



Project Homeless Connect

A Manual for BC Communities



February 2009

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Please visit www.stophomelessness.ca for more resources including some editable templates mentioned in this manual.



Project Homeless Connect

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Introduction

Project Homeless Connect is the name given to a special event designed to give people who are homeless access to a wide range of health and other support services all under one roof. The first official Project Homeless Connect was held in San Francisco in 1998, though variations on the concept have existed for some time in many places. The stated goal of San Francisco's Project Homeless Connect is "to provide easy access to services that support the transition of the City's homeless off the streets and into housing."

Connect events, which can be held once a year, every quarter, or every week, are designed to connect people who are homeless to services they may have difficulty accessing on the street. To the extent they can, service providers try to deliver as many of their services on-site, minimizing the need for referrals and follow-up.

The range of services offered at Homeless Connect events varies greatly depending on the resources available in the community and the degree to which service providers are able to deliver services at the event. At a large and well-established Homeless Connect event you might see dental services, general medical care, massage, veterinary services, ID making services, haircuts, foot treatments, legal aid, long distance phoning, letter writing, de-bugging (for bed bugs), food services, food bank supplies, addiction and mental health counseling, employment assistance, and housing services. Smaller events might have just first aid, a housing outreach worker, food services and hygiene kits.

Getting started is the key. The experience of many communities that have held Homeless Connect events is that they grow, getting both stronger and easier with time, as service providers and others in the community see the benefits that come from this method of providing outreach to people who are homeless.



Project Homeless Connect began in San Francisco in 1998 with over 1,000 volunteers. Today, Homeless Connect events are bi-weekly, serve up to 2,000 people, and involve 250 non-profit and 300 corporate partners.

How to use this manual

This manual will assist community organizers in British Columbia who are planning a Homeless Connect event. The manual provides basic organizational information as well as helpful hints and checklists that can be used to help the event go smoothly. It is a resource that can be widely shared with volunteers and service providers to help them understand the Homeless Connect concept and what it is they are being asked to do. Finally, it contains some forms and templates that can be used for advertising purposes, as well as to gather feedback and statistics at the event itself.

Important Tips for Success

- Organize early - hold a planning meeting
- Get the word out
- Write a plan
- Identify the people you need
- Keep track of numbers
(i.e. service and people served)

Getting Started

Whether you are thinking of a big event or something small, effective planning will help make everything easier.

“Overall, the day was a success and provided needed service to many. It also provided a unique opportunity for Vancouver service providers to come together under one roof and forge new relationships.

This event also marked the start of a new way of connecting with people who are homeless, and tracking important information in a way that will help us better understand the needs of people who are homeless in Vancouver.”

Celine Mauboules,

City of Vancouver, Housing Centre

—from her report to council regarding

Homeless Connect in October 2008

Organize early

Preparation is key to holding a successful event. Your organizing committee has a number of major tasks including: securing a venue, promoting the event, finding volunteers, and gathering financial and other support. Giving yourselves 8 - 12 weeks to prepare will greatly increase your chances of hosting a successful event.

Hold a planning meeting

Contact other community organizations, volunteers, service agencies, service clubs, and local businesses. Let them know you are planning a Homeless Connect event and invite them to participate in a planning meeting.

This first call should be as broad as possible so that all service providers and potential partners will have an opportunity to find out about the event and decide if it is something in which they can participate. Even those who decide they cannot participate can provide support in other ways. Use this first meeting as a way of generating excitement about the event, and be open to new ideas and suggestions.

Hold organizing meetings regularly in the weeks leading up to your event.



Write a plan

Start with what you know and add more details as your planning progresses. Consider this plan a 'living document' that you will refer to and update often. Set key dates for decisions and delegate to ensure each task is completed. People often work more effectively when there is a deadline!

Identify the people you need

Depending on the size and complexity of your Homeless Connect event, consider assigning organizers to the following positions to ensure that important tasks are accomplished.

Event Co-ordinator

Duties: Convenes meetings, sets agenda for meetings, runs meetings, follows up with action items, and liaises with partner groups and agency contacts about planned events and needed support.

Fundraising Co-ordinator

Duties: Works in collaboration with the committee to identify and approach potential sponsors, donors and funders for goods, services and cash donations, ensures supporters are thanked.

Logistics Co-ordinator

Duties: Works in collaboration with the committee and event co-ordinator to organize the event including: arranging for a venue and other rentals (if needed), layout, signage, seating, supplies, set-up and tear-down, security, emergency & first-aid services, event insurance, compliance with municipal, provincial and federal safety standards and regulations (especially if you are serving food), and possible back-up plans for unexpected conditions (e.g., weather or labour dispute).

Volunteer Co-ordinator

Duties: Recruits and is the contact for volunteers, collaborates with the event co-ordinator to assign tasks and trouble-shoot at the event, ensures volunteer training is provided and ensures volunteers are thanked after the event. This person should also compile and maintain the volunteer contact list.

