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# Designing Shelter: Responding to Issues of Homelessness in Grand Rapids through Design Thinking

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Designed by

## **The 'Tiny Team'**

Of

Grand Valley State University

Design Thinking to Meet Real World Needs (HNR 313 03)

Winter 2016

Authors: Mari Behovitz, Mariella Impellizzeri, Brandon Aho, and Cody Gallagher

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## Design Brief

## Background

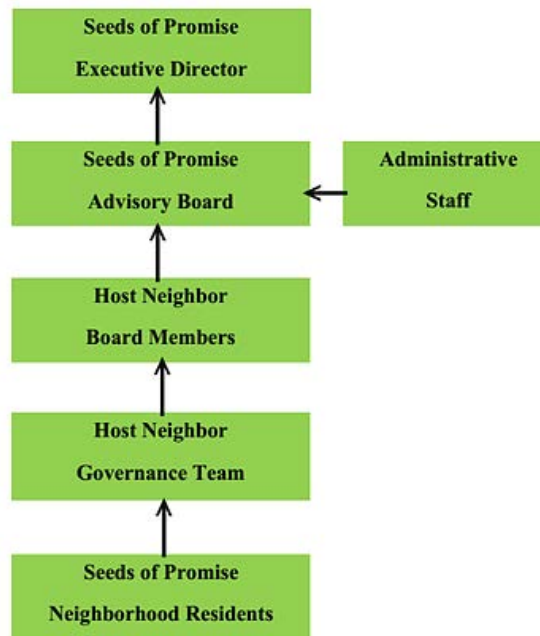
Homelessness is an issue that has plagued society for as long as there have been homes. There are many who only need to be given the chance with the tools to succeed, and who need a firm base to launch their dreams. As you delve into this document, you will be exposed to the insights that led to how these individuals can become empowered to not only re-enter the community as contributing members of society, but also how to improve their chances of staying there and growing the community for the better. Before diving too deeply into this, however, we will look into the background of our collaborator, Seeds of Promise, the organization which invited us in to solve this problem.

Seeds of Promise is a non-profit organization based out of Grand Rapids, Michigan, with an ultimate goal of combatting the very wicked problem of homelessness in Grand Rapids. The organization began in 2005 with an ambitious, but not out-of-reach, mission statement. They hoped to transform this neighborhood through:

- “collaboration and community stakeholder partnerships,”
- “application of sustainable development best practices,”
- “increasing local resident leadership,” and
- “meeting the expectations, needs and wants expressed and desired by the neighborhood” (web, date accessed).

Their vision is of a *sustainable community* capable of fully meeting the needs of its current and future residents. In the past, they have had much success in both providing training for the unemployed and creating Host Neighbor programs that empower leaders from the community and for the community.

