stories heard by fellow Columbians. Medical care responses during my conversations have been varied with some listing medical access as their

biggest problem while for others it was not a concern. While this difference exists, the literature states that approximately 25% of homeless people are reported as not being able to receive medical care and around 60% had at least one ambulatory visit to a hospital (Kushel, Vittinghoff, and Haas 2001).

Moreover, according to a study done at hospitals in Toronto, 25% of homeless people in the city experienced a hospitalization in the previous year. And, on average, the cost of discharge for an admitted homeless client is around \$2500 greater than for a housed patient (Hwang et al. 2011). Specifically, in regard to psychiatric conditions, the authors speculate that the limited nature of mental health services for homeless people make their admittance to the hospital coincide with more severe conditions. Homeless people wait until the last second to go to the hospital and are therefore harder to help.

While medical care falls on socioeconomic lines, the white population is twice more likely to receive medical care than the black community (O'Toole et al. 1999). Furthermore, even veterans who qualify for insurance do not all receive benefits, with almost half of homeless veterans not having insurance (Kushel, Vittinghoff, and Haas 2001). These trends both point to the ineffectiveness and unavailability of medical care for homeless people.

Another national study found that the homeless population is four times as likely to experience a hospitalization and, on a whole, receives much more acute care than the housed population. So, while homeless people are receiving more hospitalization and acute care, they also exhibit more advanced cases of illnesses and developed diseases.

How does this relate to homeless people in Columbia? As a society, it is important to figure out how homeless people's medical care influences the rest of the medical system. With

the high amount of acute hospitalization and ambulatory use, the housed population, homeless population, and city-wide economy are all hurt. For the homeless population, their use is correlated with terrible symptoms, often at the later end of an ailment or treatment. This further alienates the homeless community by disincentivizing them to receive long term care, while only receiving acute emergency care for severe cases. In fact, the United Way of the Midlands published a Health Care and Homelessness Report that stated 5% of the homeless population incurred 48% of Medicaid charges (Health Care and Homelessness Report). A cornerstone to someone getting out of a bad situation is their physical and mental health. Without these services, homeless people cannot reasonably be expected to raise themselves successfully. Furthermore, the nature of their situation comes with an inherent set of dangers including but not limited to exposure, illness, and injury.

Secondly, this pattern of lack of resources and behavior that waits until care is urgent affects the housed populations. As emergency services are disproportionately used by the homeless population and those on Medicare, these services become less useful and available to the rest of the population. So, not only are homeless people not being served to the best extent, this behavior then impedes the rest of the population's ability to receive proper emergency services. This can lead to further problems and more cost on the health care system if people are not being treated initially with the best care possible.

Finally, the impact on the economy is substantial. Unfortunately, it appears to me that a logical fallacy exists in respect to medical care for homeless people. From the outside, it would seem that paying a lot for medical clinics and more coverage for homeless people would be costly. However, the cost of treating homeless for weeks or months after an illness or injury

began is much more costly than treating something at the outset. Secondly, the stress on the health of homeless people inhibits potential economic gain from their incorporation back into the economy through employment and buying power.

In fact, living in homelessness can cause an environment that can produce lots of illnesses. One study concludes: "nutritional deficits, lack of shelter and clothing, poor hygiene, exposure to the elements, and a lack of health care all contribute to the health problems among the homeless" (Sachs-Ericsson et al. 1999). In addition, common illnesses like a cold or flu can escalate in the homeless population to much more serious issues. As noted earlier, homeless people often use more acute services and delay hospitalization. The results of the study that measured how homeless people use medical services reveal that 70.8% said that they were receiving care because their condition had recently gotten worse while only 12% said that the reason they were seeking care was that they had just recently begun having a medical problem (Sachs-Ericsson et al. 1999). The larger trends that the authors produce reflect homeless people's heightened vulnerability to ailments while simultaneously not receiving care until their conditions had worsened to extreme measures.