Communications Co-ordinator

Duties: Creates and distributes relevant communications materials; handles media relations with local media outlets (news releases, media events); places paid and free advertising in local media, acts as the contact person if or when media is present at local events, ensures evaluation forms are distributed and collected, and that information is retained in a co-ordinated manner.

These positions can be shared or one person can wear two 'hats.' Depending on your circumstances, you may also need to create other positions to oversee specific areas such as transportation, food services and security.



About Event Planning

Writing down your event plan is helpful for several reasons. A written plan keeps you on track and provides reassurance to potential supporters that your committee is organized. In addition, as new volunteers and allies come on board you will be able to provide them with copies of the plan.

There is no 'right way' to create or format an event plan. However, just keep in mind that your plan should answer the following questions:

- When is the event? What day and time?
- Where is the event?
- What specific services (e.g., meals, foot baths, housing support, etc.) do you plan to provide?
- Who can / will deliver these services?
- Can members of the public attend your event?
- Can journalists attend your event?
- What elected officials (if any) do you intend to invite?
- Do you need / have volunteers?
- How will you promote your event to the appropriate audience?
- Is your event linked to other community events or activities?
- How will you know if your event is successful?

Find a location

Start where you can and recognize that compromises may be necessary in your search for the right location.

In many communities, the choice of location will be one of the hardest things to deal with. Ideally, you want a location that is out of the ordinary for people who are homeless; you want them to see that this event is something different. If possible, you want people who are homeless to feel that you are inviting them into the living room of your community, even if it is just for one day.

In some large US cities, convention centers are used to hold Project Homeless Connect events. Other cities use venues like arenas or other large buildings (public or privately owned) provided it is as convenient as possible for large numbers of people who are homeless.

When you are just starting out, it can be difficult to hold a Homeless Connect event at the type of location you want. Building owners can be nervous or skeptical about what you are doing and costs can be prohibitive. This is an area where you may have to work toward your ultimate goal over a couple of years as you gain community support and more sponsors become willing to contribute.

In addition to the message your location sends, there are some practical considerations that go into the choice of location. These are largely related to the range of services you intend to offer. Some things are essential, such as toilets, but you may also want to consider whether you need any of the following:

- A kitchen
- Access to clean water and disposal of dirty water in a place outside the kitchen (e.g., for foot care or hair washing)
- Internet access
- Screened in or private areas (for medical care or legal advice)
- Separate rooms (e.g., for counseling or social assistance intake)
- Storage (for shopping carts and luggage)
- Kennels (for dogs and other pets)
- An entertainment area
- Telephones

Establish a date

Check to see what else is happening in your area on any dates you are considering to ensure that you are not in conflict with something else that might make it difficult for service providers, volunteers, or people who are homeless to participate. Your choice of date may also be driven by the availability of a suitable location.

You can start by canvassing your partners and key contacts about their availability but also check newspaper ads, on-line calendars and event listings (e.g., Craigslist, ticket sellers and your city hall events calendar).

Services

What services should be available?

There are some key services you want to have every time you hold a Homeless Connect event. These include food services, first aid, housing outreach, and giveaways such as hygiene kits, socks, and take-away foodstuffs. You should also try to provide a secure storage area for people's belongings, including shopping carts and a pet-minding service.

There are many more services that fall into the "nice to have" category, and you should try to include one or more in your event. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it may help you think about what is possible. It includes: legal services, mental health and addiction counselling, dental services, foot care, debugging services (for bed bugs), seasonal clothing distribution, work clothing distribution, ID making, long-distance calling, letter writing, employment counselling and referrals, eyeglasses, massage, hair cutting, veterinary services, banking services, social assistance intake, arts and crafts activities, and entertainment.

Make it special
not the usual place for
people who are homeless

Make it convenient
or provide transportation

Make it work
have or get the amenities
you need



Health and personal care services for people who are homeless:

Foot care clinic
Dental care clinic and free eyeglasses (either prescription or readers)
Eye care
Medical clinic
Medical outreach
Blood pressure clinic
Haircuts
Veterinary clinics

Legal clinics
Tenants' rights
Community dinners
Video / movie nights

Music / entertainment event
Road hockey
Soccer games
Healthy food service

Blankets
Warm clothing
Socks and footwear
Food

Finding the array of services that best meets the needs of people in your community can take some time. It is also something that becomes easier as service providers gain experience and a greater appreciation of the benefits delivered by Homeless Connect events. At some point your challenge may be that you have to turn away some service providers (or find a bigger venue).

It's about service delivery, not referrals

Homeless Connect events are all about providing services for people who are homeless. This is an important point to remember when thinking about which service providers should attend and what services they will offer.

Service providers should be prepared to deliver services during your event. They can also distribute information but unless information is all they ever provide as a regular service, this should not be their sole activity. Giving general information to people about services that they have to access somewhere else is frustrating and defeats the purpose of the Connect event.

