

Surviving In Detroit

*Older Adult Men who Experienced Homelessness After the
Death of a Parent*

Annual Summit on Ending Homelessness
October 29th 2015



School of Social Work

Challenging Minds, Leading Change, Transforming Lives

Collaborators

- **Tam E. Perry**, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work
- **Justin Petrusak**, LMSW – Macro and Clinical, Graduate Research Assistant
- **Luke Hassevoort**, LLMSW – Quality Improvement Analyst at Common Ground
- *Thank you to the Humanities Center for sponsoring this project!*
- *Thank you to the Study Participants!*
- *Thank you to Melissa Levasseur and Vanessa Rorai!*



Neighborhood Service Organization
Celebrating 60 Years of Service and Impact



School of Social Work
Challenging Minds, Leading Change, Transforming Lives

Background

“Usually there’s been some kind of trauma, traumatic event that leads to [homelessness]. Whether it be issues with family, um, one person told me about how his mom died when he was young and he just kept bouncing around different family members’ houses through his whole life since he was young. He talked about how he never really had a stable environment.” – Case Manager

The Project

- Research Question: How do men experiencing homelessness after the death of a parent navigate survival in Detroit?
- Methods:
 - Qualitative Interviews
 - *Service Providers: n=5*
 - Men experiencing homelessness: n=5 (total expected: n=10)
 - Data Analysis
 - Independent review of interviews
 - Collaborative discussion of key themes

Chronically Homeless

“A person who is: currently residing on the streets or in an emergency shelter; has either been continuously homeless for one year or more, or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years, and has a disabling condition.”

- Department of Housing and Urban Development

Family

Mental Health

Feelings of Home

Physical Health

Cooking

Job

Community Connections

Holiday Gatherings

School

Death of Parent(s)



A black and white photograph of a city street. The street is wide and paved, with white dashed lines marking the lanes. On either side of the street are various buildings, including a prominent tall skyscraper in the background. The sky is overcast with heavy clouds. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is centered over the middle of the image, containing the word "Identity" in a large, bold, black serif font.

Identity

Identity

“I see a lot of people think it defines who they are. Like, whoever they were before they got here, they don’t feel like that person anymore. So, maybe they were a mom, or a student, or an employee, you know. It’s like those things no longer apply to them and they define themselves as being homeless. And I hope that that goes away after they’re housed, but I don’t know if it does.” – Case Manager

Identity: Restoring Documents

- State ID Card, Birth Certificate, Marriage License, School Records, etc.
- Who has the power to legitimize identity?

“... once you get that stuff restored it feels so good. Like, you know if it’s lost, I remember times losing my ID and once I finally found a place, a shelter, somewhere I knew was gonna’ be permanent for a minute, then I would restore my items and keep ‘em.... Yeah, it felt good, ‘cause there’s no worse feeling than walking around with nothing stating who you are. We’ve had consumers tell us ‘I haven’t had an ID in 20 years!’” – Peer Support Specialist

Identity: Possessions

“I’ve never seen a homeless person with a file cabinet.”

– Case Manager

“It might be all they really have left in their life. You know, it might hold some sentimental emotional value, it might be something that was given to them maybe... then you can’t keep it so might start feeling more low, more down, more depressed.”

– Case Manager

Identity: Possessions

- Consumer was very upset about losing his possessions. He reminisced about having nice kitchen appliances and a grill that he would use and host friends. It seems like losing his things was very hard for him and the thought of getting back to a place where he has nice appliances and a comfortable life is a motivating factor to get back into an apartment.

- Field notes from interview with Paul

Identity

“I didn’t like it but my therapist knew that I really wanted it and she talked to (name) and going back and forth with each other and they both say, “He’s very organized.” ... That’s when I got very serious and they saw that I was serious because I was dedicated at getting things done to get in here.” – Peter

Identity

I: What has experiencing homelessness been like for you, I mean what kind of affects to you feel?

Bill: I'm different. Sometime feel like I'm not wanted. Don't nobody care. That basically those two things right there. I'm not worth nothing and don't nobody care.

I: Yeah.