Among barriers previously discussed, the study also states that homeless people's past experience with disrespect by medical professionals can dissuade them from pursuing medical care (Sachs-Ericsson et al. 1999). One solution proposed by the author was to tailor more services specifically to homeless people. In their study, they found that homeless people were more likely to use services tailored to their needs, such as a free clinic as opposed to a traditional emergency room. This information can be used to better care for homeless people in

Columbia. Some, like Mike (who is yet to be discussed) have cancer and need long term care while others like Carl could have used assistance while having the flu in winter.

5: Interview with Shari

Shari is a middle-aged black woman from South Carolina. At the start of the conversation, Shari immediately began to turn the conversation to landlords and property managers. She feels especially frustrated about the condition of apartments around Columbia. Specifically, she mentioned that the landlords do not care for the tenants living conditions including mold and decay. She said that people do not get what they pay for in Columbia and that she feels no one is caring about this issue. From what she has seen, the lowest rent for people like her is around \$500 a month. She says for a lot of people the only way to make it into housing is to pool resources.

Shari looks down upon the 'gimme' culture of homelessness and stated that homeless people have to care for themselves in order to find real help. In another echo of past conversations, she said that her life got better once she stopped hanging around "bad company". She said that she lives paycheck to paycheck from Social Security and rarely has anything left over after rent and food. With her fixed income, she has the ability to plan but the small margin of error leaves her susceptible to bumps that can have large consequences.

She noted the significance of the buses in Columbia but the lack of cleanliness and scheduling for them. She thinks there are bus drivers that care a lot about their job and those who could not care less. She noted that the ones who do not care can have a big impact on people like her who rely on the transportation for all parts of life.

Personal Reflection / Housing Economics

This interview was the first interview where I had trouble orchestrating the conversation. If I strayed away from what she wanted to talk about, she would revert to what she was saying. This was my first test as an interviewer in overcoming a communication gap and sticking with the conversation. As will be mentioned in a later section on the interviewing process, this was the first interview in which I learned that listening is often more important than asking any questions.

With respect to the housing situation that Shari brought up, a common solution is to provide shelters for homeless people. However, in the long-term homeless people/poor have to have the ability to find long-term permanent housing. As noted in other interviews, many people on the edge of homelessness are forced to live in boarding rooms that cost around \$500-\$600 a month on the low end. Going into this research project, I assumed I would hear lots of complaints about landlords and be able to be spurred into research about housing rights and how the landlord fits into this situation. However, the majority of the time I did not hear complaints about the landlords themselves but rather what was driving the landlords towards how they price their housing.

Another lasting conversation piece was about the high price of low-income housing in Columbia. The normal going rate for weekly housing was around 150 dollars, or around 600 dollars a month. This astounded me for a number of reasons. First of all, student housing for college kids hovers around the same price, often less than the impoverished are paying. And, it is of much higher quality. Secondly, this is next to impossible to afford. If you are enrolled in

social security or some form of government assistance, you would be lucky to receive one thousand dollars per month. If rent is \$600, then you have \$100 a week for utilities, food, clothing, transportation. Being spread thin is an understatement. The prospect of saving is unimaginable, which is a main factor in why being impoverished is an unclimbable wall.

In general, America does not value renters as highly as homeowners. This can be seen in maintaining tax breaks and deductions for mortgage payments but not rent (Colburn and Allen 2018). Colburn defines severely rent burdened as using more than 50% of income to pay rent. One solution offered would be to offer similar tax deductions for rent that people get for their mortgage payments. In fact, The State reported that there are estimates that in the coming years the area including and surrounding Columbia will surpass 1 million residents (Flach 2017). Recently, the low-income housing issues have come to the forefront of Columbia with the Allen-Benedict Court gas leaks that killed 2 residents. This is emblematic of the low-tier maintenance and upkeep that is common at apartments like this. In fact, a couple of these conversations highlighted the neglect of maintenance notices or any real upkeep.