This is a new concept to many service providers and one they may resist. In some cases they may feel that they already make their services easily accessible to people who are homeless (and indeed they might), but their participation in the Homeless Connect event is part of what makes the overall experience so special to people who are homeless. The point to stress is that a Homeless Connect event is about having the services all together, to make it easy for people who are homeless to go from one service to another and be able to accomplish more than one thing that day.

Some considerations for particular services

Although service providers will let you know what they need by way of special facilities, it is good to have an idea of what you might need while you are looking for a location.

The following are some common Homeless Connect services and the type of facilities they typically require. This list is meant to help you in scouting a location and to help you determine whether it is reasonable for you to invite a particular service provider. If you can't meet their basic needs for service delivery, don't invite them. It will save everyone from a frustrating experience.

Cart and pack storage – A defined area that is supervised or locked and protected from rain is all that is needed. A covered outside area works well. If you anticipate that a large number of items will require storage, you may want to have a ticketing system. The same area can be used to hold garbage bags full of bottles and cans that people have been collecting.

Dog-minding – Pet-minding is different from veterinary services. It is intended to simply allow people with pets to be able to safely leave their pets and come into the event. Individual kennels work best as pets generally feel secure when in a kennel. Volunteers who are comfortable with pets can act as supervisors. Dog treats, fresh water, and protection from sun and rain are all that is necessary. Take-away packages of pet food are also nice to have.

Food Bank – If you are able to involve your local food bank, you can distribute foodstuffs to people as they are leaving. Make sure that the food you are distributing is healthy and appropriate for people on the street. Fresh fruits, complex carbohydrates and foods high in protein are good choices. If you are distributing canned foods have can openers available as well. Avoid empty calories and anything that can't be easily carried.

Food Services – If you are serving anything hot, you may need to obtain a permit from your local health authority and have the food prepared by a certified food preparer in a certified kitchen. If you are handing out lunch bags, you may face fewer regulations, but you should check out the requirements well in advance. Note that you will need quite a few volunteers to assist with serving and to keep the eating area clean.

First Aid Services – Generally, you will not need any special facilities for first aid other than access to water for hand-washing. The service provider will bring the personnel and supplies needed. You may, however, want to consider portable screens or room dividers to increase privacy.

Housing Outreach – No special facilities are needed beyond a table and some chairs but check to see if an internet connection is needed.

Hygiene Kits and other giveaways – These are usually handed out across a table when guests are leaving. Having people stop to receive a kit enables volunteers to engage them in a very short evaluation survey (see sample template provided).

The content of hygiene kits varies with the type and quantity of donations received, but a selection from among the following supplies is typical: toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, non-alcohol hand-sanitizer, lotion, shampoo, lip balm, deodorant, comb, condoms, and for women sanitary supplies.

Socks are also a good giveaway as they are always needed by people who are homeless.

Service providers should arrive prepared to deliver services. Simply handing out information can add to the frustration of people who are homeless.



“This was a fantastic event. The clients I worked with were very grateful for it and seemed to get a lot out of it.”

*Service provider,
2008 Homeless Connect Event*



Financing and Budget

Once you have an event plan in place, you can start approaching local businesses and organizations to help cover your costs. Some organizations can also contribute in-kind donations.

Estimate how much money you will need for your event. Though you will likely have many things donated, you should keep track of the things that cost money, including those for which you will not be charged.

The following is a list of potential expenses. Your budget should specify whether the cost is something you will need to cover, or whether another organization or business is making an in-kind donation.

- Facility rentals
- Food service at event
- Purchase of food or other give-away items
- Insurance
- Supplies for services (footbaths, haircuts, etc.)
- Entertainment and PA rental if needed
- Permits and licenses

Once you have an estimate of the money you will need to raise, consider whether your event qualifies for small grants from local businesses or charities. Approach these organizations early to determine the process for making a request. Many small businesses and financial institutions can quickly decide on donations of \$500 and under.

Partners

Service Providers



Many of the service providers that come to deliver services at your Homeless Connect event will be involved only for the day. A few, however, will be partners, participating in the overall planning and management of the event.

The San Francisco group has developed a partner relationship with a number of service providers. A major partner is the Food Bank. They are involved in every Homeless Connect event and are responsible for managing all aspects of their participation. This includes carefully selecting foodstuffs that meet the needs of people living on the street, delivering the foodstuffs to the event, and providing staff and volunteers to distribute the food.

In BC, the health authorities already play a partnership role in Connect events in many communities. They participate in the core planning group and coordinate and manage the delivery of health care services at the event. In some cases, the health authority has been the lead organization.

Funders

You will have the best results with funders by establishing a relationship and linking your goals and strategies with your funders' granting goals. Here are some things to be aware of when you approach funders for support:

Who will be involved in your project?

List the community service groups, agencies, businesses and individuals involved in providing services and goods. Describe the unique contributions of these people to the success of your event and their help in creating connections with people who are homeless.

How many volunteers are involved?

Some grant givers are looking for a significant volunteer component to your project. From the funders' perspective, volunteers are partnering with you by investing their time and expertise.

What is your budget?

