

Siouxland Street Project 2.0

Interviewing people who spend their time in public spaces: 2022

~ @Julia Kleinschmit, BJ, MSW, CSW

Background

In January 2016, community partners and stakeholders gathered to discuss how the community of Sioux City can address the issue of vagrancy compassionately and effectively. Major goals of the project included expanding and utilizing current resources to address concerns of vagrancy and homelessness (hereafter to be referred to as ‘people who are unhoused’) in downtown Sioux City. Renamed the Siouxland Street Project (SSP), several work committees were developed to advance the community’s larger goal of ending vagrancy and ensuring people are housed. One of the Research Committee’s tasks was to develop a questionnaire and analyze the specific needs of people in Sioux City that are considered unhoused or vagrant. The original SSP interviewing project and questionnaire were created through a coordinated effort by Sara Staver, a University of Iowa Social Work graduate student, under the guidance of Julia Kleinschmit, University of Iowa Clinical Professor of Social Work.

In 2022, Kleinschmit repeated the study with support from the Siouxland Human Investment Project (SHIP), and funding from the University of Iowa’s Seeding Excellence: Office of the Vice President Community Engaged Scholars program and the Siouxland Coalition to End Homelessness. It involved multiple volunteer interviewers, and five Morningside University students who interviewed participants, tracked project progress, and entered data.

Design

The study used both qualitative and quantitative data collection, a mixed methods research design of descriptive statistical analysis, and traditional inquiry using qualitative data. The University of Iowa’s Institutional Review Board found that the project was not considered Human Subjects Research and therefore exempt from further review because it was low-risk and designed to improve services.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews from a convenience sample of 97 individuals. Participants were solicited in public areas where SSP partners and stakeholders have experienced groups of people spending time during the day. Volunteer interviewers for the SSP were recruited through connections with SHIP, Morningside University, and Sioux City’s Neighborhood Services (SCNS) department. Interviewing was conducted from January to February 2022. Volunteers affiliated with SHIP and SCNS joined efforts on January 26 to do both the national Point in Time count of people who are unhoused and this study’s questionnaire.

Setting

Volunteers targeted areas to canvas for participants. Interviews occurred at the Warming Shelter, Gospel Mission, Bright Side Café, Sioux City Public Library (Wilbur Aalfs branch), on the streets, and the Institute for Community Alliances (ICA) office. About 40% (n=39) of the total participant

sample was collected at the Gospel Mission and 36% (n=35) at the Warming Shelter. Remaining interview sites included the Bright Side Café (17), Aalfs Library (5), and the ICA office (1).

Participants

SSP participants had to be 18 years of age, able to complete the interview in English, and indicate they spent a great deal of their days on the street or in other public places, either by choice, or because they had nowhere else to go. Interviews took place in public areas and lasted about 20 minutes. Participants received their choice of a \$5 gift card to Kum & Go or Burger King (funded by the Siouxland Coalition to End Homelessness) as a thank you for their time. The benefits, risks, and voluntary nature of the project was explained to the recipients prior to obtaining verbal, informed consent. To prevent participant duplication, participants provided a unique code; the first letter of their first name and first three letters of their last name. The code was written on the questionnaire and used to track each interview and gift card distribution. A Morningside University student completing an internship with SHIP kept track of participant codes and updated lists of those already interviewed to avoid duplicate interviews. In this iteration of the study, there was no duplication and 97 people were interviewed. Completed questionnaires were returned to Kleinschmit, who assigned them to students for data entry.

Instrument and Measures

The semi-structured interview consisted of 37 quantitative and 23 open ended questions. The questionnaire themes expanded on a survey developed by the Sioux City Police Department. These themes focused on demographics, sleeping arrangements, housing, income sources, substance use, law enforcement involvement, interactions with local businesses, current situation perspectives, and individual strengths.

Findings

Demographics. The majority of participants identified themselves as white (45%) and male (68%). Participant mean age was 43.75 (SD 15.75) ranging from 21-73 years old. Regarding gender, 68% self-identified as male, 28.9% as female, 2 as transgender, and 1 chose not to identify a gender. Forty-four (45.4%) of participants identified as White/Caucasian, 20.6% as American Indian/Alaskan Native, 12.4% as African American/Black, 10.3% as Hispanic/Latino, and 5.2% as Multiracial or other. Three people declined to answer. Of those who identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native, 7 were members of the Umoⁿhoⁿ (Omaha) Nation and 2 were members of the Santee Sioux Tribe. Membership in the Oglala Sioux, Three Affiliated Tribes, Rosebud Sioux, and Spirit Lake, Sioux Tribe of North Dakota were claimed by one person each.

