STOP, LOOK, AND LISTEN.

Please continue this project’s purpose to simply STOP, LOOK, AND LISTEN. Open your eyes and see these people. They’re here. Step outside of your comfort zone and talk to them in an effort to better comprehend what you don’t understand. Restore the humanity and dignity that is lost among negative views and false assumptions of homeless individuals.

Mission Statement

The mission of STOP, LOOK, & LISTEN is to raise awareness of Kenosha’s current homeless situation through conversation, storytelling, and public acknowledgment.

The objective of publicizing homeless individuals’ personal stories is to restore their humanity and dignity that is lost among negative views and false assumptions of their character and current life circumstances. While statistics spark interest, stories are meant to inspire connection and compassion.
PROJECT DEDICATION
This project is dedicated to the homeless of Kenosha whose life circumstances continue to remain unchanged and/or worsen due to:
- Inadequate, limited, or outdated social services
- Insufficient number of available beds at permanent shelter sites
- Lack of employment opportunities
- Deficient transportation for second and third shift employees
- And to those suffering from mental illness, alcoholism, and drug abuse who consequently struggle in qualifying for and finding success through participation in current social service programs

PROJECT RATIONALE
Though concentrated in Kenosha’s downtown and uptown areas, homelessness is a major community issue. Many of these people face daily struggles without empathy or support from the rest of the community. This should not become the norm. Kenosha’s homeless deserve the same amount of respect, human dignity, help, and care as our community’s most valuable and successful members. Economic circumstances and housing status should not limit efforts in providing help and assistance needed to lead a fulfilling and dignified life. It is in the community’s best interest to work toward improving Kenosha’s homeless situation and lessen its negative affect on local business, neighborhood disruption, along with increased health care and social service costs. Anything less is a failure in our community’s responsibility to support the most vulnerable among us.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY
The main purpose of this project was to record, transcribe, condense, and compile thirty homeless individuals’ narrative accounts into a public booklet.

The booklet documents the individuals’ stories and challenges, along with their desires on how to improve their own and other’s current situation. These stories aim to encourage change on both political and personal levels in how homeless individuals are viewed and treated in this city. The ultimate goal of this project is to spark action in bringing about change in the lives of Kenosha’s homeless and ensure that every Kenosha community member’s right to a dignified existence is preserved, regardless of economic circumstances and housing status.

PROJECT CONCLUSIONS / PUBLIC RECOMMENDATIONS
- Never pass judgment on a homeless individual or assume you know the reasons for their current life circumstances.
- Reach out and routinely volunteer at grassroots, social service agencies that work directly with homeless individuals to better connect and understand their situation.
- Share information and facts with others about homeless individuals to help rid false stereotypes. Dispel the assumption that every homeless person is unemployed and/or a substance abuser.
- Refrain from discriminating against and/or judging potential employees who share the fact that they are homeless.
- In addition to nonperishable items, donate extra fresh fruits and vegetables from your garden to homeless shelters and food pantries. Don’t allow them to go to waste!
- Organize a group of friends and family members to volunteer and cook a meal for an INNS church site that does not have food to serve their homeless guests.
- The Kenosha Achievement Center requires ownership of a bike lock in order to qualify for a donated bike to conduct job searches or travel to work. Donate bike locks, padlocks, and chains to homeless shelters.
- Collect travel-size soaps and hygiene products from hotels and donate them to organizations that serve the homeless.
- Donate adult and children’s books and small children’s toys to organizations that serve homeless individuals and families.
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- Collect travel-size soaps and hygiene products from hotels and donate them to organizations that serve the homeless.
- Volunteer at social service agencies to help clients fill out resumes, complete job applications, and practice interviewing.
- Support programs, campaigns, and policies that seek to improve life circumstances for homeless individuals.
- Work to open a permanent residential facility that serves homeless individuals and/or families.
- Work to improve Kenosha’s public transportation system with new routes and times that coincide with employment opportunities and second and third work shifts.
- Work to open a public, needs-based shower site.
Anonymous female (43 years old), homeless for 3 weeks

“Immanuel Baptist Church [on Pershing Blvd] treats you like kings and queens. They literally take the clothes off your back and give you scrubs, a new pair of socks, and a new pair of underwear while they do your laundry. The even fold the clothes for you. They fold them better than I ever could.”