Above everything, your budget should be realistic and truthful. Your budget should give the funder a clear understanding of your budget categories and line item details. Break the budget into logical categories (e.g., transportation, rentals, purchases, facilities, etc.). Note other sources of potential funding or in-kind donations. Most funders will want to see that you are not relying on them for everything you need. 'In-kind' can mean unbilled staff time or donated goods or services.

How will you know you are successful?

What will you be able to provide in the way of information or data to show whether or not your event has been successful (e.g., number of visitors, services provided, etc.)?

Grant givers will want you to explain your evaluation procedure. This can be as straightforward as counting the number of people who were served. Although not as objective, anecdotal reports can be extremely compelling. Stories are more powerful than numbers. Make sure to collect compelling stories and testimonials where appropriate.

How will you acknowledge contributions?

Funders want to know how you will acknowledge their contributions. Here are a few ways to thank funders:

- Public thanks (where appropriate)
- Include funder logo on materials and website (e.g., stophomelessness.ca)
- Media releases & announcements
- Annual reports and newsletters

Champions

Champions are part of your communications plan. They are community leaders or local celebrities that can attract financial and other support.

The Mayor of San Francisco is an important champion of San Francisco's Project Homeless Connect. Because of his involvement and leadership, business groups, community groups and others got on board.



Volunteers

Working with Volunteers



Volunteers are an important part of your event. In addition to carrying out tasks, volunteers have a major role in helping people who are homeless feel welcome and able to find the services they need.

After the event, volunteers become ambassadors in the community, talking to their friends, family, and colleagues about their experiences and debunking some of the myths about people who are homeless. They can also help to bring in new volunteers to the next event.

Recruiting volunteers

Sometimes groups of volunteers are seconded from businesses, agencies, or municipal governments to your event; others come as individuals from the community. Regardless of how you find them, there are a few things to keep in mind when engaging volunteers.

Figure out, in advance, the number of volunteers needed

- Identify the skills volunteers should have for each position
- Ensure volunteers are assigned to positions suitable to their skills, interests, and comfort level
- Explain what is expected of volunteers
- Identify volunteers by having them wear a distinctive t-shirt, hat, name tag, vest or button
- Make sure to thank volunteers after your event.

It is important to keep volunteers engaged year-round so ensure you are keeping a contact list including names, phone numbers and e-mail. Send volunteers appropriate reports on the outcomes of your event so they know the value of their participation.

Keep in touch with volunteers between events with e-mails, newsletters or other correspondence.

Promotion

Promotion for your event should be carefully targeted to a few key groups.

Event Guests

When it comes to getting the word out about your event(s) to people who are homeless, it is helpful to think creatively. Identify the places and people that have contact with people who are homeless and ensure that they have information about your events and perhaps some material to hand out. Some groups have successfully distributed small cards and posters via service providers. Consider approaching:

- Street outreach workers
- Service agencies
- The local police
- Library staff
- Front desk staff at community centres
- MLA and MP Constituency Offices

Poster Templates

Customizable Word files of these poster templates can be downloaded from the resource page at www.stophomelessness.ca

STOP HOMELESSNESS

Vancouver Cares

Please join us for a free, public program of music featuring:

- Leon Bibb
- Jim Byrnes
- Peter Juric
- Jackie Richardson
- Shutterfly
- Special Guests:
- Buff Allen (drums)
- Bill Sample (piano)
- David Sinclair (guitar)
- Tim Stacey (bass)

When:
Tuesday, October 16
11:00 am - 2:00 pm

Where:
St. Andrew's - Wesley
(Burrard at Nelson)

Sponsored by a variety of Vancouver agencies, the City of Vancouver Housing Centre and the Metro Vancouver Steering Committee on Homelessness.

For more information call 778.786.2838

www.stophomelessness.ca

Event Title Here

Brief Intro highlighting what event is about. Lorem ipsum consete vero di amet moduluptat.

STOP HOMELESSNESS

Tons of useful services like dental care, free eyeglasses, eye care, medical clinic, medical outreach, blood pressure clinic, haircuts, veterinary clinics, legal clinics, tenants' rights, video/movie, music/entertainment, road hockey, soccer games, food service **ALL FOR FREE!**

To Volunteer or donate lorem ipsum dolorum contact us at:

Blank area for specifics of location date and time (can be hand written)

www.stophomelessness.ca

Card Template

<p>Project Homeless Connect <i>For People Who Are Homeless</i></p> <hr/>  <p>When Oct 7th 10am to 3m Where ABC House Foot care income assistance intake Medical clinic Haircuts Legal services Entertainment Food And More</p>	<p>Project Homeless Connect <i>For People Who Are Homeless</i></p> <hr/>  <p>When Oct 7th 10am to 3m Where ABC House Foot care income assistance intake Medical clinic Haircuts Legal services Entertainment Food And More</p>
<p>Project Homeless Connect <i>For People Who Are Homeless</i></p> <hr/>  <p>When Oct 7th 10am to 3m Where ABC House Foot care income assistance intake Medical clinic Haircuts Legal services Entertainment Food And More</p>	<p>Project Homeless Connect <i>For People Who Are Homeless</i></p> <hr/>  <p>When Oct 7th 10am to 3m Where ABC House Foot care income assistance intake Medical clinic Haircuts Legal services Entertainment Food And More</p>
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Volunteers

