



Implementing Your Street Outreach Program

Adapted from Trudee Able-Peterson & Richard A. Hooks Wayman's
"STREETWORKS: Best Practices and Standards in Outreach Methodology to Homeless Youth"



What These Findings Indicate to New Outreach Workers:

- Be prepared to cover social conditions and issues
- Be prepared to react to diverse reasons why the youth left home
- Be open to working with a wide range of youth

Geographical Assessment/Neighborhood or Community Assessments

The best and safest street outreach work begins with an in-depth and thoughtful assessment or “environment study” of the area or areas in which an outreach worker will be working.

- Visit targeted neighborhoods at different times
- Observe different patterns of activity
- Check out community centers and get to know staff
- Observe where youth go after school
- Get recognized by someone
- Develop sites where the outreach worker can go in case of emergency, accompanied by youth or alone

“Always be friendly and open, and walk through the neighborhood as a guest while you are doing all you can to connect to the community.” – M.J. Mueleners

Procedures for Interaction with Law Enforcement

- Outreach workers should be prepared to speak with law enforcement and seek advice on how to respond during investigations
- Make contact with juvenile law enforcement, they have knowledge of where youth are
- Act respectfully and follow directives of police personnel
- It doesn't help to resist
- Calmly do what the officer asks, when he or she is making a requests within the parameters of his or her authority
- If an outreach worker, partner or youth is treated in any illegal manner by police personnel, write down the badge number, ask for their name, or get the squad car number and report it to your supervisor

Approach, Engagement and Relationship Building

Approach

- Always have your card and a personal agency outreach card available
- Identify yourself and affiliations as quickly as possible

Some effective approaches may be:

“Hi, have you got a minute? I’m an outreach worker for _____ (drop-in center, clinic, youth shelter, etc.)”

“Hi, my name is _____, and I’m an outreach worker with the _____, I just want to give you some information about our program.”

“Hi, my name is _____, and this is my partner _____. We work for _____, and we want to give you some information about services for youth in the _____ area.”

Approach, Engagement and Relationship Building

Approach cont.

- Don’t be offended
- Always be willing to give the youth another chance
- Approach with sincerity and information about youth services
- When leaving the youth, tell him or her to have a safe night and to take care, or another positive parting remark
- Let the youth know you’ll be back on a specific day or time
- Give the young person a business card

Approach, Engagement and Relationship Building

Engagement

- May happen the first time, or it may take several attempts
- Depends on: how the youth is feeling, what the youth may be involved in, his or her personality type, whether the youth feels you are safe at the time
- Try to remember names, even if it is a nickname

Some strategies for outreach workers to develop:

- Associating the location where you meet the youth with the name
- Asking a partner to help you remember names
- Keeping a notepad with names of youth you've met and reviewing it before you return

Approach, Engagement and Relationship Building

Engagement cont.

- Small pocket notebooks
- Wait to write down information
- Engagement can be achieved by actions rather than words
- Help the youth with a project
- Youth not only listen, they watch you

Approach, Engagement and Relationship Building

Relationship Building

- Aid in making safer choices
- Making positive changes in lifestyle
- Help youth feel good about themselves
- Overcome obstacles
- Begin the healing process
- Be there when you say you will
- Work with them as partners
- Feed them, listen to them, and respect them

“While walking down the streets looking for young people trying to find their way, I often think, ‘Do I really have an impact?’ or ‘Are youth really hearing what I’m saying?’ Time passes and you meet thousands of faces on the street, then one day comes two years later, you reunite with a youth and they say, ‘Do you remember me?’ Then they tell you when and where they met you, they pull out the card you gave them long ago and say, ‘I really need someone to talk to.’ These stories make your energy level soar and want to continue meeting all those thousand of faces on the street where we are needed.” – Ryan Delaney, outreach worker

Outreach Methodology – How Do I Conduct My Work?

- Teamwork
- Clear identification for everyone’s safety
- Coordinate limited resources to cover a wide area and large range of hours
- Don’t have “turf” but connect with communities
- Provide basic needs to the best of your ability
- Specialization can be a good thing
- Engage youth and build trusting, long-term relationship – not long-term case management
- Involve youth
- Involve community volunteers
- Prevention is worth more than a cure
- Commit to evaluating practice

Harm Reduction as Part of outreach methodology

- Work to minimize effects of drug use, rather than ignore or condemn
- Establish that cessation of all drug use is not the criteria for successful interventions
- Affirms drug users as the primary agents of reducing the harms of their drug use
- Does not attempt to minimize or ignore the real and tragic harm associated with licit and illicit drug use
- Recognizes that harm reduction methodology can be used in any risky or harm situation

Culture Underlying Outreach Methodology

- We approach and are open about being approached
- We are patient and nonjudgmental
- We abide by the Code of Ethics
- We remain respectful of individual differences
- We are safe people. We do not have a Code of Silence
- We are engaged in a craft that affects human lives in making new choices
- We are agents of Political and Systems Change

What Should Be Our Goals with Youth in Conducting Outreach?

Youth Participant-Centered Goals

1. Assess, approach, and engage youth
2. Respond to immediate crisis for basic needs
3. Practice a harm reduction approach to abusive, violent behavior
4. Develop tolerance
5. Help youth to exit the street
6. The outreach workers themselves are a resource for the youth

Agency/Collaborative-Centered Goals

1. Give all youth immediate or priority assistance in 'hooking' up with agencies to meet their needs
2. Locate areas where youth hang out
3. Attempt to ensure non-duplicative outreach services
4. Allow member agencies to remain accessible
5. Allow each agency to reach a larger geographical area
6. Approach all youth from a strength-based approach
7. Strive to achieve outcomes of youth making safer choices

The Role of an Outreach Worker as Relationship Builder and Assessor

- Ask
- Don't make decision *for* youth but *with* youth
- Outreach workers don't label young people
- Youth readiness
- Follow-up

Safety Protocols

Locations

- Do not work alone unless the work has been approved by agency supervisors
- The single worker should always have base areas where there are other 'safe' people

Preparation

- Sit down 15-20 minutes to discuss where they will be working for the afternoon or evening and talk about the area
- Develop a code word that means, "LEAVE THE AREA NOW."
- Be aware of gang areas/territories, colors, symbols
- Always describe the area to a new partner and let him or her know what to expect
- Partners discuss anything that might be relevant to their safety

Safety Protocols

Responding to Unsafe Conditions

- Drop any backpacks or supply bags and run if in a dangerous situation
- If street fighting is observed, get away from the scene
- DO NOT interrupt the sale of sex or drugs for money
- Report any unusual incidents or danger zones back to the program supervisor and outreach team

Don't become a target

- Don't carry a cell phone, car keys, or personal identification in your supply bag
- Don't carry a purse-strap handbag on the street
- Keep some cash in your pocket, shoe, etc. for emergency
- Don't be critical of your partner in public
- Carry a work card with your name on it
- Avoid wearing expensive and visible jewelry, or expensive, very popular brand name clothing.

Contact Information

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