Twelve participants had served in the military. Of those, four reported acquiring a disability while in service. See Table 1 for more information, and a comparison with 2016 data.

Housing Status and Sleeping and Daytime Locations. At time of interview, 67% (65) of participants were staying in a shelter, 9 had their own apartment or shared housing with a partner, 11 people slept outside in tents, stairwells, parking lot ramps, train bridges, and in doorways. Four slept in their cars, 3 were doubled up with friends or family, and 5 declined to answer.

When those who had been staying in a shelter were asked how many days they had been in a shelter in the last week, the mean was 6 (SD=1.09). Forty-eight (73.8%) of the 65 had stayed 7 of 7 days. Eight participants (12%) felt they would leave the shelter in less than a month and 9 (13.8%) in one to three months. Sixteen (24.6%) were planning to stay indefinitely, 13 (20%) until the (Warming) shelter closed, and five were waiting on housing assistance to come through. One interviewee was leaving the day after the interview for Welcome Home, Community Action Agency of Siouxland’s transitional housing program for families, and another was living in the shelter until they went to the Third Judicial District’s Residential Treatment Facility, (a supervised facility often used as an alternative to incarceration or as a first step in community re-entry from prison).

Table 1. SSP Participant Demographic Data - 2016 & 2022

Variable	2016		2022	
	n	%	n	%
2016 Age - Mean: 43.94, ±SD 10.99, Range 18-65				
2022 Age - Mean: 43.75, ±SD 15.75, Range 21-73				
	96		97	
18-29	13	13.5%	18	18.7%
30-39	16	16.7%	26	26.9%
40-49	35	36.5%	15	15.6%
50-59	26	27.1%	21	21.7%
60-69	6	6.3%	14	14.4%
70-79	--	---	1	1.0%
Declined to answer	--	--	2	2.1%
Sex	97		97	%
Male	69	71.1%	66	68.0%
Female	26	26.8%	28	28.9%
Transgender	1	1.0%	2	2.1%
Other	1	1.0%	--	--
Declined to answer	--	---	1	1.0%
Ethnicity	96		97	%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	46	47.4%	20	20.6%
White/Caucasian	29	29.9%	44	45.4%
African American/Black	11	11.3%	12	12.4%
Hispanic/Latino	5	5.2%	10	10.3%
Multiracial/Other	5	5.2%	5	5.2%
Declined to answer	--	----	3	3.1%
Served in Military	96		97	
No	84	86.5%	83	85.6%
Yes	13	13.5%	12	12.4%
Declined to answer	--	----	2	2.1%
Military Branch, if served	13		12	
Army	6		4	
Army National Guard	--	----	3	
Navy	3		--	
Marines	2		--	
Other	2			
Declined to answer			5	
Disability Acquired in Military	13		12	
Yes	4		4	

When asked how much time they spent finding a place to sleep each day, 22.7% said it took less than an hour (mostly those who had stable lodging at the Gospel Mission or were well-acquainted with the Warming Shelter’s check in process), 15.5% spent 1-3 hours searching, 10.3% searched 4-6 hours, and 17.5% said they spent more than 6 hours a day finding and planning for a place to sleep. Regarding satisfaction with where they sleep, 51.5% were satisfied, 33% were not, and 15.5% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Many were thankful for shelter provided by the Warming Shelter and the Gospel Mission because “it’s somewhere warm to sleep” and “better than being on the streets.” As in 2016, the Warming Shelter was noted as friendly and one said, “Better than it was 6 years ago.” However, several peo-

Table 2. SSP Participant Housing Status and Sleeping and Daytime Locations 2016 & 2022

