

3-24-2016

Dialogues that Dig Deeper: Surfacing the Multiple Faces of Homelessness in Grand Rapids, MI (Report Three)

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Recommended Citation

Cleypool, Chad; Davis, Dallas; KaviEFF, Mara; Ortiz, Chelsea; Pataro, Cassie; Thompson, Ian; and Vincent, Morgan, "Dialogues that Dig Deeper: Surfacing the Multiple Faces of Homelessness in Grand Rapids, MI (Report Three)" (2016). *Undergraduate Research*. Paper 12.

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Dialogues that Dig Deeper:
Surfacing the Multiple "Faces" of Homelessness
in Grand Rapids, MI

A Report from GVSU's
"Dialogue, Integration, and Action"
(LIB 312-01)

Chad Cleypool, Dallas Davis, Mara Kavieff, Chelsea Ortiz, Cassie
Pataro, Ian Thompson, Morgan Vincent

Dialogue Three
Deliberative Findings
March 24, 2016





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Mission: This community dialogue provided a space for Dégagé patrons, staff, and volunteers to share their stories, prioritize their key values, and begin to identify a broad range of possible interventions for housing and homelessness in Grand Rapids.

Vision: Collaboratively design, facilitate, summarize, and widely disseminate a community dialogue around issue(s) of homelessness and housing in Grand Rapids.

Values:

- Action-oriented Dialogue
- Reciprocity and Mutuality
- Neighborhood & Student Empowerment
- Motivate Community Involvement
- Place-based knowledge

Project Introduction: This community dialogue was designed to identify a wide-range of solutions, consider tradeoffs, prioritize options, and begin implementation efforts. We wanted to discover any possible areas of need for individuals experiencing homelessness that are not currently being addressed by the programs available. In order to accomplish this, we held a community dialogue at Dégagé and elicited responses from patrons, volunteers, and staff.





The results will be shared with Dégagé Ministries, Seeds of Promise, other local nonprofit leaders/experts, and this report will also be openly published so anyone interested can access the lessons learned.

Timeline:

Date	Location	Activities
February 9 4:00-5:15 pm	Dégagé 144 Division Ave S, Grand Rapids, MI 49503 (616) 454-1661	Tour and Narrative: Dégagé Mission & Overview of issues patrons confront
February 18 4:00-5:15 pm	MAK B2116, GVSU, Allendale Campus	Students' Initial Dialogue Design Discussion and Revisions
March 24 4:00-5:30 pm	Dégagé 144 Division Ave S, Grand Rapids, MI 49503 (616) 454- 1661	Community Dialogue (student- designed and facilitated) · 3-4 patrons, 4-5 staff, sit in circle and lead discussion
April 12 4:00-5:15 pm	MAK B2116, GVSU, Allendale Campus	Student Presentations on findings/summaries from community Dialogue & Debrief
April 16	http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/ lib_undergrad/	Publish Report



III. Preparation

Our dialogue design and facilitation efforts began with a tour of Dégagé Ministries and deep listening practices with staff, volunteers and patrons. Next, we integrated deliberative theories, best dialogic practices, and facilitation tools from Grand Valley State University's LIB312-01 "Dialogue, Integration and Action" course with secondary research conducted on issues of homelessness in Grand Rapids. We also intentionally utilized our own disparate expertise as a team in the design, facilitation, and analysis stages of the dialogue. With both a host of facilitation tools and our own strengths in mind, we were usable to ensure all dialogue participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences.

- Inter and Intra-Class Collaborations: the dialogue design harnessed insights from our student team as well as insights from the class as a whole. Based on our experiences conducting our own dialogues and secondary research, we integrated and vetted best practices for dialogic engagement into a "hybrid" dialogue design.
- Secondary Research- Completed before the dialogue in order to contextualize the issue being addressed.
- Facilitation Tools- Included the use of recommendations for dialogue, greeting, round robing, and the elicitation of narrative.
- Name tags- Allow for everyone to become more comfortable with one another and we were able to get to know everyone on a more personal level.
- Questions for dialogue- Allowed for us as facilitators to have a flexible, structured plan for the dialogue.