After the Allen-Benedict fiasco, 241 of the residents who have been evicted have not found permanent housing, even though most of them have section 8 housing vouchers and/or qualify for public housing (Reynolds 2019). Even with the publicity of the incident and the obvious embarrassment to the Columbia Housing Authority, they still have not been afforded new housing. Instead, a lot of the people have been put in cheap motels away from the city center. Unfortunately, it is reasonable to assume that housing crisis like the Allen-Benedict incident will grow to be worse as Columbia and South Carolina continues to grow. Luckily, Columbia is on the ground floor of being a metropolitan area rather than New York City and

Seattle which are now dealing with housing shortages retroactively. It is a lot more difficult to build “back” housing instead of being on the ground floor (Columbia) where a city can plan ahead. In Columbia, there has been a recent push towards a “Housing First” movement that seeks to first provide homeless people with permanent housing and then focus on any underlying issues (Housing First Columbia).

To dive into housing issues would be an entirely new project and could be a springboard for another Honors Thesis. Topics involving homeless people include how rent control could be a positive or negative force, introducing stricter zoning laws, social housing spending, and many other vectors of research.

6: Interview with Mike

Mike is a middle-aged black man who has leukemia and is homeless. To keep from getting sores, Mike has to wear clothing around much of his body. Mike's biggest concern for homeless people is affordable housing and believes that this should be a main area of focus for helping the homeless population. He has heard that other cities help homeless people by helping them find apartments and housing. Mike said that he has not had problems receiving medical care for his condition but that it has impacted his ability to be employed. Another reason he gave for not being able to find a job is his criminal record. He said that having a record can make it hard to get his foot in the door and to be looked at fairly.

Mike has not had negative interactions with the police and has found them to be a positive influence with some knowing him by name. Mike emphatically says that he has not experienced disrespect from the police. He recounted that during the day everything seems fine but at night it is like a switch is pulled and everything changes and he feels unsafe. Related to safety and the homeless population, Mike suggested that a 24-hour shelter would help people on the streets. Mike remarks that certain restaurants have been nice and accommodating to him while he has been homeless while others pushed him out of the doors. In general, Mike expressed that "homeless ain't bad but are just going through something".

Mike thinks that education can change how people see their life. One local service that has served Mike taught him how to save money more efficiently which he reputed helped him a lot.

Personal Reflection and Discussion of Urban Kindness

One of the first questions I asked Mike was about his medical care and condition, but he brushed off the question and said that the hospitals and clinics treat him without any issue. He said that he has had few issues receiving cancer treatment. I found this surprising, and in later conversations I heard differing stories on medical care for homeless people. There is quite a difference in the two conversations of Shay and Mike. Mike had cancer and said treatment was not a problem, yet Shay claims to have had to quit his job on account of his lack of medical care. In retrospect, I should have pried more into how and where he receives care. This was my first interview and admittedly I was still getting my footing under me in respect to the interviewing process. With the combination of cancer and his criminal record, his employment search seems daunting and hard to manage.

In this interview, we talked briefly about interactions with the police. I came to find through my conversations that there was a lack of substance I got from any topic related to the police-I found this to be confusing. From the outset, I assumed that homeless would have more to say about police interactions whether positive or negative. Yet, in truth, the impression I leave the project with is that the police were a neutral force. The few examples of positive or negative interactions say little about how Columbia Police Department help or hurt the homeless population. I was not sure whether the participants did not want to speak to me about certain experiences or whether my questions did not press hard enough. The null hypothesis remains that the police are a more neutral force than anything in Columbia.

Mike said that during the day everything seems fine but at night he feels unsafe. This comment is indicative of some of the inherent dangers involved in the homeless community

with no structure during the night. At its root, the living situation is anarchy where each night is unpredictable in terms of weather, people, and sleeping arrangements. Lastly, we talked briefly about certain places and restaurants that were nice and accommodating to him and it was clear these acts of generosity and kindness meant a great deal for him. This last piece of our conversation is illuminating to the nature of homelessness in society.

When I asked Mike what he wished more people would know about homelessness, he wanted me know that being homeless isn't the same as being 'bad' or something of that sort. Instead, it is just people who are going through difficulties, for whatever reason. As noted, I asked him about places outside of dedicated homeless facilities that helped him out, and he mentioned a couple of restaurants that gave him food or let him stay in their building, and I could see a smirk come on his face that showed how happy these interactions made him. The nature of homelessness can be lonely and jarring, but simple acts go along way and are not forgotten. In the end, this idea is the central component of this thesis and should be a takeaway of the paper. In of the conversations, John mentioned that each person has to be the difference maker in the equation. At the end of the day, each citizen has an opportunity to recognize the humanity in the people worst off in society. This is not a testament to politics but rather an objective view that some people are going to get unlucky breaks. Some people are going to make poor decisions while some people are going to be pushed by an economy that can be ruthless.