Bill: But that's not true. People, some people do care about homeless. A lot of passionate people do care. ... wish I could hit a big old lottery. Come down here and just go around the city and take care of homeless. I do. I like fifty billion. Fix up these buildings. Put um all in there, you know. Whatever you gona do your gona do it anyway but you're not goin to be able to live on the streets no more. ...They fed.

Identity

“Even my kids mother she got tired of it you know and she left and took the kids moved back with her mother. That was the first time I felt homeless.” – John

A grayscale photograph of a city street, likely in New York City, with a semi-transparent white banner across the middle. The banner contains the word "Survival" in a bold, black serif font. The street is empty, and the background shows a dense urban skyline with various buildings under a cloudy sky.

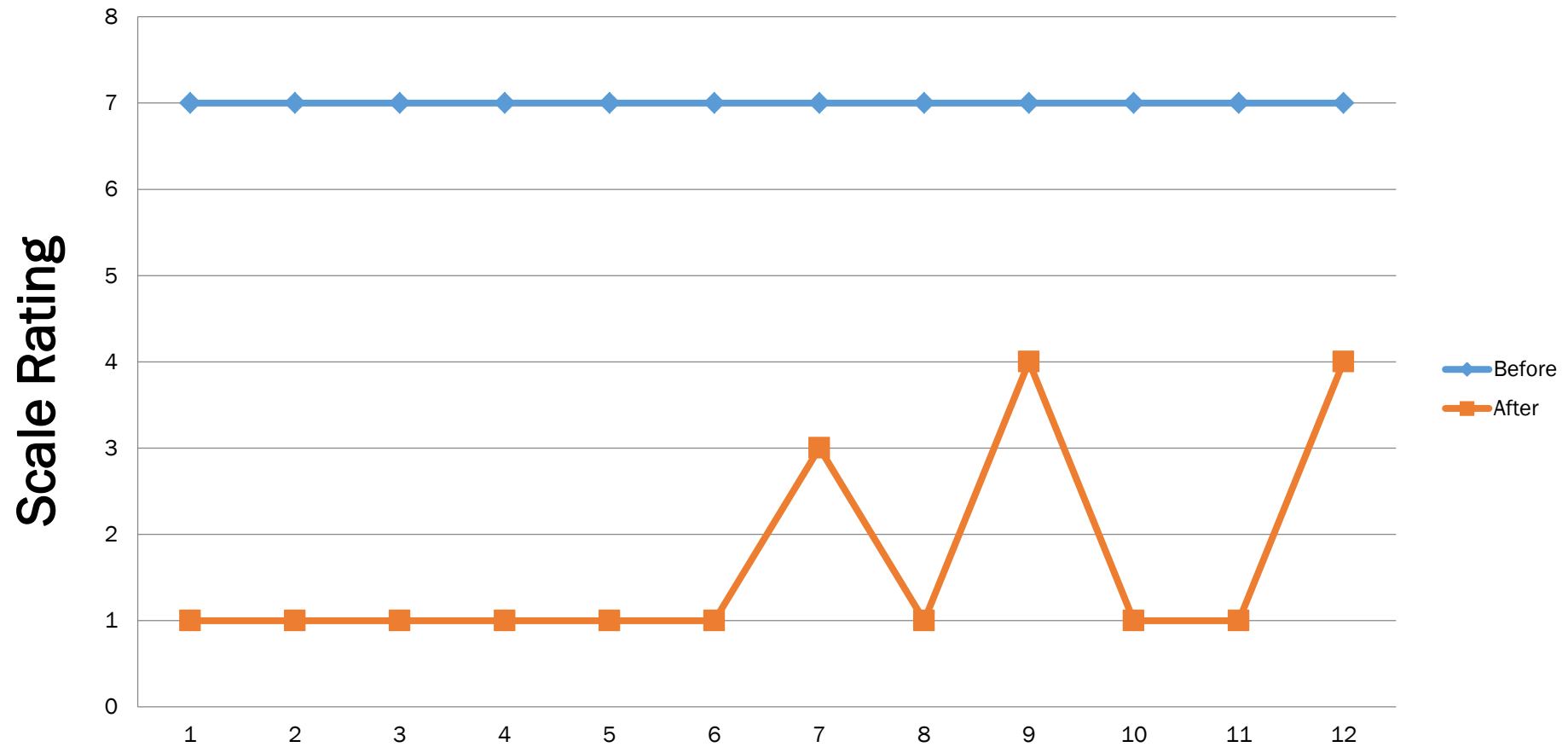
Survival

Survival: Be(com)ing Homeless

“Major belongings would just be left. Just grab the clothes that you can, and maybe a few keepsake items, and maybe a few important documents and that’s it. Just walk away from everything. You kinda’ have to start over.” – Peer Support Specialist

