

SHELTER RESIDENT AND STAFF FEEDBACK REPORT FINDINGS & METHODOLOGY SUMMARY

Upon request by a local nonprofit shelter operator, the Lived Experience Advisory Board (LEAB) collected feedback on resident and staff experiences at the shelter to determine satisfaction, unmet needs, and areas for improvement. The LEAB members gathered input in several ways, including a “secret shopper” review where a board member went through the intake process and stayed at the shelter for a night, a focus group with residents, a survey of residents, and a survey of staff.

The most common feedback reported related to the following issues:

- Inconsistency among staff in implementing and enforcing shelter policies and expectations.
- Residents not feeling sufficiently informed about additional available services.
- Insufficient referrals to alternative shelters and resources if an individual is turned away.
- A desire for greater clarity and transparency around policies and processes at the shelter.
- Safety concerns and sense of resignation among residents to come forward and report incidents.

Based on the feedback collected and additional research, the LEAB generated recommendations in five key areas to improve service provision for shelter residents and improve the working experience for staff members.

The five key areas are as follows:

- **Operational**— including developing a shelter assessment tool to monitor issues, creating greater shelter employment opportunities for residents, and streamlining the intake process.
- **Safety**— including providing secure storage, building staff capacity, and exploring critical incident reporting.
- **Shelter Policies and Expectations**— including providing specific staff trainings and establishing feedback loops for soliciting client feedback.
- **Grievance Process**— including clarifying the grievance procedure, adding a person with lived experience to the advisory committee that reviews the grievances, and strengthening confidentiality around filing a grievance.
- **Information Dissemination**— including directing individuals who are turned away to alternative resources, utilizing various mediums of communication, soliciting feedback from lived experience groups on the creation and circulation of resource materials, and strengthening goal setting and service plans.

METHODOLOGY

The LEAB went about gathering information on the shelter’s intake process and how it is serving the needs of their residents and employees in the following ways:

SECRET SHOPPER REVIEW

The LEAB sent a member of the board as a “secret shopper” to evaluate first-hand the shelter’s intake process and services for people experiencing homelessness. The board member stayed at the shelter overnight and the member’s experience was then documented through an in-person interview.

SURVEY

Nine members of the LEAB administered a 41-question survey to 80 residents. The survey utilized was based on a tool designed by the City of Baltimore Mayor's Office of Homeless Services in collaboration with the Consumer Advisory Work Group. Questions were modified and visual analog and Likert scales were incorporated to assess what is working well at the shelter, and what can be improved. The results were then tabulated and converted into bar graphs and pie-charts to highlight key findings and takeaways.

FOCUS GROUP

In addition to administering surveys to individual residents, the LEAB members also hosted a focus group with approximately 20 residents. Questions for the focus group aligned with the survey questions and allowed residents an opportunity to elaborate on topics touched upon in the survey. Recordings from the focus groups were then transcribed, coded, and categorized to inform the focus areas for recommendations.

STAFF SURVEY

Eight members of the LEAB administered a 41-question survey to 11 shelter staff. The survey was administered to staff who primarily work the day and swing shifts. Questions were designed to focus on trainings and support provided to staff, what is working well at the shelter, and what can be improved from staff's perspective.

RESEARCH ON BEST PRACTICES FOR EMERGENCY SHELTERS

After collecting feedback from residents, the LEAB researched national best practices for shelter providers. Through engagement with Heartland Alliance in Chicago, the LEAB came to learn about the work done through the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services in Baltimore, including their formalized annual review and quality improvement process, and the years of experience they have with establishing a Lived Experience Advisory Board that works with the Continuum of Care. The LEAB consulted with the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services in Baltimore on their survey findings, successful implementation of recommendations, and best practices in the field. With the Navigation Center model emerging as a best practice in the region, the LEAB also reached out to Episcopal Community Services in San Francisco to learn more about the implementation, challenges and benefits of Navigation Centers, and how their approach might be helpful in responding to key findings.