



POWER IN A
SHOWER

Public Showers in New Haven, CT

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SHAWN is supported by the NIH/NIDA No: 1R15DA056285-01. Smoyer, PhD, Principal Investigator. Project Title: Impact of COVID-19 Criminal-Legal Practices on HIV Risk among Women Who Use Drugs: A Multi-Methods Qualitative Exploration

ACCESS TO TOILET & SHOWER IS A HUMAN RIGHT

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



U-ACT DEMANDS

NOTICE TO THE CITY OF NEW HAVEN: **UNHOUSED PEOPLE DEMAND THAT YOU** **RESPECT OUR RIGHT TO BE IN PUBLIC SPACES**

We are the Unhoused Activists Community Team (U-ACT), a group of unhoused New Haven residents and our allies. We are fed up with being CRIMINALIZED for simply living our lives in a city that does not provide places to do the things that everyone else takes for granted, like eating, stopping to rest, sleeping, personal hygiene, securing our personal property, using the bathroom

We demand the following immediate changes to city policies regarding the human right to use public spaces:

1. No evictions from public land

- ◆ 10 business days written notice if the person/people at an encampment cannot be reached in person
- ◆ A publicly-monitored process which includes U-ACT
- ◆ Immediate, accessible alternative housing must be provided
- ◆ No police involvement in encampment sweeps except as a last resort

2. Do not throw away the stuff that belongs to us

- ◆ Store belongings for no less than 60 days after evictions
- ◆ Lost or thrown away items will all be replaced
- ◆ Free, secure public storage lockers will be made available at an accessible location downtown

3. Permanent public bathrooms for all

- ◆ Clean, safe 24-hour bathrooms located across the city, starting with downtown and Fair Haven
- ◆ No criminal charges for public urination or defecation until this demand is met

4. Free permanent public showers

- ◆ Clean, safe shower facilities accessible to the public
- ◆ Reasonable hours that accommodate our needs

Flip this over and take action!

PROGRAM EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- **OPERATIONS & LOGISTICS:** Provide feedback about the Power in a Shower program design and operations.
- **PSYCHOSOCIAL EXPERIENCE:** Describe participants' experiences with New Haven's public shower program.



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EVALUATION DESIGN

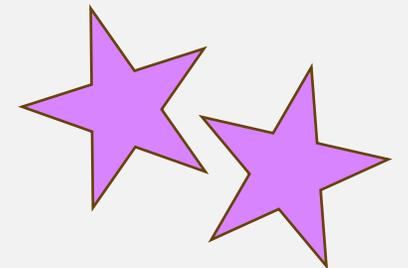
58 Staff Administered Surveys

- Conducted by SCSU social work faculty and trained student research assistants (Amy, Sam, Mellody & Emily)
 - Convenience Sampling: People waiting to use the shower were asked if they would be willing to complete a survey.
 - Staff administered survey. Responses recorded with paper & pen.
 - Time = 5-20 minutes
 - Participants received gift bag (\$5 value)

20 Open-Ended Interviews

- Conducted by SCSU social work faculty: Karen & Amy
 - Key Informants: People who used the shower on numerous occasions were referred to the interviews by Power in a Shower staff.
 - Interviews audio-recorded and transcribed
 - Time = 30– 40 minutes
 - Participants received \$20 for their time.

Thank you to all the study participants who contributed their time, expertise, and insight.



PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS (N = 58)

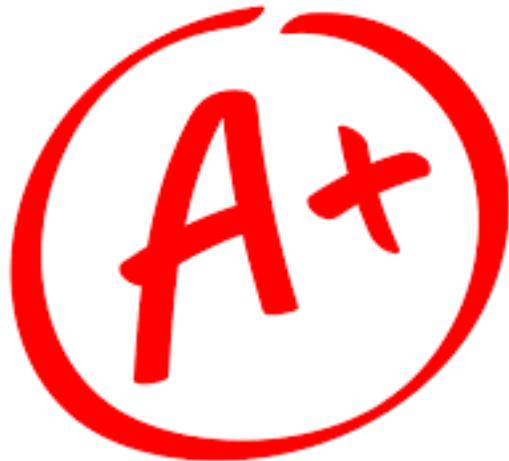
- Participants included people of ages, including parents with children.
- 70% Male; 30% Female
- 30% Black; 30% Latinx; 30% White
- Where did you sleep last night?
 - 58% Shelter or Warming Center
 - 42% Outside
 - 10% of participants reported that there was a shower in the place where they slept last night.



PUBLIC SHOWERS IN NEW HAVEN



CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEYS

A red handwritten 'A+' grade inside a red circle, indicating high satisfaction.

Overall satisfaction with the shower service was high.

Customer ratings of the service on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high):

- Satisfaction with the shower = 4.8/5
- Cleanliness & Safety = 4.9
- Temperature, Pressure, Time, Locations, clothing, bath supplies (shampoo, soap) = 4.8
- Disposable towel = 4.2
- Feedback about shower staffing = 4.9

PART ONE: LOGISTICS



SHOWER OPTIONS



- **No Shower:**
 - **Chris:** I ain't have a shower in a minute. I had to get up in there. I had to use it.
 - **Domina:** I hadn't bathed in three or four days.... I wasn't worried about lack of privacy or anything. I just wanted a shower...I'm a lot happier.
 - **JJ:** We hadn't had a shower in a couple, probably been about a week and a half to be honest. So having a shower is like, oh man, that was a beautiful thing.
- “Bird bath” – washing up in a sink (often not permitted, so risky)
- Social service agency: Fellowship House, Liberty Community Services
- Shelter Housing: Columbus House, Overflow Shelter (not all shelters have shower). Hotel/Motel
- Outside: The Quinnipiac River; Pond on the Boulevard; Water hose: At campsite, behind a church.
- Other people's homes: House of friend or family, as a favor. Potentially risky. Maybe not functioning. Maybe lots of people with one shower.
- Pilot Truck Stop (\$20/shower)

HOW DID YOU LEARN ABOUT SHOWER?

Walked past it, saw it; stumbled upon it while at the Green

Referred by a friend/acquaintance who had used the shower

Heard about while in Whalley Jail

Read about it on website, list of community resources

Referred by health provider from Cornell Hill Health Center

Police officer

CLOTHING

Clothing packages are greatly appreciated

- **JJ:** if you're to do little showers twice, twice a week and that's your only source of clothing, I think it's great.
- **Jorge:** Yeah, besides the clothes I already have, I get a chance to change clothes and don't have to go around people smelling... [My favorite part of the program is] Getting nice, clean clothes, having conversations with the work for people that work there.

Suggestions:

- Clothes
 - Smaller & bigger sizes for clothes
 - More clothes: offer a clothes closet, donation of clothes, especially pants
 - No marron shirt for women bc looks like York CI uniform
- **JJ:** I think having a sink there where you can shave and you have a mirror is nice... I find that having a mirror and giving the adequate time to shave sometimes that's been helpful. ..unique to power shower.



ACCESSIBILITY: 3 DIMENSIONS

LOCATION

CLEANLINESS

PRIVACY

ACCESSIBILITY: 3 DIMENSIONS

1. LOCATION

Most people use one shower that is closest to where they live: Green, Fair Haven, & Dixwell locations offer options for people in different parts of the city. Most people are walking to the service.

2. CLEANLINESS

- **Denise:** One, it's clean. Two, warm water. It's almost like taking a shower in a house. It's comfortable, it's clean. It's not dirty. They are very respectful about keeping it that way.
- **Stan:** The cleanliness, the set up. Everything works like a well-oiled machine. They showed a lot of care and love over the year. Yeah. So I got to know them when I just passed it on through.

