Sensitive Fundraising Techniques to Support People Experiencing Homelessness

Bonnie Jim - General Public Health
Rachel Sadoff - Health Policy & Management
Carina Schmid - Faculty Advisor

*In this presentation and our health communication video, we will be referring to the population at risk as ‘people experiencing homelessness’ to adhere to the general social justice practice of ‘people-first language’*
1. GOALS

About **580,000 people** experienced homelessness in the U.S. in 2020. Some American non-profit organizations serving people experiencing homelessness might counterproductively leverage the “poverty porn” model, which is “any type of media… which *exploits the poor*’s condition to generate the necessary *sympathy* for… increasing charitable donations” to gain contributions by donors.

**Problem**

Fundraisers often exploit poverty, which **increases stigma** against people experiencing homelessness.

Stigmatization as a Public Health concern leads to:
- higher rates of mental illness or other health problems
- excess death of average 12 years sooner.

**Goals**

**Reduce stigmatization** of people experiencing homelessness by providing alternative communication methods to organizations.

**Call to Action**

American non-profit organizations fighting homelessness consistently and exclusively use **sensitive fundraising and communication techniques**.
2. TARGET POPULATION

The Human Resources (HR) Teams of U.S. non-profit organizations are responsible for training employees and are a key gatekeeper to provide resources for communication/fundraising teams in the long-term. The HR Team can influence the training curricula and their employees’ attitudes towards people experiencing homelessness. Since 1/3 of funding is from private donations, there is always a need to fundraise.

Locations & Demographics
- 11,000 U.S. nonprofit organizations in 2021
- CA has the highest number of orgs (841), followed by NY (554) in 2015

Attitudes/Beliefs of Using Poverty Porn
- An easy sell as the images resonate with the perceptions held by the public
- Images of charitable beneficiaries that fit completely with the “victim” stereotypes can maximize donations

“...that they become an image that can be understood by most people, because the image of a young person living in a squalid bedsit would be difficult to film...but with these young people [the street homeless], you just send the cameras down.”
3. JUSTIFICATIONS

Attitudes and beliefs are modifiable risks factors that can be changed. The Logic of Risk model below depicts various factors contributing to stigmatization towards people experience homelessness, which then lead to public health problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Determinant</th>
<th>Behavior Factor</th>
<th>Health Problems</th>
<th>Quality of Life</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Non-profit administrators holds the belief that images portraying charitable beneficiaries as victims can lead to highest donations.</td>
<td>2  Non-profit administrators leverage poverty porn model for fundraising and communication campaigns.</td>
<td>5  ● 50% of people experiencing homelessness had depression or mental health need.  ● People experiencing homelessness lose confidence in societal structures because of stigmatization.</td>
<td>6  People experiencing homelessness have:  ● increased comorbidity of other psychiatric conditions  ● decreased school performance</td>
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<td>3  Communities hold stigma and negative stereotypes towards people experiencing homelessness based on images they see from various media outlets.</td>
<td>4  Communities decrease public support towards tax-funded welfare programs to address homelessness issues.</td>
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4. COMMUNICATION CHANNEL

The health communication channel will be a dedicated YouTube channel that hosts the intervention video with best practices, following a diffusion centric communication approach.

Diffusion Centric Communication

- Easy to Disseminate
  - Cost-effective way to reach dispersed, tailored audiences
  - Tight control over the message

- Diffusion Centric Communication Videos

- Easy to Integrate in Training
  - HR can leverage video content for training
  - Easy to retain content

- Easy to Measure Engagement
  - Video views can be tracked
  - Improve engagement by adding search engine optimization keywords in the description of the video
5. STORYTELLING

It is tempting to rely on traditional fundraising tactics like poverty porn, but they are likely to exacerbate stigma. There are many other proven ways of fundraising to fight homelessness that do not carry this risk and should therefore be more widely adopted, which are discussed in the video.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Traditional Fundraising</th>
<th>Sensitive Fundraising</th>
<th>Evaluation of Sensitive Fundraising</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tools</strong></td>
<td>Images exploiting the people experiencing homelessness to generate the necessary sympathy</td>
<td>Stories, animations, and voiceover are more relatable and impactful than stats and figures</td>
<td>Draws closer connection to allow the public to apply empathy towards people experiencing homelessness</td>
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<td><strong>Power Dynamics</strong></td>
<td>Exacerbates imbalanced power dynamics by emphasizing the vulnerabilities of beneficiaries</td>
<td>Promotes equity by empowering beneficiaries to share about their life</td>
<td>Allows beneficiaries to control their narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact</strong></td>
<td>Contributes to stigmatization towards people experience homelessness, which then lead to public health problems</td>
<td>Increases compassion by sharing credible testimonials from beneficiaries and reduces stigma towards people experiencing homelessness</td>
<td>Challenges stereotypes; protects and empowers beneficiaries</td>
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We will share the video with the HR Teams via email/LinkedIn with next steps. We eventually hope to share the video with other organizations offering fundraising resources like the Foundation Center.

**Work Plan**

**Months**

1. Collect HR Team contact info and create success metrics
2. Segment non-profits by size and outreach potential (e.g., annual budget and serve population) and create email template
3. Send emails to non-profits HR based on segmentation
4. Monitor email responses and video views
5. End of quarter review and refine campaign as needed

**Success Metrics**

- Reach out to 20 orgs each month; get responses from 20% of those
- Receive 50 YouTube views monthly

**Outreach Template**

The template will include the following call to action:
- Please watch the attached video
- Share your feedback with us
- Consider integrating it in your onboarding training materials
By influencing HR teams, who do shape the culture of the organizations, we can help modify the fundraising strategies to reduce stigma and have a lasting, positive societal impact.

**Benefits of Sensitive Fundraising**

**Hearing Others’ Voices**
Learning firsthand from the credible stories of people’s experiences with homelessness enhances equity

**Developing Compassion**
Respecting beneficiaries and leveraging cultural humility to make a positive emotional connection

**Changing Perception**
Encouraging the public to exercise critical thinking skills based on these firsthand stories

**Increasing Support and Advocacy**
Widening the spaces for support and advocacy through collecting credible evidence