Variable	2016		2022	
	n	%	n	%
Currently in a Shelter	96		97	
Yes	74	77.1%	65	
No	21	22.9%	27	
Declined to answer	--	----	5	
Days in Shelter in Last Week - 2016 Mean: 6.05, ±SD 1.7, Median: 7, Range 1-7 2022 Mean: 6.00, ±SD 1.09, Median: 7, Range 1-7	74		65	
Projected When Will Leave Shelter	74		65	
Less than a month	23	31.1%	8	12.0%
Until they close	20	27.0%	13	20.0%
Until housing comes through	14	18.9%	5	7.7%
1-3 months	7	9.5%	9	13.8%
When weather gets warm	6	8.1%	--	----
Until employment	4	5.4%	--	----
Indefinitely	--	----	16	24.6%
Feel Has a Stable Place to Sleep	96		97	
Yes	80	83.3%		
No	16	16.7%		
Ease of Finding Stable Place to Sleep	96			
Easy	45	46.9%	40	41.2%
Somewhat easy	24	25.0%	32	33.0%
Difficult	26	27.1%	24	24.7%
Declined to answer	--	----	1	1.0%
Time Spent Looking for Place to Sleep	97		97	
Less than an hour	30	41.7%	22	22.7%
1-3 hours	15	20.8%	15	15.5%
4-6 hours	11	15.3%	10	10.3%
More than 6 hours	14	19.7%	17	17.5%
N/A	27	27.8%	32	34.0%
Satisfaction With Place to Sleep	96		97	
Very satisfied	36	37.5%	50	51.5%
Somewhat satisfied	35	36.5%	--	----
Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	6	6.3%	15	15.5%
Somewhat unsatisfied	9	9.4%	--	----
Very unsatisfied	10	10.4%	32	33.0%
Does Where Time Spent During Day Meet Needs	93		97	
Yes	58	62.4%	72	75.3%
No	35	37.6%	18	18.6%
Decline to answer	--	----	5	5.2%

ple (especially women) stated they felt unsafe there because of certain groups of people who fight or “create drama.” There was concern that situations could and frequently escalated quickly and staff needed more training (and possibly more staff) to de-escalate situations. They also remarked how snoring, coughing, and behavior from people who are drunk or high cause trouble, or at the least, interfere with decent sleep. People noted the challenge of keeping the Warming Shelter clean, though fewer than in 2016. People who

stayed at the Gospel Mission mentioned their “very strict rules that made it easy to kick someone out” but seemed happy with the safety, sleeping arrangements, cleanliness, and educational programming *if* they were Christian and in agreement with the Mission’s philosophy. People who lived on the streets said they were cold, had no comfort, bathroom, or shower. Most said they camped or stayed in neighborhoods that were “not good.”

Seventy-two people (75.3%) said that where they spend time during the day met their needs, up from 62.4% in 2016. As in 2016, many walked around town, visiting the Wilbur Aalfs Library, Mercy hospital, Burger King, Perkins, skywalks, Brightside Café (which at the time of data

collection was offering a free carryout breakfast for unhoused people, funded by donations), church, the day shelter, and homes of their friends or families. Twenty-four (24.7%) worked or were looking for work. Several mentioned researching (often at the library) and looking for resources to help themselves and their families.

Services Desired. When asked if they would be interested in various services (yes/no), transportation was still the service of primary interest (73.2%). This was matched in 2022 by rental and housing assistance. These were followed by general funding and financial assistance, help with finding employment, mental health (53.6% up from 45.8%), medical or health insurance help, job training or educational advancement, substance use/addiction services, and legal help. Participants revealed more context regarding some items, as described below:

- *Transportation* was consistently mentioned as a barrier to employment and taking care of mental health and substance abuse issues. This was noted by several who said service-oriented employers needed workers during hours when there was no bus service. Participants who owned or had access to vehicles remarked on the high price of gas and how hard it was to fix vehicles when necessary, putting employment and other opportunities at risk.

Table 3. SSP Participant Services Desired (Yes) 2016 & 2022

	2016		2022	
	n	%	n	%
Transportation	95	69.5%	97	73.2%
Funding/financial assistance	97	64.9%	97	71.2%
Rental/housing	97	62.9%	97	73.2%
Help with finding employment	97	62.9%	95	58.8%
Job training or educational advancement	96	59.4%	94	47.4%
Medical/health insurance help	97	46.4%	95	51.5%
Mental health	96	45.8%	94	53.6%
Legal	97	37.1%	96	29.9%
Substance use/addiction	96	36.5%	94	35.1%
Related to parenting	97	24.7%	--	----

- *Funding or financial assistance* was needed for deposits for housing rental or utility contracts, or for replacing personal identification, the key to so many other resources, including employment. Several participants said that being unhoused made it difficult to keep ID cards and documents safe. One participant said, “My ID was stolen at the shelter. They did find my Social Security card and birth certificate with the trash.”
- *Rental/housing* was still seen as largely unaffordable and challenging to access. More people spoke of the importance of having housing first to be successful at employment and other aspects of life, echoing national research that shows the same. Some mentioned that losing work or becoming ill during 2020 sent them into a spiral. This resulted in being unhoused along with bad references from landlords, effectively barring them from most rental opportunities. This was especially true considering the lack of affordable housing in Sioux City to begin with. Access to housing has improved since 2016 through concerted community efforts, but there are still some gaps people are falling through. One participant said, “Our potential landlords want us to have \$750 to move in even with the Emergency Housing Voucher (EHV). (But) to qualify for EHV, you can’t have any income.”
- *Job training or educational advancement* was desired by many. Several mentioned a history of making a living in construction and other jobs that resulted in heavy wear and tear on their bodies. Some got injured on the job. For these participants, it was very difficult to find work that fit with their skill sets – especially when having to navigate the daily challenges of being

unhoused. Others mentioned that even though some employers advertised that they were hiring, when the study participants tried to apply, the jobs were no longer available.