3. PRIVACY

- **Domina:** I tried to get other people to come, but some people feel embarrassed about it because it's so public. Maybe if it was facing this way instead of when they step up the shower, people see them because that's what they were telling me. I'm saying, why don't you come? Why don't you come? And they would say, well, when you step out the shower, everyone sees you coming out the shower.

SAFETY

Miss J: I was hesitating because a female, I wasn't sure if it was safe, if how private wasn't, and the time because I'm physically handicapped so I kind of hesitated, but then the people I was talking to who were homeless to says, oh, just go give it a try. So I said, okay, it won't hook. So I came over, I tried it, I liked it, and then been here ever since.

JJ: I was only hesitant. It's a new idea. Obviously I've lived in an RV before and it's not much different than an RV. But yeah, I mean people always worry about their safety and security and after our first use of it all, that was just wiped away, man. It It's like having a private shower that you can go to. Yeah, you got to wait in line, but it's a private shower.



STAFF INTERACTION

Amy: Very courteous. They're working and trying to service at the same time because they cleaned after every shower. Every participant gets a freshly sanitized bath stall. Okay. So without having to need too many directives, they're very courteous and they're on a time... I know that once I sign my name, I don't really need to bother them. Okay, they're going to call you up your card. Yes. So you sign up, you check off your need.

JJ: They know me and my wife by name and we stopped by every once in a while, but while we were both still housed, said hi. They're really nice people. They actually care. You can tell that they actually care and the fact that there's probably a hundred people go through every day and the fact that they know my name and they know they can remember bits and pieces of my story I think is amazing. It just really shows how much they do care.



STAFF INTERACTION: HUMOR

Chris: I love the staff. They're good people... I like to laugh. They make me laugh... Now we built the relationship. You feel like they're look out for you? Of course, we've built a relationship. That's right. At some point you got to build a relationship.

Dickie: I use it frequently and the staff when I show up now, they joke with me a little bit. So it's a nice experience. Yeah.

STAFF INTERACTION: RESPECT

Gena: Respectful interaction. I feel like they haven't said anything, but they seem to be really empathetic about everyone's needs where they try to stay on top of providing what is necessary.

Anthony: Staff is very friendly...they respect you.

Miss J: [Everyone] is really nice, respectful, and I'm happy with the service

Stan: There's no rush at all. They don't be banging on doors to say, you got to hurry up and get out of here and you got to go next person. No, it's nothing like that...They treat me with respect. They treat me like family. It's a mutual understanding.

Cowboy: They treat you like you are human people. They understand you on hard times. How cool is that? But when you disrespect them, then they got other people say, "Whoa...wait a minute."

STAN

Those who are homeless and need a way to get there. Personal hygiene, mentally, psychologically, morally ethical, need to take a shower. They much come down here. They don't discriminate anyone. I never seen them push away anybody or tell anyone to leave. I never have seen them stop anyone from coming here that they might not like or they might not felt comfortable. I never ever seen that happen.

And now I look at it, now, it's a year, and this is the anniversary. You know what I'm saying? They got through with the pilot program. So now they get high marks of doing something that is just, the whole saying is cleanliness... And that's what they're doing and that's how they're, and others should follow that way. And it's a shining example, inspiration that could pass along through the City of New Haven for those who have and to those who have not.



SUGGESTIONS

Most report that they wouldn't change anything.

- **Most common suggestion – Expand!** Increase number of stops and hours per week, esp weekends (currently no service Sat, Sun or Mon); open year round; offer showers in other cities (Waterbury, North Haven), by the beaches
- Suggestion for supplies
 - Bars of soap (vs. body wash)
 - Real towels
- Set up in a place where there is shade, so people can wait in the shade



SUGGESTIONS: TOILET

Participants reported limited access to toilets.

Portable toilets on Green are filthy and un-useable.

Bathrooms in Public Library and City Hall have limited hours and security surveillance,

Restaurants and shops have restricted customer-only access, especially after COVID.

