



BEST PRACTICES FOR RURAL STREET OUTREACH

The purpose of street outreach is to connect people to services which they would not otherwise be able to access due to environmental, physical, or situational circumstances.

- **WHERE** can street outreach be done?
 - Street outreach efforts are best focused under bridges, in state parks and campgrounds, at libraries, near gas stations (particularly those with bathrooms located outside), around lakes, rivers, creeks, and other bodies of water, at homeless shelters, and in motor home and recreational vehicle (RV) parks (many individuals are living in campers without essential utilities).
 - In rural areas especially, many homeless individuals gravitate toward areas where they will not be easily discovered - places like caves, abandoned buildings, and extremely deserted areas like dense forests
 - Ask people in your community where individuals may be located!

- **HOW** can someone effectively participate in street outreach?
 - Dress appropriately. Hiking boots or sneakers provide both stability and mobility for the feet, while long pants and clothes that cover skin can enhance resistance to cuts, scrapes, bugs, and poison ivy.
 - When exploring potentially dangerous or unknown areas, take a partner. Exploring safety matters with local community leaders or police force can provide an idea of which areas are safe and when it is more appropriate to bring a partner.
 - Be prepared to take appropriate action (e.g., intakes and/or gathering information) when engaging individuals.
 - Try to build relationships. Some individuals and families will not talk to you openly or enroll in a program until they trust you. Taking food and water can open doors for communication while helping someone who may be hungry and/or thirsty.
 - Make the effort to listen patiently and compassionately to the person(s) you engage.
 - Remember: you are walking into someone else's home. Treat the area with the respect that you want others to have for your home.
 - Never assume that an individual or group is or is not homeless. Ask for help in spreading the word about your organization and/or programs, and then allow someone to self-identify as a home-seeker on his/her own terms.

- **WHEN** are the best times to do street outreach?
 - In order to maximize connections, check known sites and hangouts at different times of the day to learn the most optimal times for engagement.
 - The winter season and other extreme weather conditions heighten the urgency and priority for street outreach efforts.
 - While some individuals and families without permanent homes are known to "camp out" year-round, they "blend in" more easily during the summer when camping numbers increase. Thus, summer months may require more thorough and intentional engagement.
 - Doing outreach in the early morning can sometimes reach individuals that go to jobs or move indoors during the day.