See Table 3 for more information.

Work/Financial Status. Of 24 participants who were employed, 8 (29.6%) worked full-time, 11 (40.7%) had parttime employment, and 5 (18.5%) were worked temporary jobs or were with a

Table 4. SSP Participant Work and Financial Status 2016 & 2022

Variable	2016		2022	
	n	%	n	%
Current job status (if employed)	21		24	
Full time	7	33.3%	8	29.6%
Part-time	5	23.8%	11	40.7%
Temporary/staffing agency	6	28.6%	5	18.5%
Seasonal/day labor/other	3	14.3%	--	----
Satisfied with current job status (if employed)	21		24	
Yes	11	52.4%	12	50.0%
Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	4	19.0%	2	8.3%
No	6	28.6%	10	41.7%
Money Received Each Week (in dollars) 2016 Mean: 122.13, ±SD 174.03, Median: 50, Range 0-800 2022 Mean: 203.30, ±SD 295.49, Median: 100, Range 0-1838	96		87	
0	36	37.5%	27	31.0%
1-50	17	17.7%	10	19.5%
51-150	14	14.6%	14	16.1%
151-250	12	12.5%	13	14.9%
251-350	8	8.3%	10	19.5%
351+	9	9.4%	13	14.9%
Declined to answer	--	----	10	
Money received each week is adequate	94		91	
Yes	21	22.3%	28	30.8%
Sometimes	6	6.4%	--	----
No	54	57.4%	59	64.8%
Prefer not to answer	3	3.2%	4	4.4%

staffing agency. Half of those employed were satisfied with their current job status, two were neutral, and 10 unsatisfied. When asked how much money they earned or received each week, 31% said they had no money at all (down from 37.5% in 2016), 19.5% had only \$1-\$50 a week, 14.1% had \$51-\$250 each week, and

19.5% had \$251 or more. Not surprisingly, 64.8% (up from 57.4% in 2016) said the money they had each week was inadequate and 30.8% said it was.

When asked more about their source(s) of income, 21 received income from working formal or informal jobs (day labor, working at the Gospel Mission) and 23 SSI/SSDI. Seven (down from 10 in 2016) said they panhandled. Money from family and friends, SNAP and EBT benefits, recycling, tribal funds, and selling plasma were the next biggest categories. Interviewees mentioned that the cost of everything has gone up, so their money didn't stretch like it used to – and it wasn't that elastic before, especially for those reliant on disability income. Others mentioned that they wanted to make changes in their lives but without resources, it was impossible – and impacted other people in their lives. “(I) can't afford medication, doctor's appointments, treatments, child support.” Others specifically addressed food access and how costly it is to be unhoused. “I don't qualify for food stamps so I can't eat the recommended diet (for a serious health issue).” “It's expensive to live on the street – I can't put groceries away.”

Medical Health Service/ Insurance Access and Need.

Sixty-four percent of those interviewed said they had medical insurance. When asked what type, 59.7% had Medicaid coverage. The next biggest group (9.7%, down from 16.4% in 2016) had Indian Health Services care. Other coverage held by 3-6% of the group were Medicare, VA, employer-provided, and other. Participants mentioned needing medical care that was not accessible due to their inability to navigate applications and other process in the system. They also spoke of insurance denying coverage for medications they need. Additionally, they mention the difficulty that comes with not having required identification documents necessary to seek help.

Mental Health Access and Needs.

More than 40% (up from 34.4% in 2016) said they had a mental health diagnosis. Twenty-two (22.7%) of all

interviewees were currently involved in mental health services and 37 (38%) were not, 35 (36.1%) said the question was not applicable, and 3 people declined to answer. Forty-three interviewees (44.3%, down from 59.8% in 2016) said they could adequately access mental health services. Fourteen said they could not, and the others declined to answer or said it was not applicable.