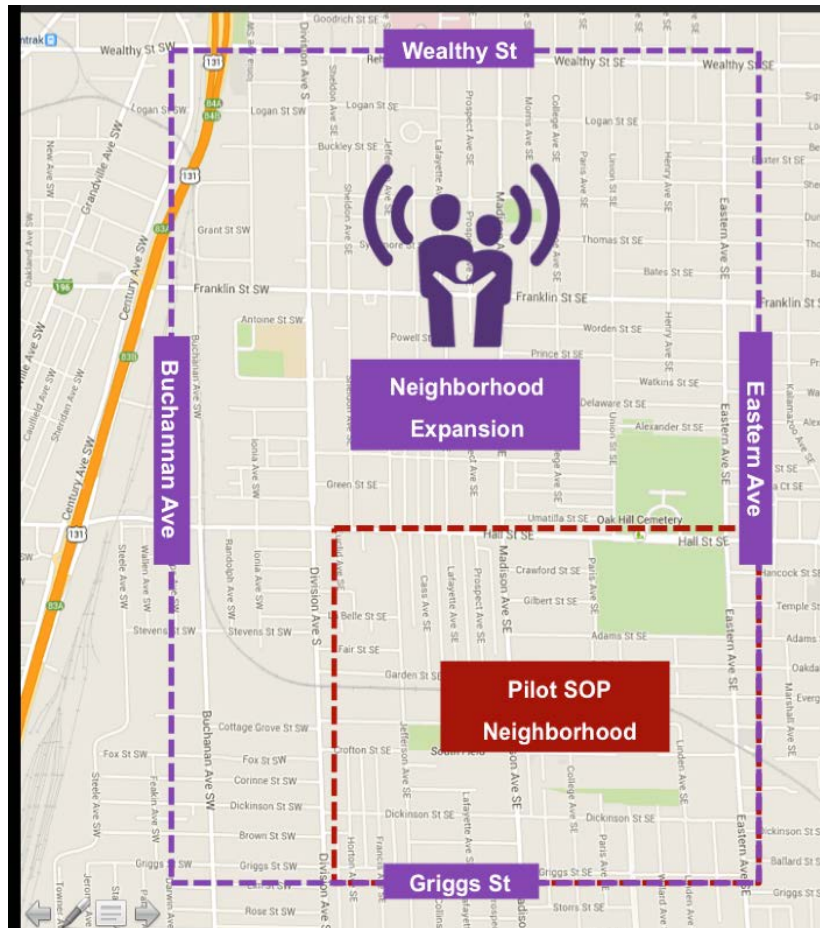
Currently, the organization has eight different “impact teams,” along with sixty endorsing partners intended to comprehensively focus on all elements of what comprises a self-sustaining neighborhood. The Seeds of Promise team is decidedly against common “top-down” strategies used to fight the war on poverty. They have chosen instead to implement a “bottom-up” approach, in which the neighborhood residents and beneficiaries receive first consideration and lead implementation. Below is a diagram illustrating their organizational philosophy.



(Seeds of Promise Organizational Structure, 2016, Seeds of Promise Grand Rapids)

The Tiny Homes Project, part of the Housing Impact Team, is the newest project for Seeds of Promise. For a home to be ‘tiny,’ it must be “less than 500 square feet in total and they can be much smaller - as small as 100 square feet” (*Small Business Labs*, 2014). According to a study published for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology by Catherine Mingoya, “basic tiny homes start at around \$3,000 for a bed, lofted storage space, composting toilet, propane fueled stove, and water tank; land not included” (*Mingoya*, 2015). The homes will be placed on vacant lots scattered throughout their neighborhood. The vision includes a strong programmatic element; all residents must complete two years of character development and work skills training provided by Seeds of Promise. This program is referred to as 5P. Seeds of Promise hopes that this project will serve as a platform to both provide homeless residents of Grand Rapids with shelter, as well as getting them back onto their feet and into the workforce. This will give them a higher chance of long-term reintegration into the community.

Below is the geographic limits of the Seeds of Promise community:



(Seeds of Promise Expanded Neighborhood, 2016, Seeds of Promise Grand Rapids)

## Problem Statement

Our team will be striving toward making the homeless feel more comfortable and secure within their homes through the use of furnishing. We are motivated to study and innovate from this commitment because research uncovered that rates of repeated entrance to homelessness is often over 50% depending on the demographics observed (*Wong, 1997*). These rates are unacceptably high. We hope to further motivate individuals experiencing homelessness to maintain their householder status. We hypothesize that in creating more of a sense of ‘home’ in these tiny homes, there will be higher rates of retaining residency in these houses.

Our ideal model takes a nod from The Empowerment Plan, which is based out of Detroit. The Empowerment Plan hires predominantly homeless parents as full-time seamstresses, teaching them valuable skillsets through on-the-job training. As seamstresses, they make coats that turn into sleeping bags, which are then distributed to the homeless population of Detroit. This model serves a number of valuable functions: it provides warmth and shelter to the homeless of Detroit; it is a source of income for parents experiencing homelessness; it develops very employable skill sets. While we don’t intend to model our project entirely off of this project, we do

believe that it has without a doubt produced a valuable prototype that can be reimaged and implemented within Grand Rapids.