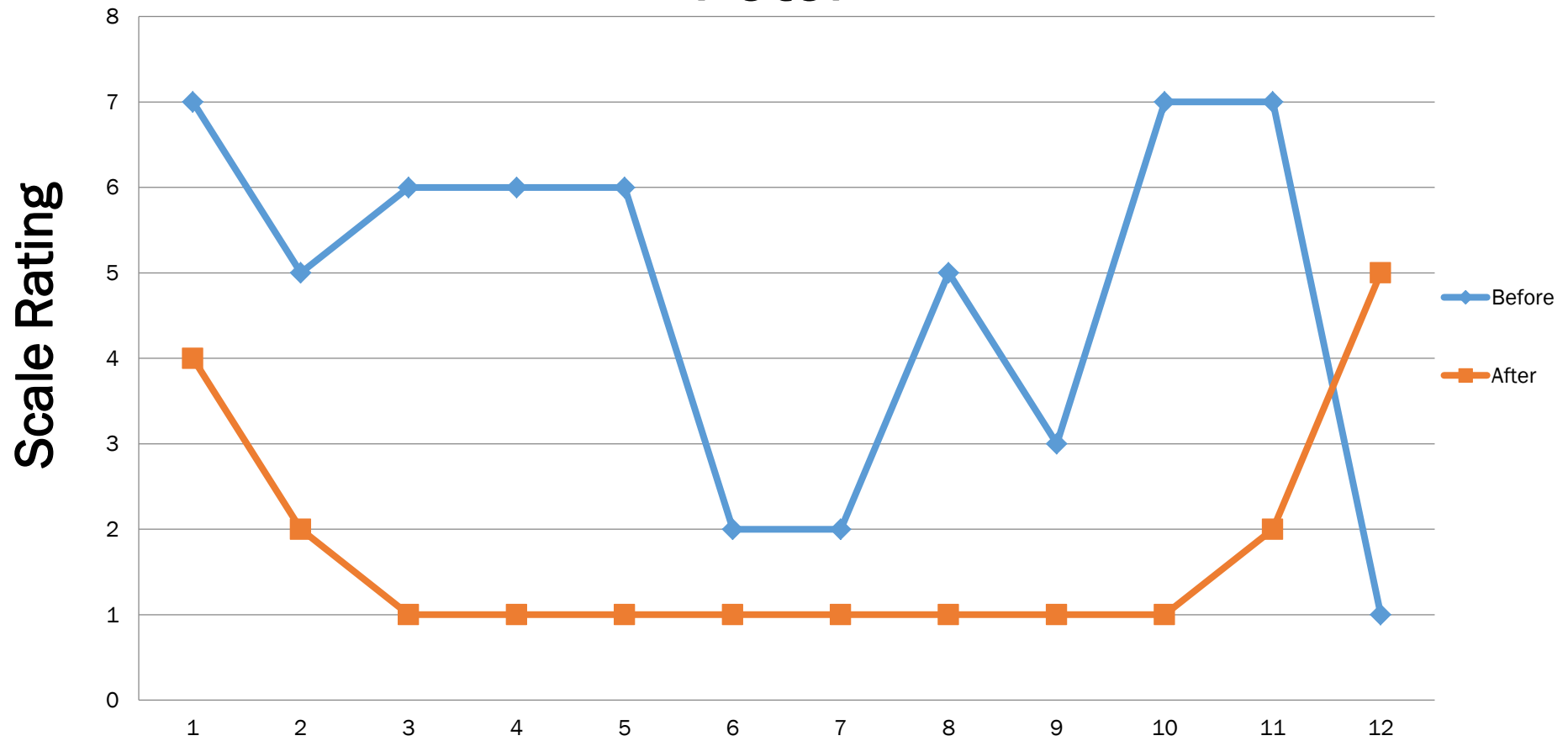
Survival

Paul



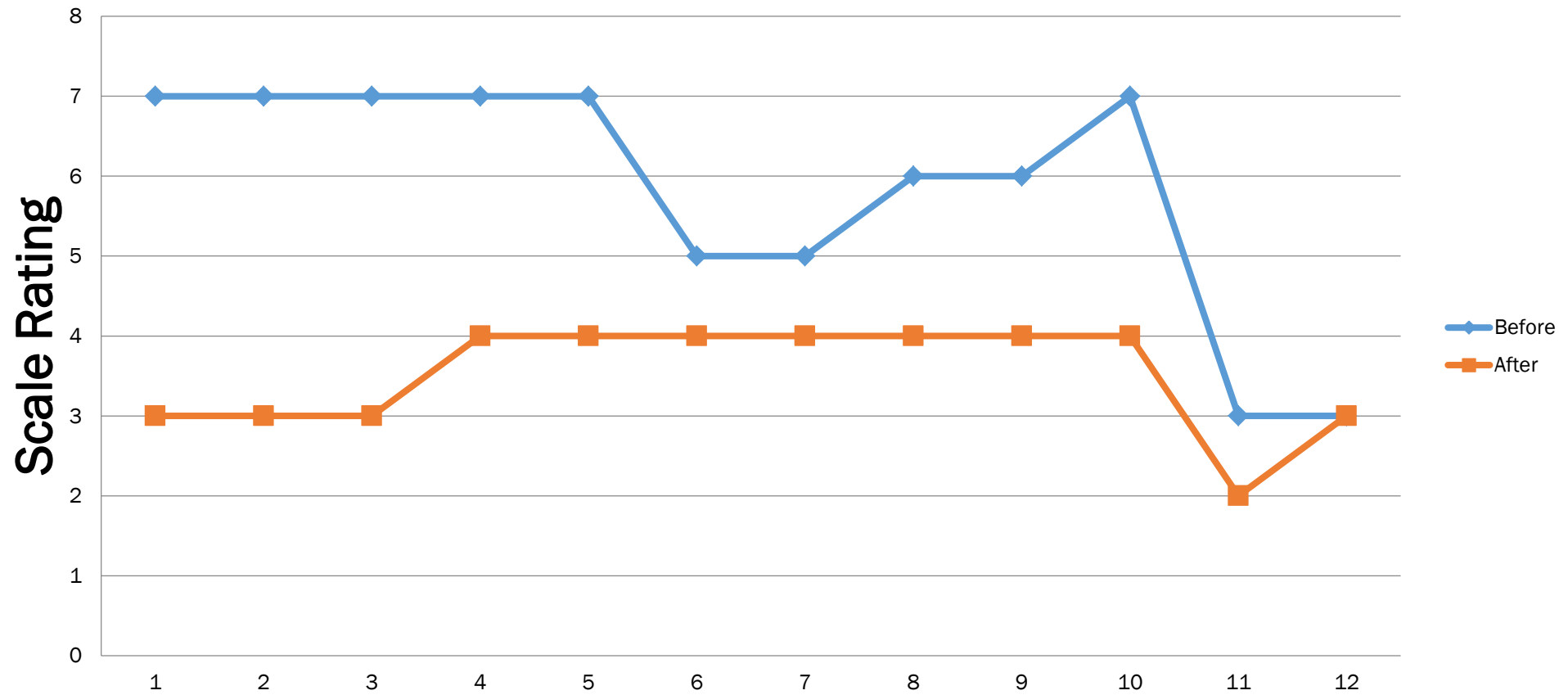
Survival

Peter



Survival

Bill



Survival

“Well they, everyone lets you know where to go for, you know, showers and things like that. You know, yeah. So, aw, I didn’t have any problems finding that out.” – Peter