PART TWO: PSYCHOSOCIAL



SOCIAL NETWORKS

- **Many people come to shower with friends or partners**
 - **Chris:** “Me and my boys come here...They’re on their way.”
- **Meet new people**
 - **Dickie:** I've met some people in line and talk with them and I see them out and about around town? Yeah. And say hi. Yeah. See 'em at other agencies. Yeah.
 - **Kevin:** Most everybody out there that's homeless I know or don't know. I seen a couple of new faces over there that I didn't know.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment was not a big outcome for everyone. Many participants were not working or looking for employment due to disability or drug use.

- **Stan:** [I ended up] getting a job working at ShopRite... That nice and neat? This was the place to be. Got myself together, personal hygiene, got myself together, had an outfit, made it to the interview. I got the job. I give it thanks to these people right here.
- **Amy** also described how showers helped her to stay employed while unhoused.
- **Dickie:** Well, I'm not working right now, but hopefully when I am, yeah. I wouldn't be going into work stinking.

HEALTH



Hygiene/Prevention

June: Just being able to keep myself clean and clear of any infections. When you don't wash yourself, you can get infections. So it's nice just to be able to stay clean even though it's only twice a week, at least it is what it is.

Several people described being hospitalized and then being released from hospital to homelessness. Their ability to care for medical issues was compromised by lack of access to showers.



Pain Management

Warm water helps manage chronic pain.

Rose: [I like the hot water because it's] Taking my bone pain out. Taking my bone because I had three rib broken.

E: I always got lower back problems. So the hot water is good for it. So when I come here, I feel like this is therapy for me. I just go there and I let the hot water hit my back and I do some exercise and then I feel good after I come out.

SELF-CONFIDENCE

June: When you look clean, you feel better. I don't like not looking clean.

Dickie: Oh, definitely feeling clean is definitely a confidence builder. . . . It feels terrible when you're all dirty and sweaty for days.

Chris: That's how life works. Standing in your own two feet, huh? That's how life works. True. Yes. Did it? The little two feet. This is part of it right here. Washing your butt every day.





PEACE

Chris: When you get out, you feel clean. It's peace of mind. You feel better about yourself... I'm relaxed. I'm not worrying about them come knocking on the door, acting all crazy with me. They don't do all that.

Tiny: I feel more relaxed. It puts me in another world.

Domina: If you go into the first shower to be real, if you go into the first shower, I forgot where I was. That was the longest time I'd been in there. And I think it was almost an hour. I forgot where I was.

Anthony: A lot of stress out when you stressed the, take all the stress out of your body... It's hot water, you know what I'm saying? Everything feel clean and everything out.

MOOD

Dickie: Oh, it feels great. It definitely brings my mood back up a little.... It improves my mood knowing that I could get clean because especially the past three days where it's been like 90 degrees out in muggy, and today getting out of the shower, I feel brand new again.

Miss J: Feels so good relaxing. We're sleeping on the ground, so the water running down, getting all the gunk and the UNC off and just the water, it feels like massages and it gives us that little bit of that happy feeling and it just, we don't want to get out.





QUALITY OF LIFE

JJ: The last two weeks that I've been homeless, it really has increased my quality of life just to be able to take a shower. I have not been homeless before and I realize how much I take for granted having a shower every single day...

It's refreshing as far as there are times where I try to stay in there as long as I possibly can, but I try to be respectful of the rules and yeah, it's invigorating.