Mike is a perfect example of the complexity involved in caring for homeless people and at-risk population. He is sick with a terminal disease, has a criminal record and has difficulty finding a job. How do we care for homeless people' medical problems? How do we

accommodate job applicants with criminal records? How do people like this navigate the legal boundaries associated with disability or welfare?

Ultimately, as John said in one of the interviews, someone has to be the difference maker in the equation. While my thesis is a small drop in a puddle and will be read by a handful of my closest friends and academic mentors, this idea of kindness is not a small concept to be disregarded.

7: Interview with Shane

Shane is a middle-aged black male from Columbia. Shane has been in and out of the penitentiary system and kept going back to talking about jail throughout the conversation. Shane was visibly frustrated about the constant revolving door between jail and unemployment. This frustration bled out into the interview often leading him to being distracted about other questions. If anything could be different, Shane says that he would want just one more chance and doesn't want to continually be punished for his past. When asked if he felt jail encouraged or helped him in any way transition to society and employment, the look on his face of disgust told the whole story. Without prompting, Shane said that he is HIV positive and that he cannot, or hardly, read. He also kept repeating that he was depressed and that through jail he started drinking and began abusing alcohol.

Personal Reflection and Discussion of the Role of the Interviewer

This interview was one of the tougher interviews to moderate, as it was plain that Shane was going through a lot. Unfortunately, this conversation was testy at times with questions I asked either not being received well or misunderstood. However, in many ways this interview illuminated the struggles of living on the streets. I did not get through many of my questions and had to let him talk about what he chose to talk about.

The gripping, sad, and lasting nature of this interview was not the substance (as many of these things have been echoed by others) but the nature of his attitude. I felt like he was in a state between hopelessness and an epic fight against himself and the outer world. In previous

interviews, people have admitted that they have made mistakes. And, though he did not say, it is fair to assume he would also say he made mistakes along the way. We all have. How are we supposed to help those who have made the biggest mistakes and fallen down the deepest holes? This is not to say Shane has made more or bigger mistakes than others, but rather his situation is an example of how we have to think of redemption, recuperation, and help.

Naturally, this conversation leads to a discussion about the role of the interviewer and interviewee. One of the main considerations I had going into this thesis was the role I would have and how I would consider the potential road blocks and inherent differences I would have in interviewing and writing about homeless people. At the beginning of the project, I was prepared to ask incredibly detailed questions about their relation to society, justice, and feelings towards law and fairness in society. Yet, in many ways, the nature of the conversations dictated the direction of the thesis. The people I talked to did not want to talk about wide ranging philosophical feelings of fairness or justice, but rather why they cannot get a job. Upon writing, I now realize that my perspective was jaded before I started talking to homeless people. I wanted to talk to individuals to understand the community but this was misguided. I talked to individuals to hear about their own lives, and while there are similarities between homeless, they are each unique, individual, and different.

In many ways, I think that my attitude was emblematic of what I was trying to avoid and solve through my thesis: trying to interview as I wanted to interview, not let the interviewees speak to their own truth and experience. I thought that I was going to be able to extrapolate deep philosophical and legal truths about the way homeless people interact with Columbia. Instead, I learned about how frustrating areas of employment, housing, and health can be. I exit

this project with an understanding that the role of the interviewer and researcher is to listen to how an individual struggles and succeeds and necessarily how they relate to a larger picture.

