



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Student Name: Monika Mitrova

Student ID: 1921378

Module Name: Community Care and Development

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Lecturer Name: Dr Laila Surani

Community of Homeless People in Croydon

Cover Page

- Introduction
- Definition of Homelessness Community
- Theories
- Overview
- Policy & Legislation Regards Homelessness in the UK
- Health and Social Care Needs
- Distinct Approach: Mobile Health Clinics
- Adapting to a Digital World
- Recommendation
- Conclusion

Introduction

This report outlines a comprehensive approach to meet Croydon's homeless community's health and social care needs. It overviews the community's main characteristics and demographics and identifies health and social care needs. The report then examines the distinct approach of mobile health clinics as an initiative to improve the community's well-being. It explores the methods used to communicate this initiative to the population of focus, including campaigns and media strategies. Furthermore, the report delves into adapting these strategies to an increasingly digital world while integrating theory, policy, and practice to ensure effective implementation.

Definition of Homelessness

Homelessness is a complex and multifaceted social issue characterised by individuals or families lacking a fixed, regular, and suitable nighttime residence (Burt, Pearson, & Montgomery, 2007). It entails the absence of a stable and secure living environment, leading to challenges in accessing fundamental resources such as shelter, nutrition, healthcare, and social support. Homelessness often results from economic hardship, unaffordable housing, mental health struggles, substance abuse, domestic violence, and systemic inequalities (Quigley, Raphael, & Smolensky, 2001).

Theories

Academic research and practical interventions have increasingly applied Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to understand the complex dynamics of homelessness and its interaction with individuals' needs and broader social contexts.

For instance, a study conducted by Johnson et al. (2018) investigated the link between housing instability and mental health outcomes in homeless individuals. The research found that the inability to secure stable housing increased stress levels, directly affecting individuals' physiological needs for safety and security. In addition, the study discovered that addressing housing stability positively impacted individuals' self-esteem and sense of belonging, supporting Maslow's theory that the fulfilment of lower-level needs contributes to the advancement of higher-level needs.

In the context of homelessness, the Ecological Systems Theory by Bronfenbrenner highlights the intricate connections between homeless people and their environment. Recent research from the past decade examines how homelessness affects these ecological systems, especially the microsystem and mesosystem. For instance, a study by Smith et al. (2016) examined the impact of homelessness on family interactions and relationships of homeless youth. Disruption of the mesosystem, which includes interactions between family and external institutions, led to challenges in accessing support services and stable housing.

Community Overview

The Croydon homelessness community is a complex and diverse group of people with various backgrounds, ages, and life circumstances. It is made up of individuals from a variety of ethnicities, including British nationals, immigrants, and asylum seekers. It encompasses a broad age spectrum, with young people, families, and older individuals all experiencing homelessness. (Croydon Council, 2021) However, this community also faces significant challenges, with higher representation from marginalised groups such as the LGBTQ+ community and those with histories of substance abuse or mental health issues. (Davies et al., 2020)

Moreover, the Croydon homeless community presents complex and interconnected challenges regarding health and social care needs. Exposure to harsh environmental conditions, limited access to healthcare services, and inadequate nutrition make these individuals more susceptible to physical and mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. (Fazel et al., 2014)

Substance abuse disorders are also frequently co-occurring, exacerbating health disparities and hampering efforts to secure stable housing. A comprehensive approach involving collaboration between housing providers, healthcare organisations, local authorities, and support services is necessary to address these challenges. (Volkow, 2019)

Effective interventions must be tailored to the specific needs of different demographic groups within the Croydon homelessness community, offering solutions that address housing instability and the intricate web of health and social care needs specific to this vulnerable population.

Policy & Legislation Regards Homelessness in the UK

Homelessness is a pressing issue in the UK, prompting the development of policies and legislation to address this challenge. This section provides an overview of key policies and legislation related to homelessness in the UK, along with relevant references.

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017:

The Homelessness Reduction Act shifts focus from managing to preventing homelessness. Local authorities must provide advice and support and extend assistance timeframes. (UK Parliament, 2017).

Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018: The UK government aims to end homelessness by preventing it and providing affordable housing and support services through collaboration between government agencies, local authorities, and homelessness organisations. (UK Government, 2018).

Everyone In Campaign:

The Everyone In campaign aimed to swiftly provide emergency accommodation for rough sleepers during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasising the importance of collaboration in ensuring the well-being and safety of homeless individuals in crises. (UK Government, 2020).

Housing First Approach:

The Housing First approach, which prioritises providing stable housing for individuals experiencing homelessness, accompanied by tailored support services, has gained traction as a model to address homelessness. Many localities in the UK have adopted this strategy. (National Housing Federation, 2021).

Welfare Reforms and Homelessness:

Research has linked welfare policy changes, such as the implementation of Universal Credit, to increased housing instability and homelessness in the UK. (Lundberg et al., 2020). Policy adjustments require understanding the impact of welfare reforms on homelessness. The UK has implemented multifaceted approaches to combat homelessness through prevention, support, and collaboration across sectors.

Health and Social Care Needs

Croydon's homeless community's health and social care needs are complex and interwoven. Individuals experiencing homelessness encounter higher rates of physical and mental health issues due to harsh living conditions and limited access to healthcare services (Fazel et al., 2014). Mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and substance abuse disorders, are prevalent within this population (O'Connell et al., 2020). Ensuring their well-being requires a comprehensive approach that addresses housing instability, healthcare access, mental health support, and substance abuse treatment.