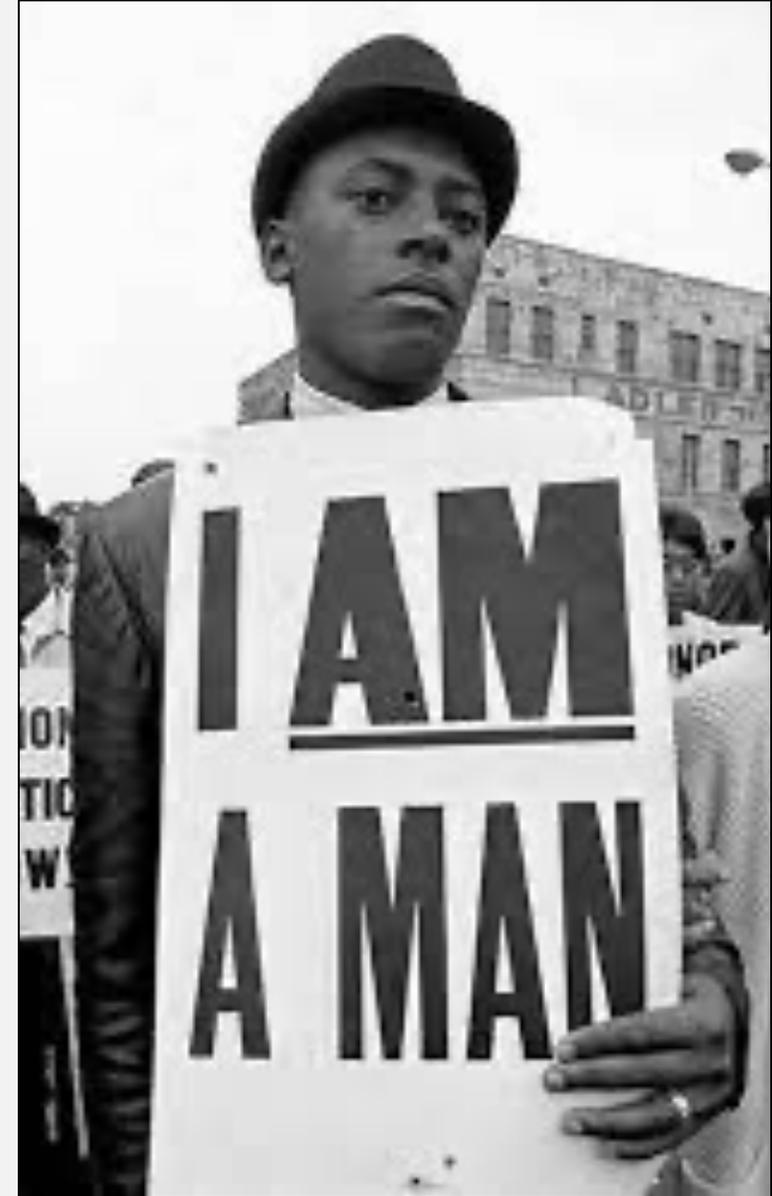
I do like the ability to actually select my temperature. There are some places like it's set at a certain temperature, so you can't get hotter. You can't get colder. And I'll tell you what, on a hot day, sometimes a nice colder shower feels better. So I would say that having that kind of control over the experience is helpful.

HUMANITY

Gena: I wouldn't wish the homeless aspect of it on anyone, but as long as there's resources like this to help at least make you feel human again, because I feel like homelessness can be in a sense dehumanizing.

Miss J: Every Tuesday in the morning me and my boyfriend come over, we're like, yes! Power shower.! Yes! It's time to think of bath, **feel like a human again** and again on Thursday too. So it gives us that little bit of feeling like a normal person and feeling like, okay, we can actually feel like everyone else in the community, even if it's just a little bit, we feel like a normal person.

JJ: I think being clean is just, it's like a reset button and being homeless sometimes it's not a choice, sometimes it is, but **having that shower that you can go to not get judgmental, people are there to actually want to help you rather than going, oh man, here's another stinky person.** I mean, I've had those feelings myself, and I try to use this experience to kind of have a little bit more compassion.