Here are a few strategies to reach volunteers:

- Free listings in community / weekly papers
- Paid advertisements in community / weekly papers
- Posters in libraries and community centres
- News releases and advance media stories
- Organizations – provide announcements for newsletters and websites

Public Service Announcements

:30 second spot

Did you know that as many as 10,500 people in British Columbia are homeless? Besides living without shelter, most have trouble accessing food, warm clothing, health care, and dental care.

At ZXC Park on October 15, 2008, the ABC Food Bank along with other service organizations is holding (community name here) Homeless Connect Day, an event where people who are homeless can find the basic services they need, under one roof, on one day. But, we can't do it without your help so please volunteer today and become part of the solution.

For more information visit (your url or stophomelessness.ca here).

A public service message brought to you by (your group name here)
"Connecting people to solutions"

Sample Media Release

For immediate release

(Date)

(Your community name here) reaches out to on Homeless Connect Day

(Your Community, B.C.) – The ABC Food Bank has partnered with local organizations and social agencies to hold Your Community's first ever Homeless Connect Day. The event, which provides a variety of services from medical and dental to haircuts and manicures, will take place at QWER Park, from 8am to 6pm on October 15, 2008 during Homelessness Action Week.

"This is a terrific way for community groups and agencies to work together to improve people's lives," said Jessica Smith, executive director of ABCD Food Bank. "Solving homelessness starts with making the basic essentials and services more accessible." Smith decided to launch Homeless Connect after reading about the success of similar events throughout BC.

"We are expecting about 200 attendees throughout the day," commented Volunteer Co-ordinator Tim Lee. "We will match up every person who comes in the door with a volunteer who will help them prioritize their needs. The one-to-one ratio will be more personal, and prevent people from getting lost in the crowd."

"Our employees are being given the day off to help at this event," said Melissa Kay of ZXC Bank, one of the event's sponsors. "It's a fantastic idea, as soon as ABCD called us we jumped on board." Several corporate sponsors have pledged teams of employees to volunteer, in addition to supporting the event's financial costs.

For more information about Your Community Homeless Connect, please visit: www.yourcommunityhomelessconnect.org.

About ABC Food Bank

ABC Food Bank is a non-profit organization providing thousands of pounds of food to over 35 charitable organizations in BC serving those in need. In addition to food distribution, the ABCD Food Bank provides numerous programs that not only solve the immediate problems of hunger, but also help individuals and families gain long-term food security. For more information about the ABCD Food Bank, visit our website at www.abcdfoodbank.org.

-30-

Contact: (name and phone number here)

Elected Officials and Community Champions

As mentioned before, elected officials can provide leadership and help bring other supporters 'on board'. You can invite officials to attend the event, meet with people and help-out on site as well. A sample invitation letter is provided here:

Sample Letter to Politicians

Dear (name),

I am writing to you on behalf of (your organization) to invite you to attend (your community name here) Homeless Connect at (location) on (date).

Your presence would send a message to the community and to people who are homeless, that (community, town or city name here) is committed to finding solutions by caring for people.

Project Homeless Connect is a special event that directly links people to the services they need. This year we have partnered with ABC Food Bank, QWER Financial Services, and U-Save Clothing, among others, to organize a 'one-stop shop' event for people who are homeless. (your city) Homeless Connect will provide (list services here) medical services, dental services, haircuts, clothing exchanges and food. Our goal is to create connections with people that improve their quality of life and link them to permanent housing solutions.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request, and if you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
(name here)