As in 2016, transportation was a major issue when it came to seeking mental health assistance. Some respondents again emphasized providing outreach to people on the streets and in shelters, especially in terms of helping people navigate complex systems and reducing stigma. Some mentioned appreciating their counselors and help they've received, especially from Siouxland Mental Health Center. Interviewees discussed their own mental health issues and how being unhoused exacerbated their concerns. "I'm still learning to cope with PTSD and (in the shelter I)

Table 5. SSP Health and Mental Health Needs 2016 & 2022

Variable	2016		2022	
	n	%	n	%
Currently Have Medical Insurance (yes)	96	68.8%	97	64.0%
Type of health insurance	67		62	
Medicaid	43	64.2%	37	59.7%
Indian Health Services	11	16.4%	6	9.7%
Medicare	4	6.0%	5	8.1%
Hawk-I	3	4.5%	--	----
VA	2	3.0%	5	8.1%
Employer-provided/private-pay	2	3.0%	2	3.2%
Other	2	3.0%	--	----
Have Mental Health Diagnosis (yes)	96	34.4%	97	40.2%
Currently involved with mental health services	97		97	
Yes	24	24.7%	22	22.7%
No	31	32.0%	37	38.1%
Not applicable	38	39.2%	35	36.1%
Declined to answer	4	4.1%	3	3.1%
Can adequately access mental health services	97		97	
Yes	58	59.8%	43	44.3%
Sometimes	7	7.2%	3	3.1%
No	19	19.6%	14	14.4%
Not applicable	6	6.2%	37	38.1%
Declined to answer	7	7.2%	--	----
Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) Interfere Daily	97		97	
Yes	21	21.6%	15	15.5%
Sometimes	18	18.6%	9	9.3%
No	58	59.8%	68	70.1%
Declined to answer	--	----	5	5.2%
Currently involved in AOD services	96			
Yes	15	15.6%	14	14.4%
Sometimes	6	6.3%	4	4.1%
No	71	74%	73	75.3%
Not applicable	2	2.1%	--	----
Prefer not to answer	2	2.1%	6	6.2%
Can adequately access AOD services	96		97	
Yes	66	68.8%	61	62.9%
Sometimes	9	9.4%	4	4.1%
No	13	13.5%	16	16.5%
Not applicable	6	6.3%	8	8.2%
Prefer not to answer	2	2.1%	8	8.2%

need to deal with others who are having problems and are off their medications.” “I feel how anxiety, depression, anger issues, and low patience are affecting me, and I’m concerned.” Interviewees were often compassionate toward other unhoused people who were experiencing mental health problems. However, they also discussed how the way others’ mental health problems negatively affected their own health. “Most folks here are not stable ... mental health episodes of others are disruptive.” And “It’s contagious. Poor mental health is a virus.” One participant said “It’s very alarming and dangerous if (people are) not getting help. We must take a closer look at the community and government (in all this).”

Substance Abuse Treatment Access and Needs. Regarding the use of alcohol and other drugs (AOD), 24.8% of respondents said substance use interfered in their daily lives sometimes or all the time, down from 40.2% in 2016. Fourteen (14.4%) of interviewees were currently involved in services and 4 said they sometimes accessed help for substance use issues. Sixty-one (62.9%) said they could access services, 4 (4.1%) could sometimes, and 16 (16.5%) said they could not. See Table 5 for more information.

Substance use/addiction services described as helpful included having an on-call counselor at the shelter on a regular basis, “someone to interact with instead of a billboard or a business card.” One said that to be effective for unhoused people, treatment would include transitional housing. As one person remarked, “(I) don’t really need treatment. I can’t utilize it while homeless and life is so chaotic.” Getting through urges is challenging – especially when around others who are using. As an interviewee said, “(it would help) if there was a safe place that if they were experiencing urges, they could get some help to get through the craving.” Transportation was mentioned again as a major barrier to getting help. Several people identified substance use as a way to cope with mental health and other issues, “It’s all related to mental health. If mental health

Table 6. SSP Arrest Experiences 2016 & 2022

Variable	2016		2022	
	n	%	n	%
Been Arrested Before	96		97	
Yes	81	85.4%	72	74.2%
No	14	14.4%	22	22.7%
Declined to answer	1	1.0%	3	3.1%
Time since last arrest	81		72	
30 days or less	16	19.8%	14	5.14%
31-90 days	12	14.8%	---	----
31 days - 6 months	--	----	14	19.4%
91-180 days	4	4.9%	---	----
181 days - 1 year	14	17.3%	15	20.8%
More than a year/last 5 years	35	43.2%	28	38.9%
How bothersome is being arrested	95		97	
A lot	42	44.2%	43	44.3%
Some	8	8.4%	3	3.1%
Don’t really know	5	5.3%	--	----
A little	11	11.6%	1	1.0%
Not at all	16	16.8%	22	22.7%
Not applicable	11	11.6%	22	22.7%
Declined to answer	2	2.1%	4	4.1%