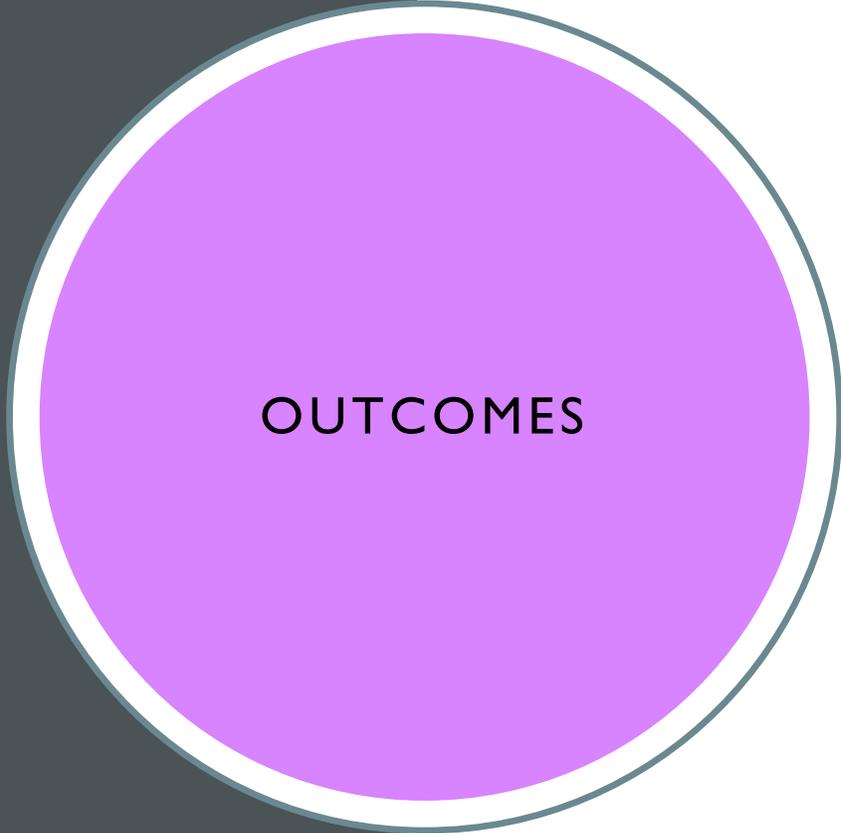
GRATITUDE

Amy:

It is awesome. Awesome. It is a blessing to [the] homeless. [It] is a blessing to people who don't have water running in their own home. That is an issue for people too....And it doesn't have to be because it's their finance. It could just be plumbing and let's say you have to get and there you go.

So it's not just a service to, I mean it's catered to homeless. They're the ones that benefit the most. But if you are in any kind of dilemma and you need a shower, it's there. You don't want to not stop progress in your own life because if you can fix it with a service that's being provided through the courtesy of New Haven, Connecticut and the different human service organizations and et cetera. And I'm grateful that I could use it today.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS



OUTCOMES

Power in a Shower is a service that improves people's quality of life and is greatly appreciated.

- Respected: Very clean and well-run.
- Empathetic engagement with unhoused people
- Recognition of shared humanity
 - Hygiene is a human right
- Expanded social networks
- Self-confidence
- Quality of life: rest, safety, peace, gratitude

