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Building a Book of Benefits: Producing a Community Resource Guide to Support Persons Experiencing Homelessness

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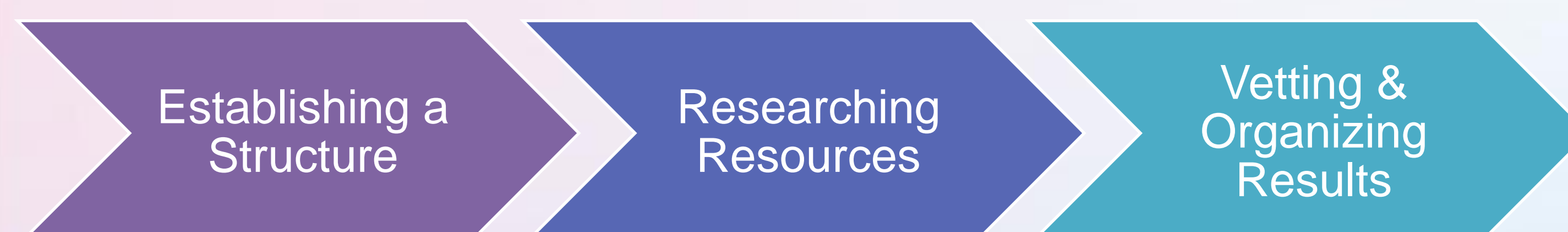
Introduction

- 2019 data from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Continuum of Care model projected that there were roughly 1,843 homeless people in Eastern Pennsylvania
 - A 2015 study at LVHN found that the network serviced roughly 9,330 homeless people
- The Street Medicine team, which is comprised of only four full-time employees, provides social services and healthcare to persons experiencing homelessness, keeping their circumstances in mind
- There is a great need for providers and community health workers to consider the barriers to care homeless people face
- There is a gap in knowledge for many who are looking to begin to address issues of healthcare in homeless communities

Objectives

- The Book of Benefits should include any community resource in the greater Lehigh Valley area that could support the homeless population
- The Book of Benefits should be structured in a way that makes it easy to update as resources change their services or new resources are discovered
- The Book of Benefits should be user-friendly in that caregivers with little expertise in treating the homeless should be able to use it as a reliable reference

Methods



- Research and analyze other resource guides
 - What works and what doesn't?
- Consider the audience/who will be using this guide
- Consider longevity and flexibility
 - Format needs to allow for updates as time passes
- Conduct a literature review of the contents of the Book of Benefits folder on the Street Medicine X Drive
- Visit and analyze the websites of individual resources
- Keep a running list of resources and their corresponding information in an Excel workbook before putting into book
- Categorize community resources by types of services offered
 - Further categorization by location to be done when filling out the guide
- Cross-reference information to ensure it is up to date
- Only include verified resources in guide

Results

- A first draft of the Book of Benefits was created, highlighting several community resources, defining key terms and acronyms one may come across when utilizing these resources, and containing blank copies of important application forms
- Data collected on each resource included its name, location, key contact, services offered, pre-requisites & eligibility for services, web address, and an algorithm for use if applicable