isn’t in check, people use substances to help with emotions.” They also recognized that situations in shelter and other spaces can be dangerous when people use. “... when someone is extremely under the influence of a substance, the probability of trouble increases.” A few American Indian/Alaskan Natives said getting the treatment they wanted was a problem. “I want to go to treatment in Sioux City, but (I’m) turned away because of tribal sources available.” And “I want treatment here, not at the reservation.”

Arrest Experiences. Seventy-two (74.2%) of interviewees had been arrested at least one time, down from 85% in 2016. Almost 14 (14.4%) had been arrested in the last 30 days, 14.4% in the last six months, 15.5% in the last

year, and 28.9% had been arrested more than a year ago. When asked how bothersome being arrested was, 44.3% were bothered a lot and 23.7% were bothered a little or not at all.

Eleven (down from 34 in 2016) respondents said their last arrest had been for public intoxication, 8 for trespassing (most because they sought shelter somewhere they weren't welcome) and 6 for probation violations. The remainder fell into various categories. Regarding their arrest experience, several said they felt the situation could have been handled differently. One interviewee said the police officer said "why don't you go get a job and quit being a bum." Another said "the female officer could have been more professional. She would not allow me to grab my coat and tightened handcuffs." Another discussed negative outcomes from arrest, "It's not fair that people have to pay to stay in jail when they don't have money. They throw everything you have away when you're arrested or (you) lose your place." Along the same line, another said "... there are people that are well off, rich, and yet they break the law and have the funds to get away with it." Some saw being arrested as "part of life," "normal at this point" and "it happens to people like me – people on the streets." For a few, it provided a turning point to work on goals. "I was using too much and needed a break. If I hadn't been arrested, I might not be here today," and "It's also a good lesson. You know you did wrong and helps with discipline and substance abuse."

Treatment from Downtown Businesses and Satisfaction with Sleeping and Living Resources. Forty-five (41.2%) participants felt they were treated very well by downtown businesses. About a third said they couldn't really say, and 17.5% (down from 28.1% in 2016) said they were treated very badly. When asked about their satisfaction concerning Sioux City resources for people who need a place to sleep, 38.1% (37) were very satisfied, 30.9% (30) were very unsatisfied (down from 39.6% in 2016) and 27.8% (27) were neutral (up from 12.5% in 2016).

Concerning Sioux City resources for people who need a place to live, 35% (34) were neutral, 26.8% (26) were very satisfied, and 25.8% (25) were very unsatisfied. Twelve participants declined to answer this question, an important consideration in interpreting the data for this item.

When asked for more detail, 38 people said they found downtown Sioux City businesses to be friendly, up from 14 in 2016. Brightside Café was repeatedly mentioned as being kind and helpful. The thrift store, Kum & Go, WalMart, and the Wilbur Aalfs Library

Table 7. SSP Downtown Business Treatment and Satisfaction with Sleeping and Living Resources 2016 & 2022

Variable	2016		2022	
	n	%	n	%
How Treated by (Downtown) Sioux City Businesses	96		97	
Very well	14	14.6%	45	41.2%
Pretty well	31	32.3%	--	----
Can't really say	24	25%	33	34.0%
Somewhat badly	17	17.7%	--	----
Very badly	10	10.4%	17	17.5%
Declined to answer	--	----	2	2.1%
Satisfaction with Places to Sleep in Sioux City	96		97	
Very satisfied	7	7.3%	37	38.1%
Somewhat satisfied	28	29.2%	--	----
Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	12	12.5%	27	27.8%
Somewhat unsatisfied	11	11.5%	--	----
Very unsatisfied	38	39.6%	30	30.9%
Declined to answer	--	----	3	3.1%
Satisfaction with Places to Live in Sioux City	96		97	
Very satisfied	15	15.6%	26	26.8%
Somewhat satisfied	16	16.7%	--	----
Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	13	13.5%	34	35.0%
Somewhat unsatisfied	13	13.5%	--	----
Very unsatisfied	39	40.6%	25	25.8%
Declined to answer	--	----	12	12.4%