“We would go back there. That was just within aw, before I came, before I got this place, me and some people would go behind there and in the wintertime, they got this big vent on the wall. It would blow warm air and I did that for a couple years. It was warm.” – Peter

“It makes me paranoid. It really messes with me upstairs.” – Paul

Survival: Be(com)ing Homeless

“So, there might be times when somebody comes in and they’re looking a certain way, and that’ll catch [a business owner’s] attention, ‘Oh you can’t come in here, you can’t do that here, we know what you’re doing.’ And other times they’re so busy they don’t see you come in, those are the times I usually tried to catch ‘em.”
– Peer Support Specialist

Survival

“It’s my passion. I love basketball. I got a ball now. Whim I want to get lost. That’s how I learned to be at peace with myself. I grab my ball. ... my mother passed. I grab my ball and go to the court, just play by myself. You know what I mean. Take it away. You know it’s going to come back when I’m done. I try and get it where I give myself a work out and I be tired. I still have the thoughts of my mother but it’s not that much. So I grab my ball and go play. You know I worked with kids before, referee you know. Junior high kids you know. Always wanted to be a gym teacher.” – Bill

Survival

John: I love reading my comics. ...readin that. A lot of people don't know read through that, that comics, it be talk about life a lot. You know?

...

They be about situations. You know. That you in and everything. And you can laugh your way out of um. You know. You be talkin you know. Read about the whole situation that, you know, one of your comics and crack up at it. And it's talkin about you. You know.

...

You know I learned that doin ... reading you can learn stuff and you know. How to go about this situation just by readin in the comics. You know cause it talkin about that same thing. You know. I just did that with my man. He talkin the same. That's crazy. And there be a comic about it. And you laugh at it cause you be like ... next time you know. It teaches you a situation.

Comic

© 2015 Wulffmorgenthaler/Dist. by Universal Uclick www.gocomics.com

10/1

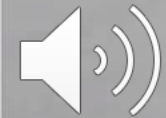
Officer, that guy's stalking me ...



Survivors: Be(com)ing Formerly Homeless

“They’ll be smiling, excited, jumping around, and sometimes dancing. Just like, ‘Yeah, I’m getting my place!’” – Case Manager

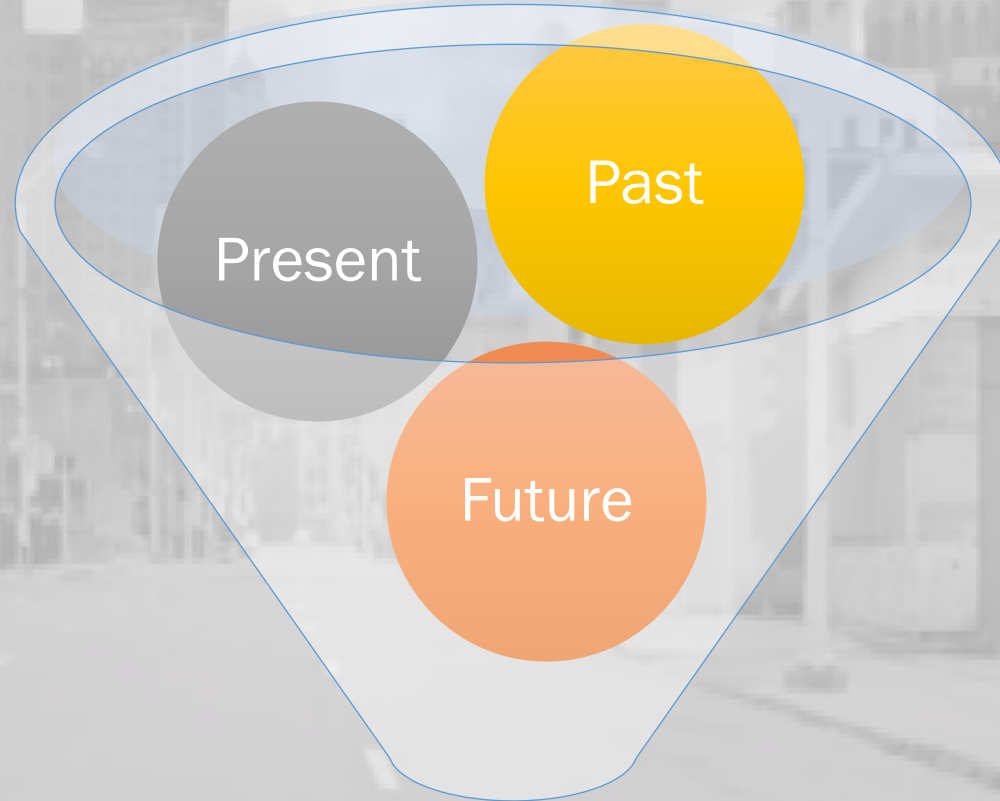
“It’s like those things no longer apply to them and they define themselves as being homeless. And I hope that that goes away after they’re housed, but I don’t know if it does.” – Case Manager