IV. Findings

Attendees:

- Three Dégagé patrons
- Marketing Director for Dégagé
- Intern for Dégagé
- Full-time employee for Dégagé
- Four GVSU students

Current Strengths within Heartside:

- Resources/services
 - Job search/temp services
 - Help in obtaining identification (State I.D., Birth Certificates, etc.)
 - Transitional housing
 - Mentorship
- Information is willingly given
 - Patrons and staff share information on what is needed and what is available.
- Sense of Community
 - Individuals have each other's back.
 - The sense of community is important even when patrons leave Dégagé and the Heartside area.

The sense of community is very important to those in Heartside. Maintaining a connection to community can be harnessed in order to empower and support those experiencing homelessness. When considering the idea of ending homelessness, the ideals of community need to be considered; it secures mentorships and life-long relationships.

Current Challenges within Heartside:

- Finding Work
 - Some patrons have criminal records and only some temporary services allow hiring of individuals with prior felony charges (friendly felon temporary job services).
 - Steady jobs are hard to come by.



- Transportation
 - Most patrons rely on public transportation (bus system).
 - No public transportation on Holidays. This makes it hard to see family members, get to medical facilities and work.
 - It is highly time consuming to use the current transit system.

When it comes to gaining and maintaining work, previous criminal records and transportation difficulties are a leading problem. Patrons repeatedly emphasized how previous criminal records led to housing and job difficulties. Transportation systems (particularly the bus system in Grand Rapids is a great feature of the city), however, holiday and weekend bus schedules affect patrons travel to work and other places around the city. These issues cannot be solved by one organization but are issues that need to be discussed by several organizations, businesses, and lawmakers.

V. Analysis of Findings

A. Continue Listening

An important aspect of decision-making involves listening to all perspectives. Patrons of Dégagé are very knowledgeable about their situation and have many insights to offer. Providing more opportunities for deep and sustained dialogue between patrons, staff, community leaders and others who work on issues of homelessness in Grand Rapids could further strengthen services and alleviate suffering.

B. Create Awareness

Stigmatization of the homeless population in Grand Rapids was another consistent concern emerging from the dialogue. This exacerbates problems with finding jobs. An expanded outreach campaign about homelessness and efforts underway in Grand Rapids is suggested as a means towards counteracting ignorance and stigma. The more the public gets to know the homeless community, the more they will see them as individual people, rather than a homogeneous group.

C. Tiny Homes

The tiny homes concept was brought up as a solution to transitional housing. However, participants identified many problems associated with this intervention strategy. The most prominent concern surrounded speculation that community members would not want this type of housing near their residence. It was also recommended that other services be incorporated into a tiny homes reintegration strategy. For example, efforts to foster community, mentorship services and supportive structures are needed for successful reintegration efforts.



VI. Conclusion

An analysis of this dialogue confirmed that issues of homelessness are multi-layered, dynamic, and complex, and thus that our intervention strategies must be as well. When we fail to talk in a deep and sustained way with all those involved in the issue, it is easy to overlook these complexities. Through engaging patrons, volunteers, and staff in a facilitated dialogue we were able to get multiple different perspectives and individual accounts on experiences not only within Heartside but also within the region more broadly. Individuals were respectful with one another, encouraging the sharing of personal stories about drug use, family issues, and former legal issues that still impact the lives of participants.

This community dialogue between patrons, volunteers, and staff of Dégagé Ministries and students at Grand Valley State University was one effort among many designed to provide a space for connecting across our divides, encouraging us as a community to think together about the collective challenges we face and better design interventions within the context of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Housing for successful reintegration of the homeless community must respond to the collective human need for community. Participants ultimately felt that a housing first model that does not provide additional resources to help with substance abuse, mental health and other issues will not be effective. Final recommendations focused on supporting a community and a resource base that will help individuals reintegrate into the community. For instance, support structures are needed in order to respond to issues of food insecurity, substance abuse, mental health, family, job insecurity, lack of documentation, criminal records, etc. By providing wrap-around services, long-term reintegration efforts are likely to be more successful and the impact on the community more positive.

VII. References





Isaacs, W. (1999). *Dialogue and the art of thinking together: A pioneering approach to communicating in business and in life*. New York: Currency.