were also seen as welcoming and polite. Many participants said they just wanted to be treated with respect. Seventeen talked about the stigma associated with being unhoused, and how they try to “pass” as housed. “If (you’re) deemed homeless, they give you (disgusted) looks, don’t give you the time of day.” “I don’t carry a backpack. If you carry a backpack, people see you as homeless – then you’ll be watched. A backpack here doesn’t mean you’re in college.” Several respondents said how they were treated depended on the degree to which they had a relationship with the business or the kind of business it was. “I used to be a regular at the Hard Rock before I hurt my shoulder (and couldn’t work). They treat me well.” The same person said that when he visited the hospital to get documentation of the surgery he’d had there, the waiting room security guard asked, “What are you doing here?” When the patient explained his errand, the guard was belligerent to him, hovered over him, offered coffee to everyone there but the patient, and then walked him all the way out the door saying, “We don’t let your kind hang around here.”

Contrary to data from questions concerning arrest, interviewees mentioned positive interactions with the police, “I haven’t had any trouble with the police. They see me and say ‘How are you today?’” “(I) called the non-emergency number in the middle of the night and an officer brought me to shelter.” And “Cops (will) take people to shelter or tents for the night.” A few also mentioned how things have positively changed for them in Sioux City. Some because of their own actions and the willingness of others to see them as a person with capacity to change. “In the last few years, I haven’t needed to shoplift. Businesses recognize I’ve changed my behavior.” Others identified increased services as helpful in changing the tone. “I think they are treating me fair. At one point I felt like a lot of discrimination was going on ... because of my race and homelessness. But now that they have the Emergency Housing Voucher, it feels different. (I’m) having better than expected interactions.”

Twenty-five interviewees had good things to say about Sioux City’s places to sleep and live for unhoused people. “(I have a) place to stay, clothes, food, and they’re helpful in providing resources and support.” And “Four stars.” Many interviewees mentioned the need for housing and access to it, specifically increasing the number of landlords that will accept Section 8 housing vouchers. When one participant had a voucher in hand, for two weeks, they repeatedly contacted several Sioux City property management companies who advertised that they took Section 8. The companies didn’t respond to calls and voice mails. One company told the interviewee to pick up an application – which was denied, even though there were open units. Housing application fees at \$25-\$50 each were a barrier – especially when there was no guarantee of getting offered the apartment. Others mentioned being on the housing waiting list for long periods of time. Those who were re-entering the community after completing a criminal sentence were particularly disadvantaged – especially in a community where affordable housing is scarce.

Multiple interviewees praised the City of Sioux City for the assistance they provide, including getting people to shelter when they need it, quickly processing Emergency Housing Vouchers, and help in accessing other services. Even so, many said there needed to be more services especially when it came to housing assistance, shelter for couples, transitional housing programs, access to showers for unhoused people even if they are not staying in the shelter, and one on one help navigating complicated systems. “The one case manager (is great). But a lot of resources may be available but are not offered unless you ask about them.” Needing help to replace and safely store identification documents was a consistent theme. “I don’t have an ID and couldn’t claim winnings at the Hard Rock. That (money) would have been very helpful.” And “Being homeless, I have no stable place to store my items. So, losing IDs and Social Security cards is often a problem. I end

up having no IDs and so I receive no aid.” Others said they wanted shelter but to access it they would have to give up certified support animals – key to maintaining their emotional and mental health to the degree they were able to while being unhoused.

Desire to Change Current Situation. More than 80% (78) of participants wanted to change their current situation, 11 (11.3%) did not, and 8 (8.2%) declined to answer.

Forty-one wanted housing with many saying they needed “a place of their own.” Interviewees had modest housing desires. As one said, “I want to get a home with keys.” Another, “... living normal. Having a bathroom, living room, kitchen, bedroom.”

Twenty-two wanted to be employed, get a better job, or education necessary for a better job that would pay them enough to be stably housed. Some living

Table 8. SSP Desire to Change Current Situation 2016 & 2022

	2016		2022	
	n	%	n	%
Want to Make Changes to Current Situation	95		97	
Yes	65	68.4%	78	80.4%
No	24	25.3%	11	11.3%
Declined to answer	6	6.3%	8	8.2%

with physical challenges mentioned how difficult it was to find work that they could do. “(I want to) find work that contributes to the community and also works with (my) health limitations.” Fifteen mentioned getting services they needed to be successful including assistance with medical, dental, mental health, and substance use issues, and enrollment in SSI/SSDI. Several people talked about repairing or strengthening their relationships with family members including being a part of their children’s lives or saving up to “go back home.” One person said, “I want my own place, a car, enough money for a tombstone for my mother, and to see my son.”