Interview with Dianna Deaderick

Dianna runs Fresh Start and is a Deacon at St. Luke's Ministry. Dianna was a Middle School teacher in the Columbia area for 28 years and then followed a call to ministry. From there, she saw a need for services for the community and an empty gymnasium where she could start a program. From that initial thought, she founded Fresh Start 7.5 years ago next door to St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Columbia off Gervais Street. Fresh Start provides free laundry and showers, food, clothing, HIV testing and counseling, and soon a nurse who will be doing blood sugar and blood pressure testing. Fresh Start also assists with some people's utilities and helps guide them with government bureaucracies such as getting IDs and Social Security cards. Through a health partner, they can set up free eye and dental exams as well. They recently were picked by Harvest Hope to get special diabetic food for their diet. Dianna will be doing food demonstrations as part of this. Fresh Start sources their food mainly through Harvest Hope while clothing is through donations. They also take part in a retail recovery program with Lowe's Foods and Bonefish Grill that give them occasional supplies.

Dianna said that most of the homeless people (nearly everyone) come from the Waverly neighborhood in Columbia. The facility used for Fresh Start is an old gymnasium that years ago housed a basketball league. Fast forward a couple decades and now some of the people who frequent Fresh Start in the gymnasium are the youth who first used the gymnasium for youth.

Throughout the years that she has run Fresh Start, Dianna has helped and witnessed approximately 10 people successfully get out of homelessness. She said that many of the people have had past evictions, making finding housing next to impossible. As far as how Columbia in general handles homelessness, she compliments the city (not government, but city

as a community) on having a strong network that provides homeless with at least one place that they can eat every day. Dianna said that one issue with the city's makeup and infrastructure is the lack of public restrooms. A problem homeless people face is the lack of places to use the restroom, so they often resort to urinating on the street. She says that putting in public restrooms would be an easy and important fix for the city to make. Dianna also notes that a main calamity in Columbia is the expensive housing. She says that the subsidized housing in Columbia charges more than what is offered in quality and leads to taxpayers losing money for bad services while the low income are not receiving what they deserve. Instead, the tenants are getting a mixture of mold and no temperature control. When asked what she would do with a huge influx of cash, she said it would be to bolster a program for affordable housing.

A topic frequently discussed has been the impact of criminal history on employment and homelessness. Dianna said that in her experience the restaurant industry will hire most people with criminal histories. With criminal history and employment, she says that she supports the "Ban the Box" movement. Banning the box refers to eliminating questions of criminal history on initial employment applications. She said that having the box is akin to having a life sentence for your crime as it becomes extremely difficult to gain employment.

In an interview earlier with Jack, he mentioned that homeless people have to believe in themselves in order to be helped. After mentioning this to Dianna, she said that building relationships with homeless people is the most important aspect of helping them. They have to know that they are cared for, which Dianna says is the foundation of all things. A unique aspect of Fresh Start is that they give the users of Fresh Start choice in what they choose from their

food supply. Dianna says this gives them dignity and facilitates a more even relationship. From this, she can begin to build trust and work with what they are going through.

Dianna said that the people who come to Fresh Start and are homeless are so for many different reasons. She listed previous incarceration, victims of domestic violence, mental illness and drug use as primary reasons that can push people into homelessness. In addition, she said that social mobility for the lowest income class is very, very poor and pointed towards the minimum wage as an explanatory factor.

As part of her position, she hears and deals with emotionally taxing situations and stories. To deal with this, she primarily turns to prayer and looks for joy in the people she is helping. One person who in the past had frequented Fresh Start as a client later on donated money to the center. Dianna was visibly thankful and heartfelt mentioning the story and said that was the second time someone had come back to give to Fresh Start after coming to them for assistance.

Personal Reflection

The interview with Dianna was a capstone the project and provided context for many of the topics that have been discussed. Primarily, Dianna spoke to similar sentiments with respect to housing, employment, and the need for individualized attention. With housing, Dianna echoed a sentiment of “housing first” that emphasizes the need for affordable, manageable housing for the poor and homeless. As everyone else similarly commented, Dianna said the

price of housing is plainly way too high. Ultimately was will be discussed in the conclusion, this common feeling is not only true but felt among the community as a whole.

The issues of criminal history has been spoken to by the homeless people interviewed, but Dianna offered key insight in that the restaurant business is more open than other sectors in hiring people with criminal histories. In fact, this coincides with Shay who used to be a cook and has a criminal record. Yet, as will be mentioned, low paying jobs can often not coincide with housing as Jill who was interviewed had a food service job in the midst of experiencing homelessness. Lastly, Dianna provided key personal context to the academic research about how homeless people need to be individually helped and cared for. Not only did this back up academic research, Carl and Jack both stated how homeless people need to have relationships with those who can understand the context of their own situation.