THANK YOU

The STOP, LOOK, AND LISTEN project thanks the Immanuel Baptist Outreach Team, St. Peter Parish of Kenosha, and other anonymous donors for their generous and thoughtful donations in support of this endeavor. The project’s public acknowledgement component could not have been achieved without your support!

I personally thank all project participants for sharing a special part of themselves in making this project possible. They should be commended for their honesty, courage, forthrightness, and strength. Each of them holds a special place in my heart and I wish them the best as they continue on their life journeys.

PROJECT FOUNDER

Megan Jekot

St. Olaf College
Northfield, MN
Class of 2016

Political science major with an emphasis in social work and a concentration in race and ethnic studies.

(Photo: Belfast, Northern Ireland)

I studied “Democracy and Social Change” while interning at a human rights organization, the Pat Finucane Centre, in Derry from February 2014 thru May 2014.

Please email stoplookandlistenkenosha@gmail.com with any questions or comments regarding this project, thank you!

PRESENTATION OF NARRATIVE ACCOUNTS

A total of 30 interviews were conducted, transcribed, and compiled from 22 males and 8 females, with the goal of hearing and recording the stories, challenges, and desires of homeless individuals in Kenosha.

12 interviews were gathered at First Step Services, 12 interviews were gathered at Interfaith Network Nightly Shelter (INNS) church sites, 3 interviews were gathered at the Shalom Center’s Emergency Family Shelter and 3 interviews were gathered at the ELCA Outreach Center.

Participants’ ages range from 19 years to 61 years with the average age being 38 years.

Participants’ periods of homelessness range from 2.5 weeks to 20 years with the average time period being 2.5 years.

Juan Avalos Jr. (22 years old), homeless for 3 months

“I came to Kenosha with my mom when we were homeless. Even when I was young we lived in vans and stuff. I’ve grown up living out of bags. So this isn’t my first time, but it’s my first time by myself. I have five other brothers who are living with my mom in housing right now. But that’s the maximum amount of people allowed and I’m the oldest and don’t want to get her in trouble so I stay away.”

“Most of the time it’s a challenge just finding a place to sleep, but I always think there are people out there who are worse off than me…I walk around here and people throw stuff, like pennies and other change, and say hurtful stuff to me. I’m always surprised at how hateful people are when they drive by yelling profanities and throwing stuff.”

“A lot of people talk about jumping the pier because they just can’t take it. It happens and their bodies just don’t wash back up. It’s hard out here. It’s not known how much we’re harassed and how often we have things thrown at us. We’re the same as anyone else, we’re people too. We just don’t have a house to lay our head down at night.”
Julia Jackson (30 years old), homeless for 3.5 months

“Being supportive and having a strong mind is very hard because you have no guarantees. I can’t promise my kids anything like, ‘We’re going to be okay,’ because I don’t know that.

“I have three girls and a little boy. When we’re on the street I worry about [encountering] men [who are] pedophiles and rapists because anything is viable to happen. I don’t like when we’re on the street and going to bed in a park because I always worry about something happening to them.”

“It would be great if the city could take the funds they get to provide services for the homeless and put them towards more shelter buildings. There are a lot of us out here and it’s very depressing seeing children and babies sleeping on the streets. If the city could realize that, it would be a beautiful thing.”

Cody Marcoe (31 years old), homeless for 4 months

“I had a decent job, got laid off, saved my money, got a place, got a job, then got laid off, and now it’s happening again. When I was living in the apartment I knew I was going to be evicted and become homeless because I couldn’t afford it. I did my research ahead of time so I knew where the services were when it happened. When I first came to Kenosha I was going to sleep out on the concrete but then I found out about the INNS program.”

“I just take it day by day. I don’t like the situation I’m in but I know I can do better. It just takes time. I just have to go out there, strive for perfection, and do what’s good for myself.”

“I would like to see everyone who has a mental illness be able to get some help with medication and doctors. Just give them enough so they can be successful, get a job, get a place, and feel fulfilled instead of sleeping on the sidewalk or at different churches.”