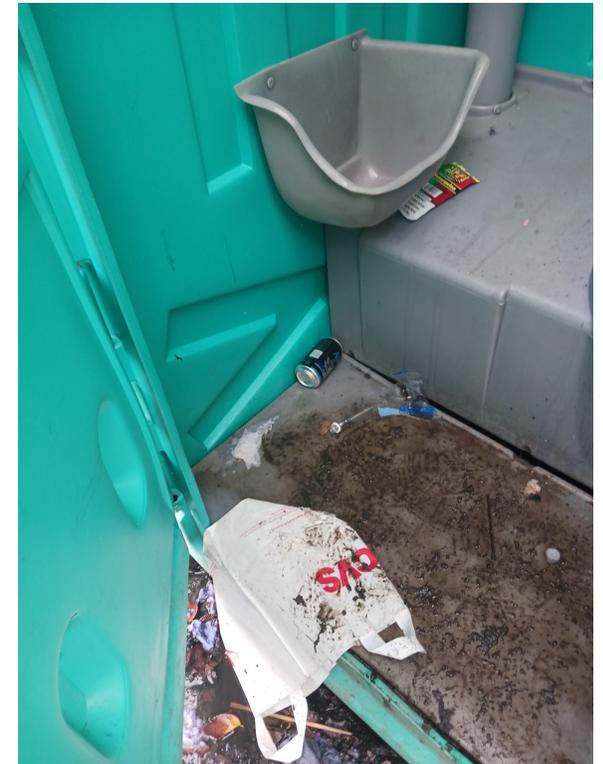


SHOWER ACCESSIBILITY

- Pronounced need for public showers in New Haven
- Accessibility = Success
 - Location = downtown
 - Cleanliness = staffing custodial professionals
 - Supplies = soap, shampoo, towels, clothing, adult diaper, menstruation hygiene
 - Privacy
 - Harm Reduction: Open unconditional access
 - Nonjudgmental, friendly staffing

TOILET ACCESSIBILITY

- Pronounced need for public toilets in New Haven
- Accessibility = Success
 - Location = downtown
 - Cleanliness = Toilet attendant who can clean bathroom after every use
 - Supplies = toilet paper



7 FACTS ABOUT PUBLIC TOILETS

New Haven can do better!

01

TOILET ACCESS: A GLOBAL ISSUE

About 673 million people, 12% of the world's population, have no toilet access. Open defecation is a public health hazard that places people, especially women, at risk for health problems and assault.



02

TOILET ACCESS: A NEW HAVEN ISSUE

- New Haven offers few public toilets. Most are downtown and accessible only during business hours.
- Portable toilets on the Green are dirty and unsafe.



03

PRIVATE BUSINESSES PROVIDE SOME TOILET ACCESS.

- Access to business toilets has decreased during COVID due to store closures & health protocols.
- People who are not making a purchase may be prevented from accessing private toilets.



04

TOILET ACCESS & TRANSPORTATION

- People with cars have access to toilets in gas stations.
- People who use buses for transportation have limited/no toilet access during their journey.
- Bus drivers also have limited toilet access.



05

TOILET ACCESS & EMPLOYMENT

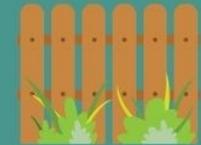
- Managers may control when employees can use the toilet.
- Serving as the gatekeeper and cleaner for a toilet the public is trying to access can be stressful.
- Without access to a toilet, people searching for jobs around town have no place to freshen up and prepare for interviews.



06

WHEN YOU GOTTA GO, YOU GOTTA GO

- If people do not have access to toilets, they will urinate and defecate outside.
- Voiding in outdoor spaces - parks, alleys, bushes - is humiliating, dangerous and may lead to unnecessary police interaction.



07

TOILET ACCESS: PROVEN SOLUTIONS!

- Public toilets have been successfully installed in US cities.
- Best practices include hiring a monitor to keep the facility safe and clean.
- Equitable access to public toilets promotes social justice, inclusion, employment, and civic engagement.



U-ACT is a collaboration of people experiencing homelessness who are organizing for social justice, including toilet access: <https://linktr.ee/uactnhv>



This infographic is informed by SCSU research about women's toilet access in New Haven. Use QR code to read this article. <https://tinyurl.com/toiletaccess>



Smoyer, A. B., Pittman, A., & *Borzillo, P. (2023). Humans peeing: Justice-involved women's access to toilets in public spaces. *PLoS One*, 18(3), e0282917. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0282917>

Identifying existing infrastructure resources in New Haven and maximizing their accessibility.

MAPPING SHOWER & TOILET ASSETS

Investment Ideas...

Grand Ave Shelter
Warming Centers
Social Service Agencies
Vacant Buildings





Thank you!

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