Logistics

Room layout

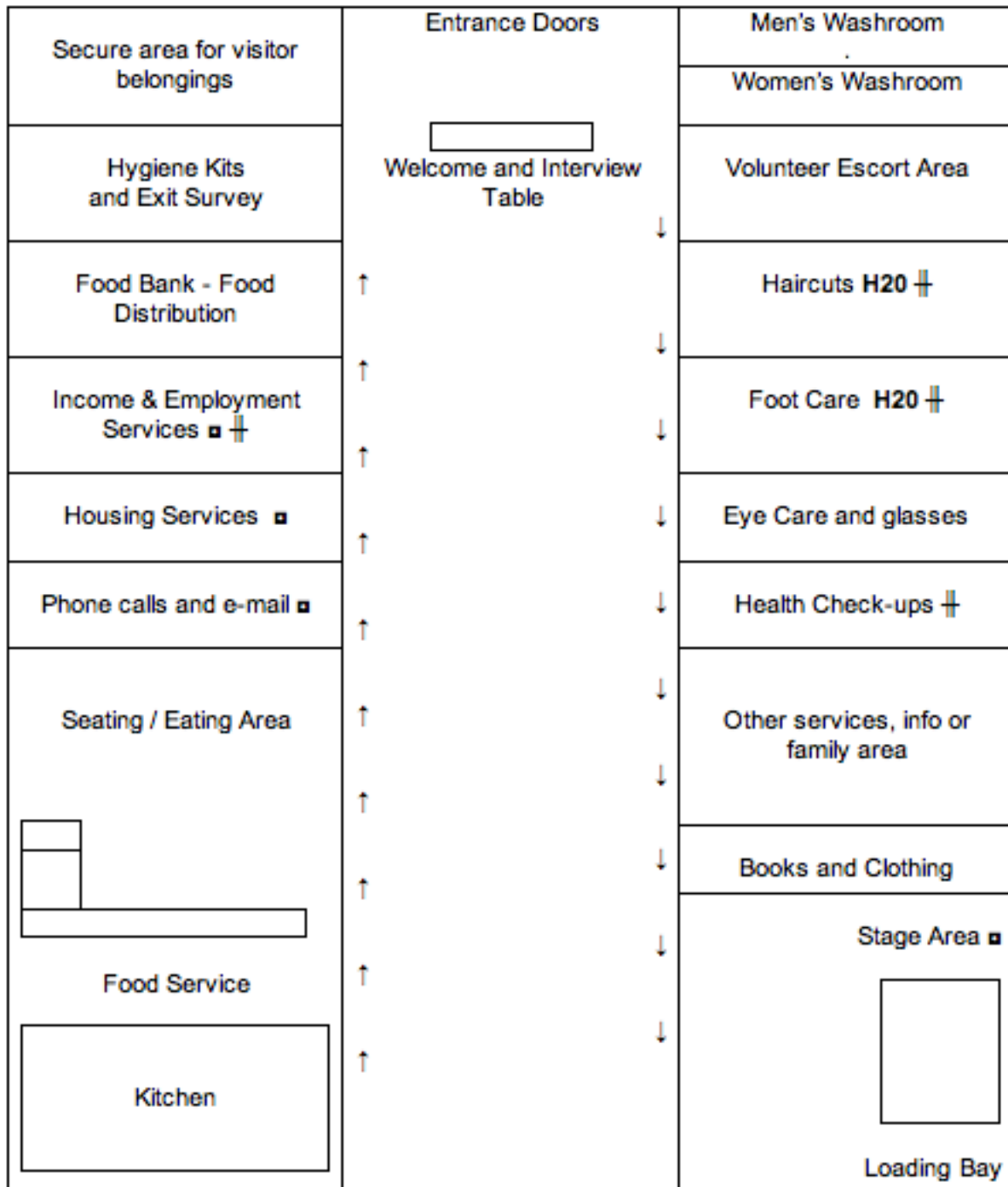
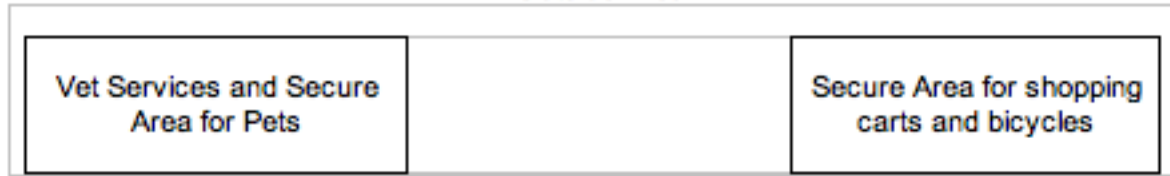
A few tips about setting up your room for the day.

- Create a visual map of your event and distribute it to volunteers and service providers. A sample floor plan is provided here to help you think about how to organize your location.
- Provide secure and staffed areas for shopping carts, bikes, and other personal belongings.
- Set-up a secure area for pets. Think about using kennels to keep animals separated and safe.
- Think about moving your guests through the venue in a logical sequence. Locate give-away items close to the exit.
- Locate services requiring privacy behind screens or in separate rooms.
- Survey service providers prior to the event about their technical requirements.
- Locate services near power, water, and washrooms as needed.



Sample Floor Plan for Homeless Connect Venue

Outside Area



■ Needs power

H2O Needs water

† Requires privacy screens

Volunteer duties throughout the day

Event Co-ordinator(s)

In addition to advance duties, the event co-ordinator should be on-site all day and work closely with the volunteer co-ordinator, venue management and security volunteers. There will be a number of decisions required on-site that day and it is important for the event co-ordinator to see that decisions get made and communicated in an appropriate manner.

Security Co-ordinator (optional)

Your event may benefit from a designated volunteer security co-ordinator. Designate one person to liaise with venue management (or their representatives) throughout the day to ensure that whatever concerns they may have are addressed. Your venue may require that certain areas are not accessible to guests or volunteers (e.g., offices or residences that are a part of the building you are using) or that certain doors remain locked or free from obstruction. It is helpful to have one person keep track of these special areas for the duration of the event.