Talevikin Peebles (20 years old), homeless for 4 months

“When I was young I knew my adopted family never cared about me. I knew I’d get to the point when I’d turn 18 and they’d say “You’re out.” So the thought of being homeless was just like an impending doom. I always knew it was going to eventually happen. When it did, I went out looking for my real parents and I found a surprise I wasn’t looking for. My real mom told me to my face that she never wanted me. So that’s how I’ve ended up in this situation. I’ve never really been given a chance. I was never really born with a silver spoon in my mouth to begin with. It hurts to be here because I don’t think I’ve ever done anything wrong to anyone to deserve this.”

“When you’re out there and you know you got nothing and someone comes up to you and asks if you need help… it makes you feel like you’ve really got nothing. It makes you feel like crying because you know you need [their help] but don’t want to take it. I’d much rather be the person who people rely on and turn to for help than the person that needs help. Not being able to take care of yourself makes you feel really helpless and vulnerable. You get to a point where it’s impossible to feel confident.”

“It’s kinda hard when you walk down these streets and you see people standing in front of their house or on their porch. I start daydreaming about wanting something like that but I don’t know if I’ll ever even get there. Some people don’t really know that there’s always people out there wishing they had what you had.”

“I’d like to see more people do what your logo say – stop, look, and listen – so [they] can sit down and try to comprehend or come close to understanding our situation to get to know us. Instead we’re pushed to the side and people put other things in front of them as a distraction from the truth. It’s a cycle that’ll keep on going unless people start changing. They will continue to not see what they don’t want to see. They will continue to not understand what they don’t want to understand.”

Alex Prokopczyk (34 years old), homeless for 3 months

“I just take it step by step and day by day. I try to remain and think positive, but because of the situation it’s easier to think more negatively. I think overall that the situation can get very tiring. You want to get out of it but don’t know how. It’s easy to give up but you just have to take it day by day.”
Richard Davis (51 years old), homeless for 7 months

“Until you’ve actually become homeless, you don’t really realize how many [people] there are. Now I [recognize] them all over the place. I see people [I’d] never guess were homeless. I used to think they were all drunks or drug abusers and now I’m homeless myself. I have worked all my life and I’m none of those things. I just think it’s a stigma that people can’t shake.”

“I’ve always had a good job [and] a good life up until recent circumstances and this really put it all in perspective. I lost my job because they replaced me with someone half my age at half my salary. I had a fear of people finding out because I never expected to be here at this point in my life, to be in this situation. So I guess you could say that I feel a great deal of shame for not being able to provide shelter or other basic necessities for myself because with people at my age, we don’t like to ask for help. But I finally did and that’s how I found this [INNS] program.”

Anonymous male (19 years old), homeless for 3 years

“It felt depressing, stressful, nerve racking… I was more worried about finding a place to eat, sleep, wash clothes, and take a shower… and then I worried about school. It was always a challenge because I didn’t know if I’d have clean clothes for school or money for transportation. Every week I’d move and try to find a place to stay. I didn’t have a clue about services. I just needed my friends to be there for me, if not… I don’t know…”

Angel Ruiz (45 years old), homeless for 5 years

“Shelters are hard because you have no privacy. Some people have health conditions and snore. Sometimes the snoring is so bad that I have to go to a park to sleep because I have to work the next day. You are never really able to get good sleep when you’re homeless, but once you’re tired enough you pass out.”

Rodney Carter-Green (22 years old), homeless for 4 months

“I think that the INNS program is what you make it. You can either make it a good experience or a bad one. I’m making it a good experience because I’m turning it into a positive step towards [becoming] a better person. There’s no point in being in the INNS program unless you’re here to improve yourself. Otherwise, you’re just taking up space.”

Anonymous female (45 years old), homeless for 2 months

“The only thing that would improve anything in this city would be creating permanent jobs that support families, have benefits, and provide training so you just don’t have to go to college to get that job. It all relies on giving the people here more structure and more jobs to build up this city again.”

Carl Ingram Jr. (53 years old), homeless for 3 years

“There’s lots of people out here with mental disabilities who are medicated or self-medicating. Every one of them is unique in their own way. They’re applying themselves to be better people, but the human will is badly challenged out here. It’s just not enough to want to do it. The human will is so hard challenged that you lose faith and just do what you gotta do to get along and that right there isn’t even enough.”