When asked what they needed to be successful in life, 27 said they need housing or shelter that could help them be successful in many other aspects of their lives. As one person said, “I need more stability. If I knew more ahead of time what would happen, I’d be better.” Twenty-two said they needed a job or more education, 12 needed help taking care of health issues, 9 said transportation would help, 9 said having an ID would “unlock lots of help.” Several people said being found eligible for SSI/SSDI would significantly aid them, though the process and getting help during it is slow and aggravating. “(I need) disability status approved. How do you get a social worker? I called a government number (for assistance). I was on hold for an hour and 20 minutes. (I) hung up because I would have lost it on the phone.” On the other hand, some who have SSI/SSDI talked about how they struggled to get by on the low amount of money they get from the program each month. “(I need) more money in the disability check. They are not paying me enough money to live. I’ve been thrown out and that’s expensive. (We) need free housing for people who are “in a recession” or homeless.”

Many participants mentioned intangible qualities they need to be successful. “1. Positive attitude – if it’s not going your way (you) have to be versatile; 2. Being a good person you get along better and have better relationships; and 3. Making progress – not going backwards.” And, “The positive way I think and how I listen to people who lived the way I am. (I am) making changes for my own good to live longer and happier.” Interviewees said that having opportunity and people in their corner are also necessary for success. “(Having the) opening to do it – (and) someone who’d listen to what I have to say.”

What unhoused people appreciate about their situation. When asked what they appreciate about their current situation, many interviewees were taken aback that anyone would ask them the question and said “nothing.” Twenty-four people said they enjoyed the people they’ve met and spent time with people that they would not have otherwise. “I’ve met some really good people I never thought I’d understand but now I do.” And “I’m meeting new people and am not isolated anymore. I’m talking to the elders and (learning) their wisdom and stories.” Several mentioned as one said “this experience is making me a hell of a lot stronger” or that it was good for building character and making them humbler. Many said being unhoused offered a different kind of freedom, though as one person said, “I’m glad I’m free, but being free and being poor is hard.” Others talked about this time as being the start of something better. “(This is) a turning point. I’m at the point where I can start new or rebuild.”

Recommendations for the City of Sioux City. Creating affordable and accessible housing stock was the primary recommendation as it was in 2016. Interviewees specifically mentioned needing more landlords who will accept housing vouchers. The second strongest desire was for a more accessible and easier to navigate service and resource system. As one person said, “On this side of things, some fall through the cracks and think ‘I won’t try to get up anymore.’ ... You’re here to help these people, but you’re not helping because you don’t experience the services so you can’t know the reality of the situation. (We need) better communication about how to access services and make services really work for people who need them. It’s worse when hope is dashed – I hung my hope on you just to get hung.” Again, as in 2016, interviewees wanted the city and business community to respect, communicate with, and better understand unhoused and very poor people – and see them as members of the community, not as a problem to be “dealt with.” “(I want them to) really take into consideration these surveys – to actually let their community know these things, that from the richest to the poorest person they are here to help. (We need to) band together to stand together.” Other recommendations included:

- Create separate shelter for families to keep children away from people who are drunk or high
- Figure out a way to help people with issues around IDs, including safe storage for them.
- Establish a housing program combined with employment assistance.
- Develop an effective transportation system that works for poor people.

Know Us. As in 2016, the final question, asking participants what they were proud of was revealing, and instructive. Interviewees had numerous skills and accomplishments that “no one knows about until they take time to get to know (us).” Some of those included being a great guitar player, a veteran, a printer, the 2005 prom queen, “comedy central” for their friends, an accomplished and published author, a football player in college – defensive line, 4H president, a carpenter, a professional baseball player, an artist who still draws, a great skateboarder, and a successful horse trainer. They were proud of their families and family roles. “My 5 year old is in kindergarten.” “I (was) a strict and stern mother and parent.” Many said they knew they were good people. The kind of people others could count on. “I have a sense of humor and I’m not rude to anyone. When someone is down, I try to lift them up.” Several interviewees were proud of what they had overcome and where they were headed. “I’m going to treatment. I’m proud of myself for making that decision.” Someone who struggled with suicidal ideation said “Every day is a new day. Now I tell myself ‘I could die tomorrow’ instead of ‘I could die today.’” Being resilient came up again and again, as did knowing themselves. “I know my own worth and value despite outside opinions and influence.” “I’m me.”

One participant said that people who didn't have her experience could learn from her. "(It's made me) openminded. When I see someone, I think about how that's the person who fought the battles of poverty, and those are the people who came back from those battles to give you the light and strength that you need."

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