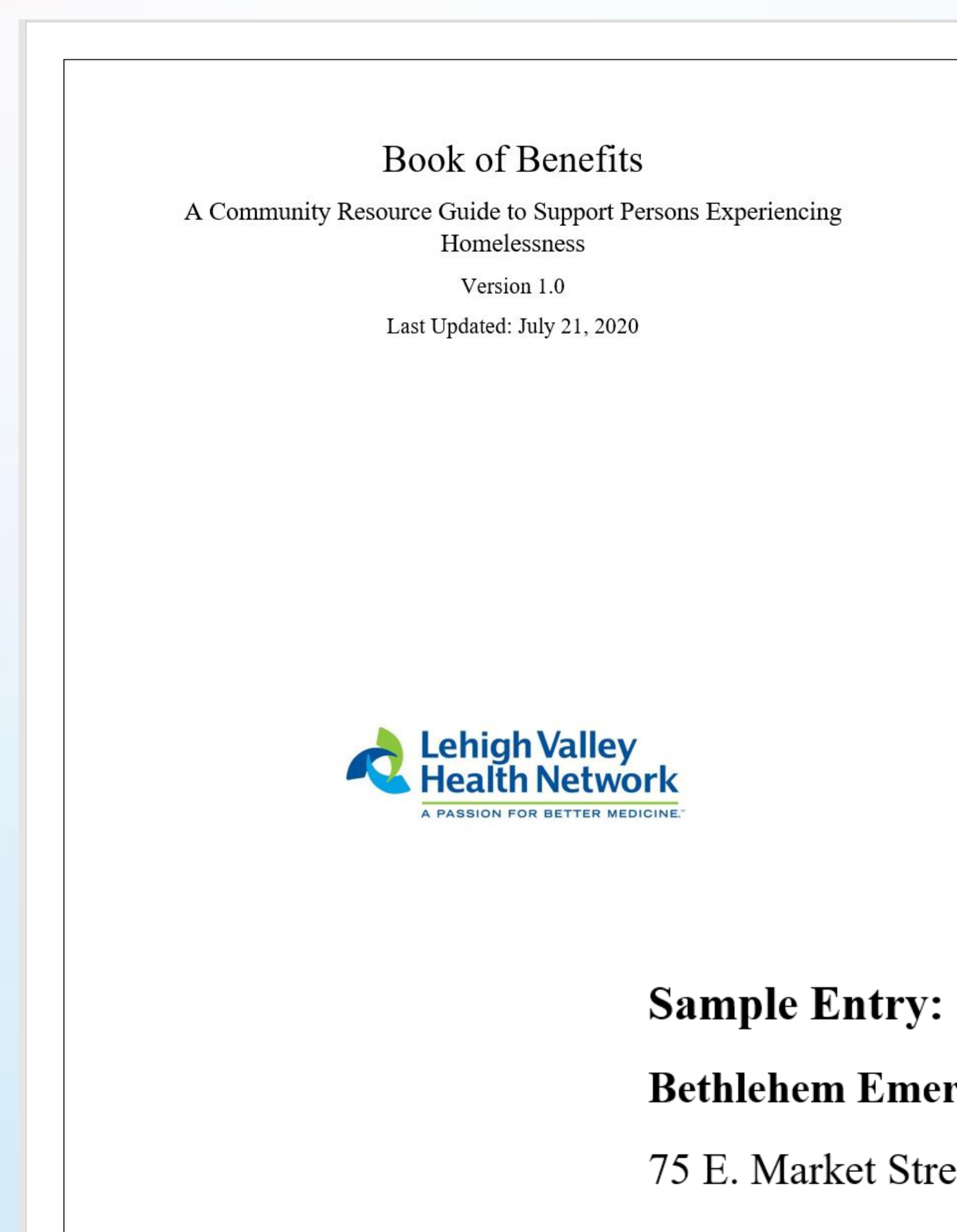


Figure 1 (above): The cover for the Book of Benefits produced by this project.

Sample Entry:

Bethlehem Emergency Sheltering

75 E. Market Street Bethlehem, PA

Bob Rapp, (484)357-0600

Emergency overnight shelter

Operates evenings November through April

<http://www.bethlehememergencysheltering.org/home.html>

Figure 2 (below): A sample entry, in this case for the Bethlehem Emergency Sheltering. This is the way information is displayed in the Book of Benefits.

Conclusions

- The collection of data from community partners and community resources allowed the Street Medicine Program to ensure they had the best, most up to date information on hand so they could offer appropriate services to their patients
- The compilation of this information in an accessible, user-friendly resource guide provides an opportunity for those less familiar with the unique circumstances those experiencing homelessness face to educate themselves and better understand how to treat these patients



Figure 3: Members of the Street Medicine team out in the field. Pictured here underneath a bridge.

Recommendations

- Develop a schedule to ensure the resource guide is updated regularly
- Develop relationships with and deepen standing relationships with community partners so others feel more comfortable approaching them for care advice
- Consider developing a quick pocket-sized guide that includes the highlights and most important sections of this longer piece
- Ensure that this guide is available to all those within LVHN that would like to use it

References

- 2007 - 2019 Point-in-Time Estimates by CoC. "2019 Point in Time Estimates of Homelessness in the U.S." 2019 Point in Time Estimates of Homelessness in the U.S. | HUD.gov / U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Jan. 2020, www.hud.gov/2019-point-in-time-estimates-of-homelessness-in-US.
- Ledyard, R.; Ulas, M., (2015, July 15) The Prevalence of Homeless Patients in the Emergency Department, Poster presented at LVHN Research Scholar Program Poster Session, Lehigh Valley Health Network, Allentown, PA.