Cherise Tyes (23 years old), homeless for 3 weeks

“When you say you’re homeless, people treat you a certain way. They assume you’re lazy and just don’t want to do anything to better yourself. No one has the right to assume why someone is homeless and then to use that to justify treating them differently. I’m homeless because my sister lost her job, the rent was $1,000/month, I had no money to afford a place to live, and I was still grieving my son who died of SIDS when he was eight months old. He was there one day and not there the next. We just couldn’t afford the apartment and the landlord kicked us out. I never thought I’d become homeless but I also never thought I’d lose a child.”
John Wise (55 years old), homeless for 5 years

“Homelessness is pretty much standing in line, for everything and anything. It’s hard to make progress because your day is consumed by survival—showers, meals, etc. It becomes a lifestyle that you’re unable to break because you have to be stuck at places at certain times waiting in lines in order to deal with the necessities… lots of waiting takes a lot of time.”

Lanette Jones (33 years old), homeless for 2.5 weeks

“I focus on the main things right now—housing, planning for the kids, and getting them in school. Then I’ll worry about getting myself back to school, getting a job, and not going back to an abusive relationship. My goal is to provide and be a better parent for my boys.”

Anonymous female (21 years old), homeless for 1 year and 3 months

“Food is hard because there’s no freedom. You can’t just go into a fridge and feed your child when they’re hungry, you always need staff permission. I don’t like not being able to feed my child when he’s hungry, and some shelters just have no food period. I also don’t want him to be sick when he can’t digest provided foods, but I also don’t want him to starve.”

Kenneth Turner (44 years old), homeless for 3 years

“There are a lot of people that care, but there are a lot of people that don’t. We’ve already had eggs thrown at us twice this year. They yell, ‘Losers, get a job!’ Then honk their horn, then drive back around again. I guess they had to use the whole dozen.”

“I had a [job] interview yesterday. I’m not going to say, ‘I lost my job, I lost my apartment,’ because they’ll just think, ‘Oh, you’re unreliable and probably a drunk.’ People just see you on the street and think, ‘You’re dirty, a drunk, a druggie.’ That’s a stigma and it needs to change.”

Andre Heartz (48 years old), homeless for 1 year

“Finding a place to sleep is a challenge. There aren’t enough beds [at shelter sites], there’s a lack of space. I’d like to see more places for people to sleep. Seeing people outside… it’s not a good feeling, especially when it’s raining.”

Latanza Carter (46 years old), homeless for 12 years

“Sometimes I don’t want to tell my story but then I think I need to. I don’t want to be like this anymore. I do what [the INNS program] says because I want the help, I want to do something, and I want to finish something. I’ve been waiting for that miracle. If I wanna get on my feet, I gotta do exactly what I gotta do to get there. I don’t want no hand outs, I want to work to get somewhere.”

“Just because we’re homeless doesn’t mean we’re people to be scared of. Some of us who are homeless have a heart of gold and we just fell out of line somewhere. I wish people would understand that there’s nothing wrong with homeless people. We have a heart and feelings just like everyone else.”

Martin Perez (50 years old), homeless for 5 months

“Transportation is really bad. I have no money so I can’t ride the bus. I can’t get a job to get the money because I have a fractured leg and three fractured ribs. Last week I was walking toward the [shelter site]. I was on the sidewalk and I heard a car coming. That’s the last thing I remember. I guess a car pulled out of their driveway and hit me. I don’t remember anything. I just received two [hospital] bills for it. One is $700 and the other is $400.”
Anonymous male (61 years old), homeless for 2 months

“Taking a shower and finding a place to get presentable is a challenge. It’s terrible. I’m lucky if I get a shower every week to every week and a half.”

“Politicians need to get down here and start talking to the people to know what they need. No one gets out here to talk to these people. They sweep them under the rug like they don’t want to deal with us. We’re just another problem. Get out of the office and start beating the streets like a homeless person. Take a week off and try being homeless and have the media follow you so everyone knows what it’s like.”