Navigating Time and Space

Time



Identity

Time

“... once you get that stuff restored it feels so good. Like, you know if it’s lost, I remember times losing my ID and once I finally found a place, a shelter, somewhere I knew was gonna’ be permanent for a minute, then I would restore my items and keep ‘em.... Yeah, it felt good, ‘cause there’s no worse feeling than walking around with nothing stating who you are. We’ve had consumers tell us ‘I haven’t had an ID in 20 years!’” – Peer Support Specialist

TOP DEFINITION



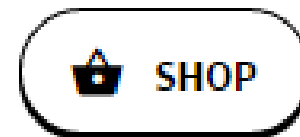
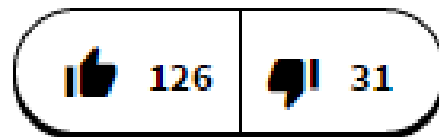
been a minute

long period of not talking to somebody

"whats up dawg"

"it's been a minute"

by [jes&bran](#) August 01, 2008



Time/Space

“I can’t remember the exact amount of time, it’s been a little while. Not too long”

“The last ten (years)”

“Cause, yeah cause the amount of time seem like ran together”

- John

Time/Space

“I ... I was born and raised with everybody. You know? And all my friends you know, that I knew, were at that school. You know. ... Way over at (name of street) all over there I didn't know anything about that way. I didn't even know what the game, none of this mess. You know I was just practically lost, you know ...” – John

“I got one more [sister] She don't exist. She lives out in (name of city).... So, she don't really um, she don't really exist, you know, hard to keep, hard to get in touch with her.” – Adam

“And you know lately it seem like I got this after that I was in the street you know.” – John

