



Consumer Input Forum of ROE Residents (Housing for Harvey): December 13, 2017

A focus group consisting of 8 participants (4 women, 4 men) was held on December 13, 2017 at 9am. Participants were asked about experiences surrounding Hurricane Harvey Recovery and at the Residences on Emancipation (ROE) housing. Ages ranged from 46-67 years and seven identified as Black/African-American and one identified as the human race (although appeared Caucasian). Two participants had a 9th- 11th grade education, three had graduated high school or had a GED, and three had some college. Seven had experienced some homelessness before Harvey; of the six of these who responded, one had been in shelters, three on the streets, and one with family and friends. Six stayed at the George R. Brown (GRB) shelter after Harvey, two did not stay in emergency shelters immediately following the storm. Two participants now had earned income (temporary jobs) and one had SSDI. Five were looking for work; one needed to heal before going to work.

HOMELESSNESS EXPERIENCES AROUND HARVEY

- One participant first became homeless ten years ago in Louisiana due to drug use and death of parents. He slept in his car and sofa surfed in friends' apartments until Harvey hit.
- Another had been working and had income before Harvey and had been paying cash rent without a lease. He lost his job at the time of Harvey. He went to GRB after the storm for shelter then became employed by GRB Red Cross. He went to HCC shelter and came to ROE from there. He had not been homeless before Harvey.
- One participant had never been homeless until the storm; had been staying with family but could not go back.
- A fourth participant moved from Alabama 3 years ago to visit her daughter but stayed in Houston and went to Workfaith Connections because it was important to go to work. She got a job and graduated from Star of Hope Transitional Living Center. She was working and housed at the time of the storm but lost her job just before storm and then went to GRB shelter. From there she then went to ROE.
- One male participant first became homeless in 2011 because he was hurt on the job. He then had an 'experience' with police and was locked up for seven months. When he was released, he lived on the streets. He got a disability award (SSDI) and then got offers to stay with family and pay part of the rent. He lost housing with family due to Harvey as he did not qualify for FEMA.
- One participant slept in the car before Harvey but usually stayed with family and friends and paid cash rent.
- Reasons mentioned for becoming homeless were loss of job, jail, Harvey, economy/lack of paying jobs. Age was also mentioned as a barrier to getting jobs (and hence not being able to afford rent) as was death of a family member with whom he was staying. Having a felony record makes it hard to get housed.
- One participant said that homelessness is a "cycle"; once you get caught up in it, it is hard to get out. This statement resonated with the group.
- Most participants have lived with family or friends in the past and a few felt they could live with family again in the future but not right now. They need income and to stabilize. Most did not feel like they could ever stay with family again.

CHALLENGES IN FINDING A MORE STABLE SITUATION

The Way Home

Challenges mentioned in finding more stable housing including finding work (age was once again mentioned as a barrier) and not having enough income to support themselves. Many had others who relied on them for support (mostly adult children). The participant who received SSDI said it is not enough to pay for an apartment. There was concern about the reputation of apartments in certain areas and that the areas were dangerous in part due to drug elements. The one white participant was concerned about being the only one of her race in a neighborhood and specifically mentioned Greenspoint, but other participants said Greenspoint's reputation is stereotyped and not all bad. A similar concern was mentioned about roommates potentially exposing you to situations which you are trying to overcome (e.g., drug use). Another challenge mentioned was that homeless people are preyed upon by businesses and by charities.

SERVICES RECEIVED AT ROE

Participants had received medical care (Healthcare for the Homeless received a good report and characterized as very helpful), employment counseling, and help with obtaining a Gold Card and food stamps. The Smith Clinic and the Beacon (medication linkage) were mentioned as helpful as was the HOT team. One participant spoke about the supportive environment at ROE.

EXPERIENCE WITH PUBLIC/NON-PROFIT AGENCIES

Those who had not sought help from public or non-profit agencies explained they had not because they did not like being preached to and/or had a feeling of distrust of charities that "prey on the homeless". Treatment at shelters was felt to be undignified and clients were not treated as adults, e.g., breathalyzer requirement and curfew. Concern about their safety at the shelter due to other clients was mentioned and that the hours enforced did not allow a person to get a job.

When asked if they had had any experiences with services or shelter that has made them not want to go back, one person was very vocal but the rest did not complain. The one complainant said the staff played favorites and that the rules – like security, curfew, and lights out – made one feel they were being treated as a child and marginalized. She expressed concern about a church being controlling and called out Haven of Hope. She said she was "tired of being lied to". Racial conflict concerns as well as availability of Kush in shelters was mentioned as well.

SERVICES YOU WISH WERE MORE READILY AVAILABLE NOW

- Housing assistance
- Storage for belongings
- Low cost housing with maximum choices
- Housing identification and overcoming CBC
- Second chance housing in quality non crime areas