Conclusions

Substantive Conclusions

Seen through the context of these interviews and research, homelessness in Columbia can arise on account of various reasons and circumstances. Among the variance, it is possible to point to common themes surrounding the project. Notably, the two main themes of criminal records and the impact they can have on employment, and the expensive housing market in Columbia.

As noted in the introduction, this thesis is a bottom-up approach analyzing specific ways that homeless people interact with society and how some of these issues might not be noted by other reporting agencies. With respect to this issue, the South Carolina Interagency Council on Homelessness published a Homeless Needs Assessment. Their findings revealed that affordable housing is the main need for homeless people. This finding is in line with one of the main themes through this project, as people find the market in Columbia to be hard to navigate.

The SCIC report states that a worker needs to make \$14.57 an hour in order to afford a 2-bedroom apartment in Columbia. The minimum wage in South Carolina is the federal minimum of \$7.25 (South Carolina Interagency Council on Homelessness n.d.). Alternatively, the cost of subsidized housing could be lowered thus improving access for those who have limited income. While this question is salient to this project, it is well understood that an analysis of subsidized housing compared to wage increase would constitute a thesis in and of itself.

While the theme of housing is covered by South Carolina reports, the impact of a criminal record on employment is much less so. Columbia has resources to connect homeless

people to information about learning about their records. One example is a free legal clinic held bi-weekly by Columbia attorneys at Transitions (a shelter and homeless services group on Main Street). However, in the literature and from what is reported, criminal records seem to not attract as much attention as they warrant. This is not to say that the issue goes uncovered as movements like “Ban The Box” have had massive impact on criminal employment. But the problem is that this issue is quite institutional and hard to change. More than just a record, the jail system and homelessness can feed into each other. This theme and wider topic of the interplay of incarceration and homelessness would be a topic deep with information and important to the wider study of homeless services.

Lastly, with respect to the participants, overall the interviews went very well. Most of the people were very open, kind, and talkative with the questions I asked. It was a privilege to be able to sit down with them, and I appreciate the time they took to talk to me. As noted before, I plan on giving copies to Fresh Start so that the participants (and anyone else) can read the report that was made in large assistance to people at Fresh Start and Dianna Deaderick.

Personal Conclusion Statement

This project has improved my interviewing as well as project management skills. I had never taken the role of interviewer prior to this project so jumping headfirst into interviewing was a scary but worthwhile and rewarding experience. One of the most important takeaways from interviewing was the importance of question order. I was mainly concerned with what questions to ask and put little time into how to frame and order the interview. I quickly realized that this was as important and had to adjust as a I went on along.

As far as project management skills, this experience was the first independent large research project I have undertaken. The level and importance of planning was key to the success of the project. From the brainstorming stage to navigating IRB approval, the work I have put into this project has provided me context and experience for future academic and career reports that require long term planning and execution.

My work throughout this thesis has extended and illuminated my view and understanding of homelessness. One striking realization is both hopeful and sad: there seem to be great resources for homeless that are run by few people. Fresh Start most likely would not exist without Dianna and through her inspiration and hard work she has been able to serve countless people in the community. Transitions⁸ is another great organization that was created by a group of people and has served many in the area. Overall, as I graduate the University of South Carolina and begin Law School I am eager to be able to positively impact my future community as I have seen how much good few people can do. Additionally, the level of understanding and empathy I have for the poor and homeless people has grown tremendously. Through the research and conversations, I think most people do not realize the small ledge between housing and homelessness. I find it hard to grasp how some homeless people really do seem like they are being continually punished for their past mistakes and stuck in a web so to speak. Some of the people I spoke with who were once homeless and now volunteer at Fresh Start showed me through their own example their loyalty and love for their community. While

⁸ Transitions Homeless Center is another resource for homeless people in Columbia. It is located north of the Statehouse on Main Street.

homelessness can be lonely, scary and hard, my experience at Fresh Start showed me another side that is full of love, help and compassion.