Set-up / Clean-up Co-ordinator

It may be helpful to assign one person to oversee the set-up and clean-up, particularly if there are specific requirements at the venue (e.g., chairs and tables stored in a special place, doors locked, etc.). Ensuring your clean-up is thorough is an important part of leaving a good impression with the venue and being welcomed back the next time.

Volunteer Co-ordinator

The volunteer co-ordinator should arrive early to greet volunteers, and ensure they are familiar with the venue and the location of services and amenities. It may be helpful to have an orientation session before doors open to review goals for the day and emphasize the focus on connecting with guests. It is important that volunteers are given tasks appropriate to their skill and comfort level. The volunteer co-ordinator should be on-site throughout the day and be available to trouble-shoot problems and reassign people in response to changing needs.

The volunteer co-ordinator should also ensure volunteers check-in and sign any forms that may be required by the venue, and store personal belongings securely. You should also have volunteers check-out. It helps you keep track of who is on site and gives you an opportunity to say thank you.

Greeters

The greeters' first and most important task is to make guests feel welcome as they enter and to direct them to the sign-in table. Depending on the venue, your greeters will usually be just outside or inside the front door.

Sign-in Volunteers

These volunteers should begin by greeting each person again and offering them a seat. Let them know about the services that are available that day (provide a list) and have them take down some very quick information about the guest on forms you provide. If a guest is resistant to signing-in don't push too hard, the information gathered at the sign-in table is helpful, but not required.

It may be useful to ask the guest which of the available services they most need that day and write this down on a separate small sheet of paper. At this point, the sign-in volunteer will call for a volunteer escort who will greet the person and guide them to the service area identified.

Volunteer Escorts

Volunteer escorts should be familiar with the event site and know where services are located. They will guide each guest to the services they have selected as the most important to them that day. Theirs' is a key role in making sure that guests get connected to the services they need.

Most of the time, volunteer escorts will not have to remain with the guest at the service, but can return to the greeting area to help other guests get started. They can also be on the alert throughout the day for guests who look like they might need directions.



It really helps to be able to identify volunteers quickly and from a distance. Consider supplying colourful t-shirts or vests to your volunteers. Put co-ordinators in a different coloured t-shirt.

“Change happens on a one-to-one basis... you need to start with one person.”

Volunteers, Surrey Homeless Connect Event 2008

Set-up

Have service providers and volunteers arrive early and hold a briefing meeting for everyone about the room layout and location of washrooms, expectations for the day, the location of first aid supplies, and any schedule of events they should be aware of (e.g., the time of food service, music performances etc).

When guests arrive

Making guests feel welcome is important, but the real purpose of the day is to connect them to services they need. Being deliberate about meeting and greeting people as they come in and getting them started in receiving services is an important part of making the overall event a success.

In San Francisco, there is a formal check-in procedure that each guest goes through. In BC, we are not required to know any personal information about the people we are serving, but you may want to gather information that will help in planning future events, e.g., age and gender. What we want to do in our check-in process is make sure that each new guest knows which services are available at the event and has their needs prioritized.

When the check-in interview is complete, the interviewer can either escort the guest to the first service priority on their list, or call another volunteer to act as the escort. Once the guest has been shown to the first service provider they want to see, the escort can either wait and then take them to the next service, or leave and get another guest. People will vary in the amount of help they want and need.

A large number of volunteers will be needed to greet and to escort guests, particularly at the beginning of the day when there might be a line-up. This number can be gradually reduced over the course of the day as the number of new arrivals diminishes. At the start, you may also want a couple of people whose only job is directing traffic at the door and making sure guests get connected to an interviewer and/or an escort to get them started.

It needs to be made clear to the volunteer escorts that their job is not to become an advocate for the guests. Their job is to be hospitable and to provide information and directions. The training for volunteer escorts should emphasize the importance of maintaining these boundaries on their role. This will avoid the danger of creating expectations that cannot be met.



*“The whole experience has been really fulfilling for me...
a real learning experience.”*

Volunteers, Surrey Homeless Connect Event 2008

Security

Security is an important consideration not only for volunteers and service providers, but for the guests as well. In San Francisco, the police are visible in fairly large numbers. During events that have happened in communities in British Columbia in the past few years, it has been more common for volunteers or municipal staff to provide security.

While violence is extremely rare at a Connect event, people suffering from mental illnesses can experience a psychotic episode or engage in inappropriate behaviours. It is a good plan to have a mental health counsellor or someone trained in crisis intervention available in case someone needs help. All service providers should know who is on site and available in the event of a crisis. A special jacket or vest can be used to easily identify this person or group of people.

If you do invite the police to participate and provide security, make sure you know how they plan to respond if they identify a guest at the event who has an outstanding arrest warrant. Though you may not wish to see people arrested on site, the police will not overlook a charge they consider serious. Discuss your expectations with the police in advance and again on the day of the event.

Insurance

Depending on your location and what other insurance coverage is available, you may need to purchase special event insurance to protect yourself from liability should there be an accident or other mishap resulting in damage to property or injury to a person.