Palmer, P. (2011). *Healing the heart of democracy: The courage to create a politics worthy of the human spirit*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

VII. Appendix



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TIMELINE	STRUCTURE & PROCESSES	FACILITATI ON TOOLS & BEST PRACTICES	REASON / VALUE	ASSIGNED TASKS
16:00-16:10	1. Introduce ourselves (favorite color/band) and ask fellow dialoguers to due the same. 2. Gain consent to record. 3. Ground Rules: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be equitable through acknowledgement of personal biases ● Be generous ● Offer your attention, not just your opinions ● Act with courage Be relentless to represent personal beliefs Engage tension with respect for divergent perspectives ● Offer participants to offer any further ground rules in order to offer them the chance to be involved in the process of development. 	Record and take notes on all ideas shared. <i>Ground Rules</i> <i>Round Robin</i> is preferred due to the importance of voice. Allowing every individual the time to speak is important in observing a diverse array of perspectives. <i>Eye contact</i> is critical in showing support and understanding for the ideas shared. We want to develop a dialogue that promotes	Recognize that we have something to learn. Admit that we are unable to completely understand the position that a participant is coming from, but we can try to relate. Be humble. Be patient. "Enjoy the fruits of diversity" (Parker J.). "The MORE you know about another person's story, the less possible it is to see that person as your enemy" (Palmer 6).	Facilitators: Dallas, Ian, Chelsea Manage recorder/ take notes: Mara



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		positive development through active engagement.		
16:10-16:20	<p>Describe the reason why we are here.</p> <p>Seeds of Promise wants to “empower residents to build a caring community that provides resources for those in need.”</p> <p>They are partnering with a lot of other organizations to do this work, including: <i>West Michigan Environmental Action Council, EZ Construction, Integrated Architecture (IA), Urban Roots, and Soil and Materials Engineers, Inc (SME).</i></p> <p>They are hoping to provide housing, employment, and other services to reduce the number of homeless men and women in Grand Rapids.</p> <p>Using the proven most effective method for</p>	<p>Round Robin</p> <p>Write down all the participants’ names on a half sheet of paper and ask participants to set it on the ground/table in front of them.</p> <p>Using a person's name is an extremely powerful way to connect and develop meaningful dialogue.</p> <p>Provide participants with paper and pens, so that they might write down any ideas they have throughout the dialogue.</p> <p>For those shy to speak, we</p>	<p>We want to develop the sense of creativity that “lies within and between us” --- developing these abilities will “revitalize our institutions, relationships, and ourselves” (Isaacs 14).</p>	<p>Facilitators: Dallas, Ian and Chelsea</p> <p>Manage recorder/ take notes: Mara</p>



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	sustainable development, Seeds of Promise has requested input from the folks of Grand Rapids on what it is that they need most.	will collect the paper at the end to be sure to include your ideas in the analysis of the dialogue.		
16:20-17:00	<p>→ What are some positive experiences you have had in Heartside and more specifically Dégagé?</p> <p>→ What other services do you think are needed?</p> <p>→ What are the barriers to getting off the street that you have experienced in your life?</p> <p>→ How has Dégagé helped?</p> <p>→ What have you found/could you find challenging about maintaining employment and/or residency?</p>	<p>Round Robin Write down all the names. Write down everyone's ideas.</p> <p>Materials Needed: Pens, paper, name tags</p> <p>Determine overarching themes.</p>	<p>“One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say” -Bryant McGill “Learn not to personalize every emotion but to look around and see what is happening with others.” (Issacs 187)</p>	<p>Facilitators: Dallas, Ian, Chelsea</p> <p>Manage recorder/ take notes: Mara</p>
17:00-17:30	With each new desire and/or need identified, ask the participants to give an example of a barrier that stops them from attaining these things.			<p>Facilitators: Dallas, Ian, Chelsea</p> <p>Manage recorder/ take notes: Mara</p>
17:30	Wrap Up/ Thank You			



After	Upload Recording & Complete Individual Summary	Listen to recording		Upload recording: Mara Complete Summary: All
	Analyze Summary	Analyze the Social Process		All

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