Using a model from *The Four Steps to the Epiphany*, we were able to develop a systems view of homelessness in Grand Rapids by creating a map of the stakeholders. We categorized potential stakeholders through considering who holds power in the current situation, who benefits, who might advocate for change, and who might be negatively impacted by change (2003). Table 1 summarizes our current thinking of who the project stakeholders are, and how they affect our project focus.

Table 1. Tiny Homes Stakeholders

<b>Power Holders</b>	<b>Beneficiaries</b>	<b>Early Advocators</b>	<b>Potentially Adversely Affected</b>	<b>Assumed Saboteurs</b>
Those who are able to help keep the project rolling.	Mainly persons who will be living in the homes.	Those who started the project or who have been working on it since near its conception.	Those who may be negatively impacted by the situation.	Those who will actively attempt to prevent the movement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Police</li> <li>- Food Banks</li> <li>- Uninvolved and Involved Funders</li> <li>- Construction Crews</li> <li>- Land Banks</li> <li>- Taxpayers</li> <li>- Health Providers</li> <li>- Substance abuse Counselors</li> <li>- Donors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prison Released Homeless</li> <li>- Homeless who “gave up”</li> <li>- Children</li> <li>- Welfare Recipients</li> <li>- Those aged out of foster care</li> <li>- Families without income</li> <li>- Substance abuse victims</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seeds of Promise</li> <li>- Involved Funders</li> <li>- Abuse Treatment Facilities</li> <li>- GVSU</li> <li>- The Kellogg Foundation</li> <li>- Grand Rapids Public Schools</li> <li>- Volunteers</li> <li>- Training providers</li> <li>- Unemployment offices</li> <li>- Cascade Engineering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Real Estate Agents (May also be beneficiaries)</li> <li>- Surrounding Neighborhoods (e.g. Those who would fear living next to an ex-criminal)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Concerned community members</li> <li>- Lobbyists (Lobbyists may also be Power Holders)</li> </ul>

## Research

Our first steps towards addressing our problem statement was to engage in empathetic listening and observation through our initial meeting with Seeds of Promise, developing a team charter, and brainstorming as a group. These steps all played important roles in both the “define” and “empathize” stages of design thinking. The first meeting with Seeds of Promise provided great insight into the history of the organization, what they’re currently doing, and what they hope to do moving forward. From there, our team officially began the design thinking process, starting with the “define” phase, in which we narrowed down what aspects of the problem we were motivated to innovate around. We had the opportunity to discuss where we might be able to best fit in with their organization through considering our own strengths and expertise.

Next, we will conduct primary research with our stakeholders, as mentioned in Table 1. From this research we will gain insights into what our stakeholders believe is valuable in a “home” for the homeless population of Grand Rapids. These dialogues are critical, allowing us to more intricately ideate, shaping our project trajectory so it aligns with place-based initiatives. For four weeks we will talk with stakeholders, including persons experiencing homelessness in Grand Rapids, volunteers and workers from homeless shelters, E.Z. construction employees, and Downtown Ambassadors of Grand Rapids. From here, will began to draft initial concepts for a proposal to make equitable and affordable housing “homey.”

After immersing ourselves in the context of the issue in Grand Rapids, themes will emerge, which we will validate through secondary research. This research will help us seek out and confirm other relevant factors. Based on our findings, we will next engage in observational studies in order to gain more insight into the situation of those experiencing homelessness, essentially allowing us to identify what belongings they hold most dear and how they define the idea of a home.

There will be multiple constraints limiting our innovations. As the tiny homes project will be starting out with very limited numbers of homes as trial runs, we will not have a large scale project to furnish the homes; there won’t even be a tiny home built by the end of our project from which we can demonstrate actual concepts. To work with these constraints, we plan to find interest levels for such a project as well as finding many ways to prototype without furnishing an actual Tiny Home.