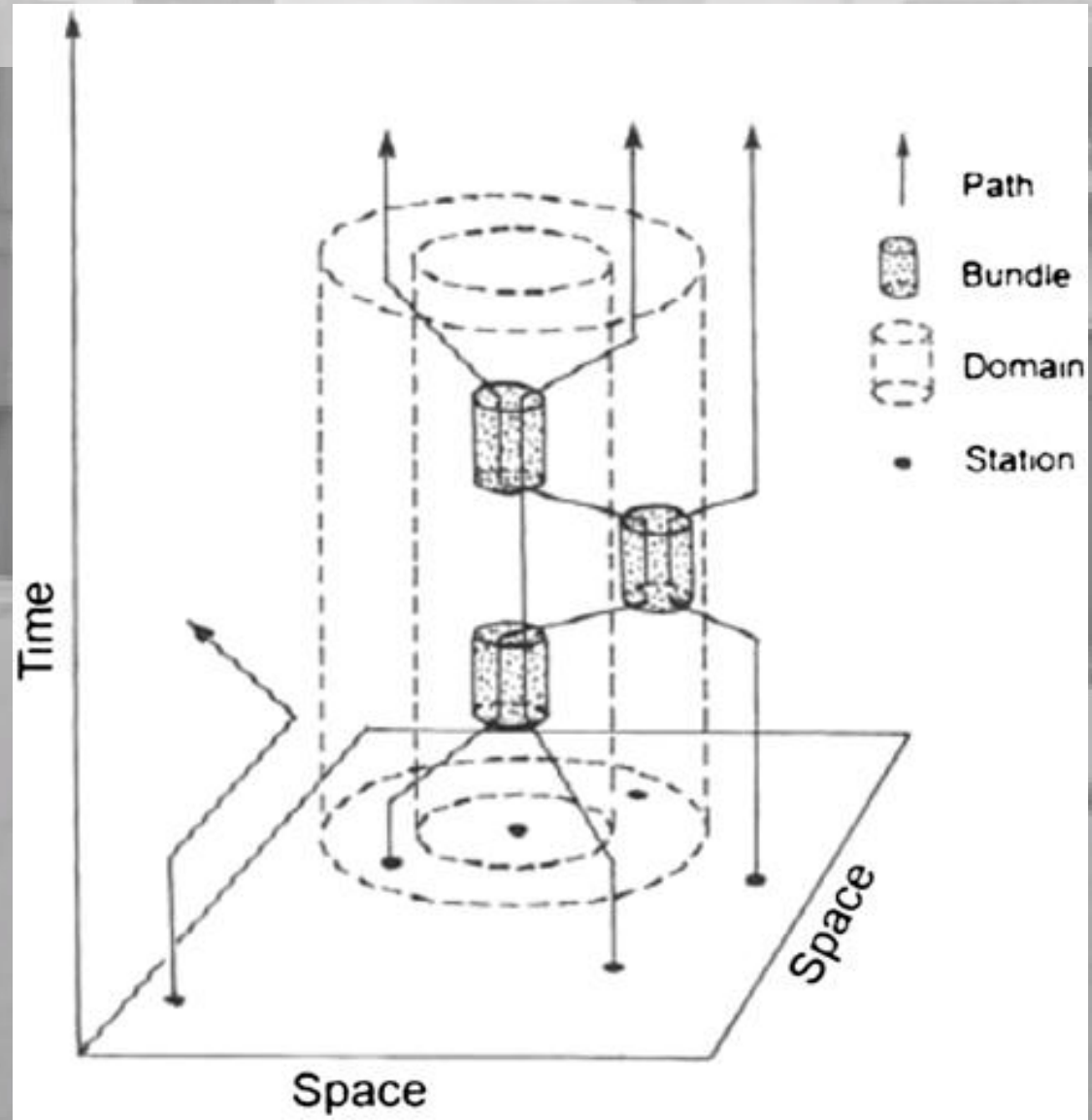
Time/Space

“Yeah we had to move around. I was used to moving around. I still move around a lot now. You know I get up out and go. Get a bus card and go different places.... You have to move around.”

“Well you have to um, go to a lot of places, depend on a lot of places for things you want. Like for clothing, for food, for healthcare, for dental. So everything you want you’re going to somebody to get it”

“Cause see when you are homeless you have to move from one place to another. You have to move. You have to move so I’m used to walking.” – Peter