Check with whoever is in charge of your preferred location to see what their insurance arrangements are and whether this arrangement will cover your Homeless Connect event. If you need to purchase your own insurance, an insurance broker can help you find appropriate coverage.

Exit questionnaire

When guests leave, have volunteers politely ask them to answer a short questionnaire. Having a hygiene kit or other give-away available at the exit area will allow you to stop and engage people briefly – they will not have to fill out a form, as the volunteer will ask the questions and record the responses. A sample exit survey is available in this manual.

It is helpful to assign one person to keep track of this information and collect any forms that were distributed to participants at the end of your event.

Evaluation

Capturing some information about your event for an evaluation report is critical to the overall success of Homeless Connect events for several reasons:

Funders (financial donors) are interested in knowing how many people benefited from your event.

Elected officials will get a better sense of the service needs and profile of people who are homeless in your community.

Volunteers and organizers will be better able to plan for future events.

The general public will better understand the solutions to homelessness.

Document the following information:

- Number of services offered
- Total number of people who attended
- Number of people who utilized each service (breakdown by age, gender, etc.)
- Questionnaire for participants (sample template provided)
- Questionnaire for service providers (sample template provided)

Appendix 1: Sample Information Form for Service Providers

Name of Organization: _____

Website: _____

Contact Person: _____

E-mail: _____

Phone: _____

Please provide a brief description of what your organization does:

Do you currently offer services to people who are homeless? If so, where / how:

What services will you offer at this event?

How many staff will you bring to the event? _____

How much space you do require for your station?

Will your station require anything else at the event (e.g., electricity, water)?

How long will you operate your station at the event? _____

Additional Comments: _____

Appendix 2: Sample Post-event Service Provider Questionnaire

1. How did you hear about this event?

Formal Request __ Website__ Employer__ Other_____

2. What is the name of your organization and what services do you provide?

3. Is this a good location for you?

Yes _____

No _____

If yes, why?

If not, why not?

Central _____

Too far away _____

Large facility _____

Impractical _____

Other _____

Other _____

4. What did you find most useful about the layout/structure of the event?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

5. What was least useful?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

6. Would you attend this event again?

Yes _____ No _____

7. Is there another service provider that you would like to see here? If so, who?

Yes _____

No _____

8. If an event like this was going to happen again, what changes would you recommend?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Appendix 3: Sample Visitor Check-in Form

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Age: _____ Gender: M / F Do you have a pet: Yes / No

Hometown: _____

Area of the city where you reside now: _____

Please rank your priorities for today:

___ BC Housing

___ Medical Care

___ Dental Care

___ Haircut

___ Banking

___ Personal Identification

___ Cosmetic

___ Pet Care

___ Income Assistance

Additional comments or service needed: _____

Appendix 4: Sample Exit Questionnaire for Guests

1. How did you hear about this event?

Shelter or other service provider _____

Poster _____

Friends _____

Other _____

2. What part of the city/town/region do you usually live in?

3. Is this (name here) a good location for you?

Yes _____

No _____

If yes, why?

Central _____

Nice facility _____

Other _____

If not, why not?

Too far away _____

Unfamiliar _____

Hard to find _____

Other _____

4. What did you find most useful among the information and services provided?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

5. What was least useful?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

6. Did you like the food?

Yes _____

No _____

7. If an event like this was going to happen again, what changes would you recommend?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Appendix 5: Sample Survey Report

This report on services provided on a Homeless Connect Day (based on San Francisco's Project Homeless Connect reports) is included as an example.

Thanks to the 397 volunteers and providers who helped we were able to provide services to 775 individuals (including families and children):

- 40 BANKING SERVICE** consultations were given, resulting in many clients opening accounts
- 90 BENEFITS** meetings (Food Stamps, GA, CAAP, SSI)
- 36 CHIROPRACTIC** treatments were given
- 90 DENTAL** screenings performed
- 30 EMPLOYMENT** interviews and services were given
- 40 EYE EXAMS** and over almost **700 pairs of EYEGASSES** distributed
- 180 INDIVIDUALS** visited our **FAMILY SERVICES AREA**
- 7781 Pounds of GROCERIES** were given
- 100 HAIR CUTS** were completed
- 20 HIV TESTS** were performed
- 124** Individuals provided **HOUSING** information
- 68 CALIFORNIA STATE ID's** were issued
- 70 LEGAL** meetings were conducted
- 701 LUNCHES** were served
- 83 MEDICAL** service interactions were made, many connecting clients with primary care providers
- 30 SUBSTANCE ABUSE, BEHAVIORAL HEALTH, or METHADONE** connections were made
- 230 PHONE CALLS AND MAILINGS** were made to family or friends
- 12 PODIATRY** treatments were given
- 33 VETERINARY CARE** and **PET SITTING** served Dogs, Cats and other pets
- 17 INDIVIDUALS** were off the street and placed in either a **SHELTER** or **STABILIZATION** room