## Outcome

The goal of our endeavor is to provide all homeless residents entering the Tiny Homes community a sense of ownership and skill-building that will allow them to create stability within their own lives. Our innovations are designed around building this security and giving those experiencing homelessness something to strive for- being a part of the community and being connected. At the end of our process, we envision communities of individuals who have the motivation to succeed and work hard to stay connected through their Tiny Home. We don’t simply picture putting a roof over heads, we see them making their homes their own. The design process will act as a tool for learning what is truly important to providing a home for the homeless.



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## Stakeholder Map

We began our work by organizing the stakeholders involved in the ecosystem into a visual map. The result of our efforts is a mind map illustrating the connections between many of the stakeholders involved. This map is detailed below.



## Insights Map

As we conducted research on the problem we collected our insights and mapped them. This process helped us uncover key themes surrounding the issue of housing and homelessness in Grand Rapids. An example of one of our insight maps is shown below.



## **Collaborator Debriefs**

Throughout the course of the semester we participated in three collaborator debriefs. These were very important in helping us gain continuous feedback from stakeholders on our ever-changing problem statement. It allowed us to present to them our new findings and updated problem statement and gain further insights on the direction of our innovation.

### **Collaborator Debrief #1: Articulating and Revising the Initial Vision**

#### **Flipchart 1: Problem Statement**

Our team will be striving towards making the homeless feel more comfortable and secure within their tiny homes, and creating within them more of a sense of home.

#### **Flipchart 2: Insights**

-A common viewpoint held by many people that we've spoken to is that it's more the people who reside in the home that make it what it is, than any sort of material items.

-We've heard from multiple stakeholders that there are many subcategories and sub communities within the homeless population of Grand Rapids. Some of the more substantial divides seems to be race and age.

-There is a surprisingly large amount of homeless individuals who resist being placed in housing, due to either mental illness, or not wanting to leave their friends who aren't able to move with them.

#### **Flipchart 3: Barriers**

-One barrier is the relatively short amount of time we have to go through the design thinking process with this project.

-Arranging times to meet with stakeholders we've reached out to has been a substantial barrier for us.

-Our relative lack in expertise and background of the homeless population and homelessness problem in general.

#### **Debrief Feedback**

##### **Other Innovation Teams' Comments**

- Was gender a factor in a sub community? - We heard mostly age and race.
- The communities are also about safety, the idea of "safety as a group."

##### **Collaborator Comments**

- What were some of their stated reasons why homeless were not willing to move? Cody – age, race, shared a story of one person who refused to leave even when offered the opportunity.

- Where did your interviews come from? (70/7 and secondary interviews)
- Where are you seeing the divisions in sub-communities? Answer: Seeing more differences in age and race. Haven't gotten more specific than that. Brandon – sub communities are divided by age, etc. If we can help keep their community together, will be a good way of keeping them together.

## **Collaborator Debrief #2- Telling the Story**

### **Flipchart 1: Problem Statement**

“Our team will be striving toward making the homeless feel more comfortable and secure within their tiny homes.”

### **Flipchart 2: Bullet list of top 3 “needs” statements (from insights/affinity map)**

1. One major need of the Tiny Homes project is addressing the sense of community that needs to be maintained within the homeless population, after they are placed into the tiny homes.
2. One essential need of the homeless after being given the opportunity of having a home need to experience a sense of security within the home. Whether that means physical locks on the doors or the presence of others or even trusting their neighbors.
3. The homeless individuals having the opportunity to get involved with the furnishing and construction of the homes, giving them a sense of ownership.

### **Flipchart 3: Bullet list of 2 “From: To:” Statements**

1. From having a community being homeless to maintaining that sense of community within their new home.
2. From risking their personal belongings night to night to having a safe and secure place to store what is most precious to them.
3. From depending on the shelters for basic necessities to taking initiative within the tiny homes project to become sustainable and independent individuals.

### **Flipchart 4: Bullet list of 3 barriers your team is facing**

1. Connecting with the homeless directly.
  - The majority of our interviews were done on individuals that work with the homeless, not the homeless directly.
2. Time Constraints
3. Application of our research towards innovation.
  - We have a lot of research and information from our interviews and we want to figure out the best way to apply this to our problem.