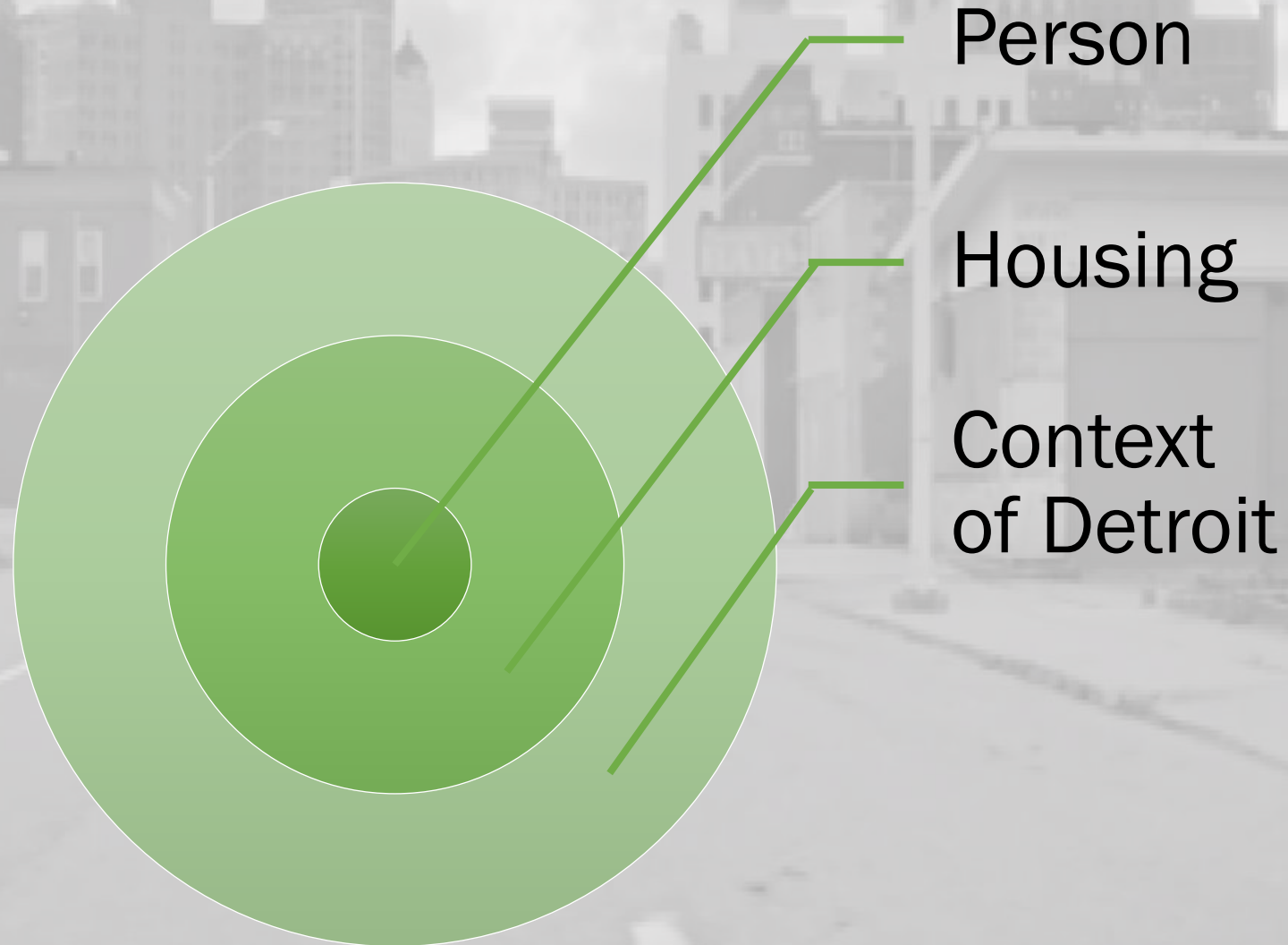
Time/Space





Navigating a Changing Detroit

Person-in-Environment



Time/Space

“I was born and raised east all my life. So when she made a move I’m like where the hell are we. This is another city. You know. This ain’t me ...got over there and I get in school and get robbed.”

– John

Time/Space

“When they had the walk in centers, the first one I went to. It wasn’t there where it is now” – John

“Um, as far as housing again there was no other choice. I mean I didn’t have another choice. I mean another way of getting it. I mean I would like work a temporary job but I was like in (shelter name) at the time, like that’s temporary, it’s not like my own home. I did work a temporary job or something but I, aw at that point I realized that’s my way of life” – Peter



Survival

What do people do while waiting?

Iceberg Comic

© 2015 Wulffmorgenthaler
Dist. by Universal Uclick www.gocomics.com

It's not fair that you have taken all the credit, while my client, who is doing most of the hard work, has been hidden below the surface and therefore often is overlooked ...



The tip is sued by the rest of the iceberg

Discussion

How are the experiences of this population different or the same as people who have other triggers of homelessness?

Are there ways to address the unique needs of this population?