Reminiscing on the ups and downs of the project, I have several critiques about my own performance. The first problem is one I think a lot of undergraduates and young academic students fall into: embarking on a project too big in scope. This is to no fault of my advisers, as I remember Professor Smith encouraging me to keep in mind that the scope of the report is important to ensure its success. At one point during the thesis in a discussion about housing I ran into this exact issue of the lack of time and space to discuss each issue to the length and quality it deserves. In retrospect, if I had more time, I would focus on a single issue affecting the homeless and poor population. If I approached this project this way, I could have tailored the questions to just housing related inquiries. The questions could have been more specific and gathered second level information while the academic report could have deeply provided context to the housing situation.

In brief, I am satisfied with the work I was able to complete and thankful for all of the people who took time out to talk to me. Professors Smith and Kloos have both been instrumental in the project as well as Dianna Deaderick, all of whom have given me mentorship in different areas and helped me improve along the way. Hopefully this report serves a purpose of education and can provide qualitative context that larger reports simply cannot.

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Appendix

Interview Protocol and Information

The interview process (IRB code **Pro00083802**) was approved through exempt review. As noted, all of the participants were clients or volunteers at Fresh Start who had experienced or currently were homeless. These participants were selected by Dianna Deaderick who leads Fresh Start and were then introduced to me and invited me to volunteer. The reason behind this was to ensure quality and ability to conduct an interview.

The questions I asked the participants varied by the flow of each interview but all came from the following bank of questions.

Interview Question Bank

- Brief overview questions
 - How do you spend your day?
 - What do you like to do?
 - Where did you grow up, can you talk about your childhood?
 - Are you currently experiencing homelessness? Can you tell me about becoming homeless? Is this your first time?
- Housing, Medical Care (interested in how you have experienced issues in obtaining justice with human rights in healthcare), and Employment
 - Can you talk generally about housing and anything that comes to mind when talking about housing/landlords/apartments? (condemned) (conflict) (lease) (sign contract or lease) (disputes with landlord) (any resources have you looked for any help)
 - How can looking for housing be frustrating?
 - What is like to seek medical treatment being homeless? What has your experience been like?

- If you could have unlimited help with one part of your life, what would you ask to be fixed? How has being homeless affected your mental well-being?
- Can you go into detail about your history with employment and unemployment? What are the biggest factors that have kept you out of the workforce, or what has helped you keep a job?
- If given the opportunity, where would you like to work?
- Justice system
 - What has your experience been (if any) with law enforcement?
 - Are you registered to vote, are there problems with voting you have encountered?
 - How do you learn about programs designed for the homeless population in Columbia? What would be the best way to advertise programs to the homeless population?
 - If you have a criminal record, how has that affected other aspects or opportunities in your life?
 - What is your view of justice? How has life treated you and how do you wish things were different?
- Broad Questions
 - What do you wish more people knew about homelessness?
 - What is keeping you from getting out of your current position? What are positive aspects of your living conditions?
 - In what ways do you manage money? What interactions do you have with money institutes such as banks or government welfare systems?
 - If you have been homeless in multiple cities, how has your experience been different? In what ways has it been better in certain cities?
- Education and Technology
 - Has education or a lack there of heavily influenced your life? If so, in what way? What type of education would help you now?
 - What is your experience with technology? In what ways are you able to reliably access technology? In what ways could technology help the homeless population?
 - How has transportation, or lack there of, impacted your life or opportunities?
- Society
 - What organization or program has helped, from your point of view, the homeless community the most in Columbia? What can Columbia do better to combat homelessness? What services serve you best? Do you go to places other than Fresh Start? How could Fresh Start be better?
 - How do you stay cool in summer, warm in winter?

- If you think society has failed you, in what manner or way has it failed you the most?
- What facet of everyday life has been made most difficult from homelessness?
- Comparing social interactions before you were homeless, do you feel as though you are treated differently? In what way?
- How safe do you feel on a daily basis? What does safety mean to you?
- What parts of society and government in Columbia lack in helping the homeless? If they are bad, in what ways could they be improved?