### **Debrief Feedback**

Last time 2 groups discussed 4-10 homeless individuals together. After receiving information from the city, it's clear that they must have 4-8 people in one house (two bathrooms) to meet zoning requirements.

Shared experience from last fall after funding to complete murals on their lots. Two professional artists spear-headed it, setting a framework for what to create, but began through deep listening with tenants and iterative dialogue. Challenges (they had the funding, but if/when no one wanted to participate, then nothing would happen).

Find and develop relationships with people who have connections.

Provide catered food and childcare. Be consistent.

Once they have the plans for the house, they will receive feedback from the homeless before anything gets built.

Door-to-door communication has been essential to getting tenants to attend.

Volunteer recruitment as it can be exhausting? Well known leadership is key to recruiting volunteers. Facebook and phones alone to get people don't work.

We had to provide food and child care for our Health Care Fair. This helped, as we had 138 families (consider barriers for others).

### **Collaborator Debrief #3: Envisioning the Future**

#### **Flipchart 1: Problem Statement**

“Our team will be striving toward making the homeless feel a sense of ownership within their new homes.”

#### **Flipchart 2: Top 5 Innovations**

- **Kindness Wall**- furniture made by homeless and donations/furniture made by volunteers
- **Workshops** to build furniture/ gain skills
- **Furniture fundraisers**
- Home goods based **market/thrift store** in which the homeless can select items from to furnish their homes
- **Tiny transformations**- support as the home's become a community- getting local schools involved

#### **Flipchart 3: Top Two Prototypes**

**Prototype 1:** Implementing a workshop program in which individuals can come in and learn valuable traits that will increase their employability. For example, a workshop might focus on woodworking. Having this trait would assist in making the individuals more self-sustaining and they could get hired more easily. Volunteers could be brought to teach the classes, making it still somewhat low cost. These classes would also provide a way for the individuals to furnish their home. The individual would work to build their own furniture, this could assist in making the individual feel more invested in and “at home” in their new housing. Having a hand in building/furnishing the home would help the individuals to feel empowered and not like they are receiving a handout.

**Prototype 2:** Seeds of Promise could develop a furniture and home goods based market and or thrift store, in which the residents could come and select their own furniture and home furnishings.

Getting furniture for new homes for very low income homes can be challenging, as we found from our interviews. This method would allow for a team of people to be out searching for furniture. In order to get the furniture the market/shop could run similar to a goodwill/salvation army. Meaning that individuals in the Grand Rapids area could donate their gently used furniture and home goods to the center. In addition to get those homeless individuals involved that wanted to be involved they could create jobs for the homeless. They could create teams that consist of volunteers and homeless individuals and have them go searching for furniture around the Grand Rapids area. Whether it is at Garage sales, good will, and or large warehouse retailers that may be overstocked. These teams could also go around asking for donations in order to cut down the cost. Another option would be a partnership with GVSU. The program could work something out where the University donates old furniture to the market/store in trade of some volunteer service on the campus.

In order for the homeless to get the furniture and home goods from the market/shop they could use a point system or pay in cash. There could be various jobs offered working at the market and the more task they complete the more points they would earn to purchase the furniture they may need. Some of the participants in the program may already have jobs, so they would be allowed to pay cash as well. Full and part time positions could also be offered to homeless individuals that may be may be looking for more than just earning points. This would be a sustainable market that would benefit the Tiny Homes community in more ways than one.

**Flipchart 4: Two questions for the attending stakeholders?**

1. Which prototype seems the most feasible and accepted by the community?
2. For that prototype- what do you think its greatest faults are?

## **Ideation Summaries**

To begin our ideation, we decided to take a look at our research and the needs we had to address. We then developed From: To Statements to decide on the direction we wanted to go. Off of this, we began ideating.