The most fundamental need of the homeless community in Croydon is access to stable housing. Without a safe and secure place to live, individuals are exposed to various health risks, including exposure to harsh weather conditions and susceptibility to illnesses (Croydon Council, 2021). Stable housing forms the foundation for addressing other needs, including physical and mental health, education, and employment.

Mental Health Support

The homeless community in Croydon often grapples with mental health challenges resulting from the stresses of homelessness, isolation, and traumatic experiences. There is a pressing need for accessible mental health services that provide counselling, therapy, and support to address depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Fazel et al., 2014)³.

Healthcare Access
Croydon homeless individuals face barriers to healthcare services, leading to unmet medical needs and exacerbated health conditions (Baggett et al., 2010). Mobile health clinics, equipped with medical professionals and resources, could bring essential medical care directly to this vulnerable population, ensuring they receive timely screenings, treatments, and preventive maintenance (Hewett et al., 2019).

Substance Abuse Services

Substance abuse is a common challenge within the homeless community, often exacerbating health issues and hindering efforts to escape homelessness. Accessible substance abuse treatment programs, including harm reduction services, are critical for addressing addiction-related needs (Laudet et al., 2016).

Social Integration

Social isolation is another significant concern for homeless individuals in Croydon. Initiatives that promote community engagement, peer support, and access to recreational activities can help counteract isolation and improve overall well-being (Munoz et al., 2018).

Education and Employment Opportunities

Access to education and employment opportunities is essential to break the cycle of homelessness. Training programs, vocational skills development, and collaboration with local businesses can empower homeless individuals to secure stable employment and housing (O'Connell et al., 2020).

Distinct Approach: Mobile Health Clinics

The mobile health clinic approach offers a holistic solution to address Croydon's homeless community's health and social care needs. These clinics provide essential healthcare services directly to homeless individuals in their outdoor settings, eliminating barriers to access (Baggett et al., 2010). Mobile health clinics offer various services, including medical care, mental health counselling, substance abuse treatment, vaccinations, and health education.

Campaigns and Media Strategies

Communicating the benefits of mobile health clinics involves a multi-faceted strategy.

Collaborations between local authorities, NGOs, and healthcare providers are crucial. Radio, television, and print media campaigns highlight mobile health clinics' availability and comprehensive services. Success stories and testimonials from those who have benefited from these clinics can resonate with the community.

Social media platforms play a pivotal role in disseminating information. Regular updates on locations, schedules, and services on social media engage the community and offer real-time updates. Video testimonials can be shared online, showcasing the positive impact of mobile health clinics. Furthermore, interactive workshops and information sessions within shelters and public spaces provide direct engagement and dialogue opportunities.

Adapting to a Digital World

In an increasingly digital world, communication strategies must evolve. Social media platforms can be leveraged further, incorporating live streaming of clinic sessions, online Q&A sessions with healthcare professionals, and interactive polls to gauge community needs. Virtual reality experiences can provide immersive insights into the challenges faced by homeless individuals, fostering empathy and awareness.

- **Mobile Apps for Resource Access**

Developing a dedicated mobile app for Croydon's homeless community could centralise information about available resources, services, and events. The app might include features like an interactive map with mobile health clinic locations, appointment scheduling for health services, and a directory of shelters and food distribution centres. Push notifications could alert users about upcoming events and important updates (Lee & Lee, 2019).

Imagine a homeless community app providing real-time updates about available shelter spaces during extreme weather conditions. Users receive push notifications with directions to the nearest open shelter, ensuring their safety and well-being.

- **Digital Communication Platforms**

In an increasingly digital world, social media platforms are powerful tools for sharing information and promoting engagement. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram can be utilised to post updates about mobile health clinics, workshops, and other relevant initiatives. Consistent updates can inform the community about upcoming events, share success stories, and encourage participation. (Smith, 2018).

For example, a dedicated Facebook page for Croydon's homeless community could post daily updates about mobile health clinic schedules, services offered, and pertinent health advice. Live Q&A sessions with healthcare professionals could facilitate real-time interaction, addressing community questions directly.

Promoting health and social care for homeless individuals in Croydon requires a comprehensive approach that addresses their unique needs. The mobile health clinic initiative is an effective strategy that utilises media campaigns, social media platforms, and direct engagement methods to bridge gaps in healthcare access and foster positive change. Adapting these strategies to a digital world ensures sustained awareness and engagement, leading to improved health and social outcomes.

Recommendation

If you have a stable place to stay, reach out for assistance immediately. Contact local homeless shelters, outreach services, or housing organisations. They can provide information, resources, and support to help you find temporary shelter and access essential services such as food, healthcare, and hygiene facilities.

I have been given much information on how to prevent and help the homeless community in Croydon. During my presentation, I mentioned support with food donations “ FOOD BANK & COMMUNITY KITCHEN. Once again, here are the details for anyone you know who needs that kind of help.

Details:

When: Every Tuesday at 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm

Where: Croydon SDA Church Hall, 95 Selhurst Road, London, SE25 6LH (access via side entrance)

Contact: 07930 167 812 or email communitykitchen@croydonadventist.org (Croydon Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2023)



Conclusion

In conclusion, addressing homelessness in Croydon requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach involving policy, community engagement, and innovative solutions. This report examines Croydon's homeless population's demographics, main characteristics, and health and social care needs. It highlights the complex factors contributing to homelessness, including mental health challenges, substance abuse, and inadequate access to stable housing. One promising approach to improving the well-being of Croydon's homeless population is the establishment of mobile health clinics, which provide essential healthcare services directly to those in need, bridging the gap in access to medical care. This initiative addresses physical and mental health needs by bringing healthcare services to the community, laying the foundation for holistic care and support.

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