Joe McBride (34 years old), homeless for 2 years

“I can look at the political figures and say, ‘I don’t care about your golf swing. Get out here, look at this, stop this from happening, and make things back to being beautiful.’ Let’s start thinking out of the box and create jobs for homeless people to do. Send them out in vans to make the streets clean, pound nails into boards, or to paint street poles because those things rust and we need to keep stuff up. It’s really messed up out here and the streets are filthy. Let’s clean up places to make them beautiful because homelessness doesn’t have to be an ugly thing. I’m not trying to dream big but I am trying to dream up a little something. When they came over here they didn’t have degrees. Johnny Appleseed didn’t have a degree to plant apple seeds but we still got apple trees. Some people are smarter than a piece of paper.”

Chris Runge (26 years old), homeless for 1 year and 6 months

“People think they could just walk around and chill all day [if they were homeless]. It’s not like that at all. You have to walk everywhere, find shelter to escape from bad weather, plan far in advance [for] when you’re going to get food and eat, [and] you have to wake up everyday at 5:30am/6:00am regardless of what time you’ve gotten in from work.”

“Medical care sucks. The walk-ins are horrible. One time the rubber thing on an ear bud got stuck in my ear and I had to go to the emergency room to get it out. I told the nurse I was homeless and she looked at me like I was less than human... like an animal. Not even like a pet, but something you’d see out in the wild.”

JoeSEPH Herman (29 years old), in and out homelessness for 13 years

“Staying safe and out of trouble is a challenge because if you’re staying on the streets, given the neighborhood, anything can happen. You can get jumped, beat up, robbed, or get involved with the cops, and then of course there are the elements. If you do get harassed by the cops, and are asked to leave your spot, it’s hard because you don’t know if you’ll be able to find another safe spot [to sleep]. There are just a lot of worries about everything—shelter, food, clean clothes, general hygiene. Then you always get the public feedback who thinks that you must be a terrible person because you’re homeless. But that’s not the case at all, we’ve just fallen on some tough times.”

“When you do apply for a job and have to provide an address, most people use the shelter’s address. Most employers and people you give that address to know that it’s a homeless shelter and they discriminate and turn you down for whatever job you’re applying for just based on that. I have a decent education but for employers it doesn’t matter. Once you get that homeless label, you’re just a bum in their eyes. To everyone, I’m just another homeless person.”

Matt Krisor (49 years old), homeless for 6 years

“Being homeless is something no one wants to do. It’s much easier to become homeless than it is to get back on your feet. You feel worthless and ashamed. You have to build your self-esteem back up, get a job, find a place to live, and keep in mind how easy it is to become homeless… and with addiction, you see how easy it is to go back. Staying motivated and not giving up is the hardest part of being homeless. For some it’s gradual, but with others it happens overnight. Then when you get to the point of homelessness you think, ‘What’s there to fight for?’ But you have to look past that and not give up.”
Edward Rodriguez (22 years old), in and out of homelessness for 4 years

“I have no family and I’m only 20. They don’t want to help me out so I really have nowhere to go. I didn’t know about this [INNS] program until about four days ago. Before then I was sleeping outside. It was rough because I had no money and nothing to eat. Before I got here it would be random for me to eat. I’d eat one day then go two to four days without. I’d snack here and there for a week or so, but then I’d start getting sick if I’d eat something because I wasn’t used to eating food. I’ve lost thirty pounds in three weeks. I probably took like three showers over those three weeks. I also wore the same clothes for those three weeks as well because I didn’t know anything about Kenosha’s services.”

“I had money to take the train back to Chicago but I was at the train station and saw two women and a baby who were also homeless. I gave them all my money, which was about $30. It just hit my heart because I have kids myself and the baby doesn’t know what’s going on. He shouldn’t be sleeping on a bench.”

“But maybe it all happened for a reason because I’ve realized that I don’t want to go back to a destructive lifestyle in Chicago. It’s amazing how now I’m so motivated and can see myself in six months with my kids and a job driving a truck at a completely different place [in life]. If I’m willing to change myself, then I’m willing to suffer. So I’ve just decided not to worry because [God] has lead me in the right direction.”