Our first problem we decided to address was that of maintaining a sense of community after placing homeless in their homes. We want to convert the tiny homes project into a tiny community project. This is because we want to maintain the ties the homeless have already built and avoid dissolving the relationships they have. Our ideas for the tiny community project include placing multiple tiny homes onto one lot, or having an interconnected system of houses, possibly up to the level of an apartment building, where the homeless community can stay interconnected. Through our research we found that a "home" is considered a place where people can be together. If they are in an individual tiny home, they will be broken from this sense of home and among a neighborhood of strangers. If we make it a neighborhood of tiny homes, they can keep their sub-communities and combine it with their new homes and neighbors.

We also wish to address the problem of instilling a sense of ownership. Our ideas have been to involve them in the creation and attainment of furniture for their homes. When we have a say in the design and decisions of our home it makes us feel more a part of it; it gives us a sense of ownership.

“Allowing every person to create his or her own home and make it personalized. In this research they found that creating a sense of ownership from the very beginning of planning and creating the home, the homeless will feel more secure and empowered.” –Ridgeway



## Top Five Innovations

- **The Kindness Wall** - The Kindness Wall is an already existing idea, our innovation was to create a modified version of this which would allow people to donate furniture and home goods instead of just articles of clothing. Instead of leaving the actual item there, they could leave a picture and a method of contact for the location where the item was being stored.
- **Workshops** - These workshops were designed with the idea of providing individuals experiencing homelessness as well as other individuals in the community to come in and learn how to build furniture, as well as building their very own. They could also donate the furniture they build back to the cause for others who could either not attend or did not have the ability to participate in the event.
- **Furniture fundraisers** - These fundraisers were a way in which the community could come in and donate furniture at given times and locations that would be able to be distributed to those living in the affordable housing provided by Seeds of Promise or be temporarily stored until a housing unit was in need.
- **Market/thrift store** - Home goods based thrift store in which those previously experiencing homelessness can select items from to furnish their homes, or others in the community with constricted funds available.
- **Tiny transformations**- The tiny transformations concept was introduced to us by a stakeholder as the idea of building support for the home as it becomes part of the community, getting local schools involved later on in the process.

## Top Two Design Prototypes

**Workshops** - The workshops idea grew into one of not only furniture construction, but of other home goods as well. Participants would be able to take an assortment of different workshops in which they would gain a multitude of skills that they could keep even after the goods they created wore out. They would of course be able to keep or donate their creations, and participate in as many workshops as desired. The workshops would be hosted by skilled volunteers who are willing to donate their time to a noble cause. The materials would be obtained from sponsors and donations.



**Thrift Stores** - The thrift store concept grew from being a place where cheap furniture and home goods were provided into a place where individuals would be able to commit their time in community service and involvement in order to obtain such goods. This idea was intended not only to provide individuals with much needed furniture, but to also reconnect them into the community and strengthen their bonds with other active community members to build a support network for the individuals.



## **Final Prototype Description**

After receiving a multitude of feedback on our two top prototypes we have selected to create the “Seeds Workshop Series.” The “Seeds Workshop Series” received the most positive responses from the stakeholders that we sought feedback from. This series is a volunteer led workshop open to all community members, not just individuals experiencing homelessness. This workshop series consists of learning valuable life skills, specifically woodworking. The series would incentivize attendance through a point-based system. For each meeting the individual chose to attend, the attendee would receive a point. After collecting a certain number of points the individual could exchange the points for additional materials/furniture made during the workshop. These items would then be used to furnish the individual's home if that is how they preferred to use the item. Selling the produced item would also be a viable option.

Our team found this workshop series to be the most effective toward addressing key issues in placing individuals in new homes since it fosters a sense of ownership and a sense of community. Collectively working on wood projects would bring individuals together and form bonds that would be successful in creating a more inclusive community. The option for the community members and individuals recently placed in new homes coming together would also build that neighborhood bond that the individuals may not have been exposed to otherwise.

The “Seeds Workshop Series” would also entice a sense of ownership within those that had just been recently placed in a home. Having the ability to build furniture that would actually be used to furnish the various homes would assist in making the individuals feel overall more invested in the project.

