

Back Alleys to Bins: Secure Storage for London's Homeless

Clare Dennis-Grantham

Executive Summary

One of the many problems faced by people experiencing homelessness is the risk of robbery. This issue is connected to the lack of secure spaces to store personal belongings. Overall, this can be a significant source of stress and limit daily activities. A secure storage program would help bring relief and allow for more freedom without being weighed down by personal belongings. Access to secure spaces could help people experiencing homelessness to better access shelters, services, education, and opportunities for employment (Chung, 2018). Additionally, users would regain a sense of dignity that was previously limited by the burden of carrying their belongings everywhere they go since this is often a harsh stigmatizing symbol of being poor (Cleverley, 2018).



"A big issue with being homeless is you can't trust anybody. You have to sleep with one eye open and on top of your belongings. Everyone attacks you like buzzards when you sleep" (Richmond & Bieman, 2019)



Photo: Unity Project homeless shelter, London, ON. Courtesy of unityproject.ca

Issue and Local Context

- ~1,000 people experiencing homelessness in London, ON
- Local factors contributing to homelessness include: local drug crisis, increasing cost of rent and high unemployment rate (Bono, 2019)

The average homeless person in London is a male of working age suffering from a chronic illness, victim of violence and sexual assault, living with an acquired brain injury, and carries a minimum of backpack size of belongings

Policy Options

- Install units indoors: previous outdoor locker programs resulted in dangerous conditions and extreme vandalism (Kenney, 2018)
- Use pre-existing buildings and services: creating project specific buildings increases cost of the project. To minimize cost, already existing resources such as shelters, soup kitchens and poverty services could host secure storage units
- Accountability: previous programs relied on users checking in with organizers daily to ensure accountability and responsibility (Cleverley, 2018)
- Dispersed units: a common complaint about poverty driven programs is the higher density of homeless people in a specific area. Dispersing units across the city in various shelters and service sectors would resolve this 'issue'

Concluding Remarks

This project could help to improve security and safety in the lives of people experiencing homelessness in London. The greater freedom could allow for new ways of conducting daily activities and enable people to live with fewer limitations. It is however important to be aware of the complex and ongoing nature of homelessness. I wish to conclude by acknowledging that this project is not to be a solution for homelessness, but rather a supplement in the lives of those who engage in the program and improve the dignity of our local homeless population.

Based on the average homeless Londoner, the secure storage program would:

- Help to alleviate stress of stolen belongings
- Provide secure storage for school and work related items
- Improve health by reducing contact of personal items with the street
- Minimize harm associated with personal robberies
- Allow for freedom to access supports and services

Policy Recommendations

1. Reach out to local community organizations
2. Discuss issue and plan of action
3. Work together to create revised plan and establish community partnerships
4. Propose revised plan to city - goal to gain consent and government funding



Sources Consulted
Bono, N. D. (2019, April 27). Homeless people face looming 'tragic catastrophe': Expert. Retrieved from <https://lpress.com/news/local-news/homeless-people-face-looming-tragic-catastrophe-expert/>
Chung, S. (2018, October 20). Berkeley provides storage lockers for homeless individuals. Retrieved from <https://www.dailycal.org/2018/10/22/city-of-berkeley-homeless-program-providing-storage-lockers-for-homeless-individuals/>
Cleverley, B. (2018, October 10). City of Victoria to pay \$150,000 for storage lockers for homeless. Retrieved from <http://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/city-of-victoria-to-pay-150-000-for-storage-lockers-for-homeless-1.25457398>
Kenney, A. (2018, September 27). Denver removes storage lockers for homeless because people were living in them. Retrieved from <https://www.denverpost.com/2018/09/26/denver-removes-storage-lockers-for-homeless/>
Richmond, R., & Bieman, J. (2019, November 14). FACE IT: The Street, Part 1 - The Problem. Retrieved from <https://lpress.com/news/local-news/face-it-the-street-part-1-the-problem>