“We need to realize that the world isn’t one person and that we’re here to help each other out. I always help people who are worse off than myself because I don’t want to see them fall down any further. I’d rather have myself fall down a step than to see that.”

Anonymous female (32 years old), homeless for 6 months

“Just not knowing where you are going to go the next day is really scary, along with not knowing if you’re going to wake up alive when you’re sleeping on the street. Worrying about your safety and your kid’s safety, not knowing who you’re around and what their background is… it’s all really scary. You don’t know who you’re going to deal with on a daily basis. Also, a lot of the neighborhoods out here are not very kid friendly. They are not very safe. You see a lot of people deal with drug and alcohol problems, not wanting to help themselves. Then your kids are exposed to that and it’s just not healthy.”

Doug Wait (45 years old), homeless for 20 years

“You give me one government person and you have him sleep where I sleep and see how he feels. Take this to [the city] and tell them to come here for one to two nights and feel how it is to be homeless. Don’t bring no sleeping bags or nothing. Come out here and find what you can and then see how they feel. Feel what it’s like to have nothing, feel the cold that we got.”

Patrick Thomas (50 years old), homeless for 5 weeks

“[Shelters] need to call up mental health services when there’s someone who arrives and isn’t all there. Instead they just kick them out because they can’t handle them. They need to stop just telling the people where the place [they need to go] is. They need to physically take them there. Those people need some guidance.”

Glen Simmons (57 years old), formerly homeless for 2 months

“It’s a challenge when you are homeless and you only have two days to take a shower and one day to do laundry in a week. Then let’s say it’s a hot summer… you have five days of people walking around with total BO unless they wash up in a fast food restaurant bathroom.”

“It’s difficult to have to share your day with thirty people that you don’t know. There are a lot of trust issues, fear, and uneasiness. To lay your head down on a mat in a room full of that many people can be scary at times.”

Edward Rodriguez (22 years old), in and out of homelessness for 4 years

“I have no family and I’m only 20. They don’t want to help me out so I really have nowhere to go. I didn’t know about this [INNS] program until about four days ago. Before then I was sleeping outside. It was rough because I had no money and nothing to eat. Before I got here it would be random for me to eat. I’d eat one day then go two to four days without. I’d snack here and there for a week or so, but then I’d start getting sick if I’d eat something because I wasn’t used to eating food. I’ve lost thirty pounds in three weeks. I probably took like three showers over those three weeks. I also wore the same clothes for those three weeks as well because I didn’t know anything about Kenosha’s services.”

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“But maybe it all happened for a reason because I’ve realized that I don’t want to go back to a destructive lifestyle in Chicago. It’s amazing how now I’m so motivated and can see myself in six months with my kids and a job driving a truck at a completely different place [in life]. If I’m willing to change myself, then I’m willing to suffer. So I’ve just decided not to worry because [God] has lead me in the right direction.”

“We need to realize that the world isn’t one person and that we’re here to help each other out. I always help people who are worse off than myself because I don’t want to see them fall down any further. I’d rather have myself fall down a step than to see that.”

Anonymous female (32 years old), homeless for 6 months

“Just not knowing where you are going to go the next day is really scary, along with not knowing if you’re going to wake up alive when you’re sleeping on the street. Worrying about your safety and your kid’s safety, not knowing who you’re around and what their background is… it’s all really scary. You don’t know who you’re going to deal with on a daily basis. Also, a lot of the neighborhoods out here are not very kid friendly. They are not very safe. You see a lot of people deal with drug and alcohol problems, not wanting to help themselves. Then your kids are exposed to that and it’s just not healthy.”

Doug Wait (45 years old), homeless for 20 years

“You give me one government person and you have him sleep where I sleep and see how he feels. Take this to [the city] and tell them to come here for one to two nights and feel how it is to be homeless. Don’t bring no sleeping bags or nothing. Come out here and find what you can and then see how they feel. Feel what it’s like to have nothing, feel the cold that we got.”

Patrick Thomas (50 years old), homeless for 5 weeks

“[Shelters] need to call up mental health services when there’s someone who arrives and isn’t all there. Instead they just kick them out because they can’t handle them. They need to stop just telling the people where the place [they need to go] is. They need to physically take them there. Those people need some guidance.”

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