## **Innovation Symposium Presentation Link**

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1VcoQFIwh54EHRDCKPNA1IW0IbAyGQaEe2Rao2Hk9OOQ/edit?usp=sharing>

## **Team Video Link**

<https://youtu.be/wup6oqYpBvg>

## Team Narrative

Wouldn't you want everyone to have a house that has become their home through the pride and joy of designing and making their furniture? We have been working as a team to make this a reality. We are a transdisciplinary undergraduate team of Grand Valley State University students tasked with researching issues of housing and homelessness in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Our Team consisted of Mari, Mariella, Brandon and Cody. Each of us had our own roles and strengths, and to discover and capitalize on these strengths, we took the Myers Briggs test. Below are our results and some brief info on the people who have taken the leap into creating a unique solution to "making a house a home."



- Mari (Outer left), our co-leader, is studying advertising, public relations, and business. She is an ENFJ, according to the Myers Briggs test. This means she carries the following strengths: caring, enthusiastic, organized and skilled communicator.
- Mariella (Inner Left), our second co-lead, is studying Entrepreneurship and Management. She is an INFJ, according to the Myers Briggs test. This means organized, dependable, and insightful.
- Brandon (Outer Right), our team researcher and reporter, studies physics and education. Brandon is an INTP according to the Myers Briggs test. He is intellectually precise, reserved and imaginative.
- Cody (Inner Right), the team technician and synthesizer, is a liberal studies major, with an emphasis on sustainable food systems. His Myers Briggs score was ENFJ. He has the same Myer Briggs results as Mari. He is very responsible and organized.

Through understanding and harnessing our collective strengths as a team and using the design thinking process, we were able to create innovative responses to problems surrounding

homeless reintegration within our community. “Teams,” we have learned firsthand, can best “offer valuable support in maintaining the complexity that integrative thinking thrives upon” (Martin, 2009, p. 81). In the context of our project, we had twelve weeks to *empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test our innovations*

We began by deep listening in place, meeting with our key collaborator Seeds of Promise and hearing their own nonprofit story. Originally founded in 2003, they have the mission of “empowering urban residents to direct their own self-sustaining improvements” (Seeds of Promise, 2016). The initial focus of our project was the use of tiny homes as transitional housing for homeless citizens in the Seeds of Promise neighborhood.

After being introduced to our project, our team recognized the great need for outreach; the problems surrounding equitable and affordable housing for those experiencing homelessness in our community requires a systemic and iterative process of engagement. While homelessness is a dynamic global issue, its complexities must be understood in place. Location matters because the solutions found for one area may not work somewhere else. For example, Grand Rapids is experiencing a housing shortage along with a drastic rise in housing prices which have exacerbated efforts to reintegrate those experiencing homelessness through affordable housing in the community.

Throughout every stage of our design thinking process, we conducted a considerable amount of both primary and secondary research. To initiate our primary research, we created a stakeholder map that described the ecosystem of homelessness in the Seeds of Promise region. We then conducted dialogues with a large array of our stakeholders to gain insight from as many perspectives as possible on the problem of homelessness. We focused a majority of our interviews on beneficiaries (those who will benefit from the solutions), power holders (those who make decisions), and early advocates (the change agents). For instance, we spoke with surrounding homeless shelters including: Degage Ministries, Mel Trotter, Heartside Ministries, 70 X 7 Recovery, and Wellhouse. We also spoke to E.Z. Construction, who works closely with Seeds of Promise on neighborhood restoration projects, and the Downtown Ambassadors of Grand Rapids. In addition, our group collectively made observations through positioning ourselves into Heartside, God’s Kitchen, Degage, Mel Trotter, and the surrounding outdoor areas. These observations served as strong guides for developing our innovations and prototypes. After empathetic listening and eleven interviews with stakeholders, we came to the conclusion that the problems surrounding homelessness and housing are far greater than we had originally anticipated. In talking to stakeholders, we generated many powerful insights that would help to guide our project.

For our secondary research, we scoured databases for studies based around homelessness, Tiny Home construction, the community in which we were working, and anything else deemed pertinent to our work. We covered various disciplines, recognizing many categories of homelessness; including but not limited to the impacts of: age, gender, race, location, background, history, sub-communities, workshops, mental illness and more.

Using design thinking methods, we were able look for patterns in key insights from our primary and secondary research. From the primary research, we realized that separating the target community and placing them in individual Tiny Homes would be inhibiting. The homeless community is tight knit and sticks together; they often refuse help unless it is also available to all those in their circle as well. Peers are considered family, and a home is not necessarily wanted if

their friends will remain on the streets without aid. The insights we found most valuable included the resounding sentiment that **people themselves are what make a home**, the observation that many without a home are experiencing mental illness, as well as that *participation for homeless outreach efforts is often an immense difficulty*. From this secondary research, we found that keeping that sense of community while aiding those experiencing homeless can assist in building a sense of empowerment that is needed if formerly homeless individuals are to thrive in their new environments.

With the results of the research in hand, we developed needs statements, and then clarified our work through creating From:To statements, envisioning a desired state. This enabled a platform for innovation; “Innovation is all about quickly turning ideas into action” (Kelley, 2013, p. 114). Our top five innovations included a kindness wall, skill building workshops, furniture fundraisers, a home goods based market/thrift store, and “tiny transformations,” a support system involving local schools. Through collaborator debriefs offered in class, we were able to narrow the focus of our potential innovations and develop prototypes, i.e. potential solutions against the problem statement. In the words of IDEO, “Once we’ve determined a range of solutions that could appeal to the community we’re looking to serve, we then start to home in on what is technically feasible and actually implement.” (IDEO, 2015).

Our prototypes were presented to a wide range of interested stakeholders, including our community partner, Seeds of Promise. Our ultimate prototype is centered on **building ownership within the home**. It is designed to involve the homeless in their home creation process, empowering them to make decisions about what is important to them. The basis for our final prototype is a series of workshops in which individuals can create their own home goods. By attending the workshops, they can not only craft their own home goods, but also earn points that they can exchange for goods contributed by donors, or goods crafted by others who have participated in the workshops.

## **Recommended Next Steps**

It would be ideal to leverage GVSU community-based courses in order to take our prototype from its initial stages and bring it into reality in our local community. There is a greater push every year at GVSU for courses to implement this model, so there could be opportunity for this project to be continued by another class. One such course is in the school’s Liberal Studies program, and is called Wicked Problems in Sustainability. The course focuses on tackling local issues through the “wicked problems” framework, initially established by Horst Rittel and Melvin Weber. In previous semesters, the course has focused their efforts on projects with community organizations such as the Heartside Gleaning Initiative, Seeds of Promise, and the Belknap Neighborhood Organization. Other courses that also participated in Grand Valley’s community engagement learning is Entrepreneurial Projects in the school’s business department. This past semester the course worked with the West Michigan Environmental Action Council to increase their revenues and brand recognition.

Another option which we believe would be beneficial is the possibility of Seeds of Promise offering an internship program. The responsibilities of this internship could entail: gathering, organizing, and analyzing all of the prototypes submitted to Seeds of Promise from all of the different courses at both Grand Valley and Kendall College of Art and Design. An internship such as this would be ideal for a wide span of Grand Valley students, as almost every department in

the university requires one to be completed for graduation. It could also be adaptive to many different majors and fields of studies. Both a Public Administration and Nonprofit Management major and a Business major could be equally as fitting for such an internship, as they would both bring in with them their own unique perspectives.

## **Conclusion**

Through our design thinking process, we engaged in large quantities of research that gave us insight into the issues of homelessness and housing in Grand Rapids. We arrived at a prototype addressing the problems of ownership within a home that is centered on workshops in which the newly homed individuals may create their own home goods such as furniture, and have something to take pride in.

We ask all of you to help continue our work and the works of others addressing this problem. But we ask that you do not stop there. Involve yourself in your community, inform yourself of its strengths and weaknesses, and identify where your own strengths and interests lie. Our team came into this project with little context on the problem, and we're ending our semester incredibly confident of what we've accomplished. You too can do the same.

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