



Central Oregon Street Outreach Guide

Drafted by

Homeless Leadership Coalition & Deschutes County Homeless Services Team

Purpose of this Guide: The purpose of this guide is to provide information on street outreach best practices and safety protocols. This guide cannot cover every potential scenario so we encourage all those conducting street outreach to use their best judgment and access available community resources.

About Homeless Leadership Coalition:

The Homeless Leadership Coalition (HLC) is a collaboration of community partners in Crook, Jefferson, and Deschutes counties and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. Participating agencies serve those at risk of, or experiencing homelessness and those in our community who care about the issues facing our unhoused neighbors. Collaborators include shelter providers, public schools, public health, emergency services, veterans outreach, faith communities, public safety, mental health, medical services, housing services, public works, private employers, people with lived experience of homelessness, and community members at large. The HLC works to prevent and end homelessness by improving tri-county and cross-system collaboration and coordination so that our communities will have a comprehensive response in place that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible, or if it can't be prevented, it is a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience.

Why conduct street outreach?

1. Provide for people's most basic needs to ensure health and survival while they are experiencing homelessness

2. Develop relationships to link people to available resources and services to transition them from literal homelessness into a housing situation compatible with their individual goals and needs

Considerations for outreach planning

- Familiarize yourself with available community resources and services. This includes nonprofit service providers, faith entities, veterans services, mental health and crisis services, medical care, law enforcement and other emergency personnel
- Find out what days of the week services are already occurring in that area. If services aren't yet occurring, inquire with local service providers about limitations or offer support to increase capacity prior to initiating outreach
- Consider the regularity with which you can provide services.
 - Offer services on a regular day and time.
 - A best practice with outreach is to offer services intermittently (one or two times a week) on a regular schedule and avoid service disruptions.
 - Consistency is key: Once you've established a schedule, stick to it. Individuals experiencing homelessness can have many disruptions in resources and relationships as a result of their circumstances. Regular, consistent resources become vital to survival and their absence can present an emergency situation.
- Consider the why behind provisions delivered during outreach to ensure they meet critical needs. Example critical needs: Wifi, cell phone charging stations, propane, socks, tarps, hand warmers are vital needs.

Best Practices

- Build rapport and trust with individuals you are serving
- Operate with care and respect for an individual's privacy. These are their homes!
- Ask before you take photos or videos and if you do take them, please be sure not to include identifiable features, locations or faces. Individuals experiencing homelessness are vulnerable and their right to privacy should be respected for

their dignity and safety. Individuals have the right to decide whether their images are captured, and also the right to decide if their image can be used in any way, including social media, fundraising campaigns, or even to just drum up community support.

- Have a needs focused approach
 - Large quantities of food can be difficult to safely store and result in rodent issues
 - Individuals who are mobile may be unable to carry many items or belongings
 - Large quantities of vital goods like toilet paper, water and propane can have the unintended consequence of creating an informal market where goods are traded, sold or contribute to circumstances of hoarding, competition and theft
- Cash and cash equivalents like gift cards are great in small doses!
 - Large amounts of cash/cash equivalents can put people at risk of theft
 - Gift nominal amounts that allow someone to be a patron at a local business making it easier to meet their basic needs such as using a restroom or purchasing food or water
 - If you are handing gift cards or cash out on a regular basis please ensure you have the financial capacity to do so
 - Consider that individuals can become dependent on resources like this and one of the goals of outreach is to link people to long-term support and resources
- Conduct outreach during daylight hours and aim for mid-day outreach so as not to catch people sleeping or after they may have been engaging with drugs or alcohol, more common in late afternoon/evening

Food Distribution

- The HLC recommends those distributing food maintain an [Oregon food handler's card](#)
- Assist with disposal of meal trash after distribution to prevent trash accumulation and prevent rodents

Sanitation, Hygiene & Trash Removal

- Encourage those in camping environments to reduce standing water. This will reduce bugs and illness transmission to humans and pets
- Encourage hygienic bathroom practices including disposing of human waste, not relieving oneself near bodies of water, burying feces and throwing toilet paper and hygiene products in the trash
- Offer to pick up trash regularly and dispose of it at no charge to the camp if you have a relationship with the individual or individuals in an area
- Practice [blood borne pathogen precautions](#)
- Request that needles are in a puncture proof container (water bottles or coffee tins work) if you will be picking up trash.
- Encourage [safe needle precautions](#) and learn more about local syringe exchange services here:

<https://www.deschutes.org/health/page/syringe-exchange-program>

Access to Medical Services

- It is in the best interest of individuals experiencing homelessness to be connected to available resources such as regular medical, dental and behavioral health care. Suggestions include the local emergency room, [St. Charles Family Care](#), [Mosaic Medical](#) as well as the Mosaic Medical Mobile Clinic.
- Health insurance enrollment resources can be found here
 - <https://healthcare.oregon.gov/Pages/find-help.aspx>
- Avoid giving medical advice, diagnosing or suggesting treatment plans. Consider helping someone with medical needs to connect with their PCP or local medical services for the unhoused.
- Avoid giving out medications. Over the counter medications sold in stores are sold generally under the supervision of a pharmacist who can assist a patient in appropriate medication choice. You may have the best of intentions, however, many over the counter medications could be dangerous if given to someone with pre-existing conditions that you may not know about

- Oregon’s “Good Samaritan” law ([ORS 30.800](#)) specifically references protecting people who offer emergency care. We do not recommend relying on this law to protect you if you are providing non emergency care, medical supplies, or over the counter medications to individuals experiencing homelessness.

Safety Planning and connecting with Emergency or Crisis Services

- Buddy system! Always inform someone where you are going and bring another outreach worker along when going to a new location or a remote area.
- Trust your gut. Do not approach someone if they are escalated or escalating in behavior. If you feel uncomfortable remove yourself from the situation, safety is a priority.
- Health and human services professionals are mandatory reporters even when “off the clock” and volunteering their time. Here is information from the state of [Oregon on mandatory reporting of abuse and neglect](#)
- Put the County’s non-emergency dispatch number in your phone
 - Deschutes: 541-693-6911
 - Crook: 541-416-0853
 - Jefferson: 541-475-2201
- 911 is appropriate for “life or limb” emergencies
- Are you or someone you know thinking about suicide? Call the Lifeline, anytime day or night 1-888-628-9454
- 1-855-503-SAFE (7233) is a toll-free number that allows you to report abuse or neglect of any child or adult to the Oregon Department of Human Services.

Setting and Maintaining Healthy Boundaries

- Boundaries help to; protect you, encourage self-respect, maintain purpose and/or mission of work, help maintain workload, set healthy limits in relationships, and provide a clear understanding of what is and is not okay in a relationship.
- A lack of boundaries can lead to; burnout, loss of respect for yourself and others, mismatched expectations and inappropriate interpersonal relationships, etc.

- You may want to think in advance about your boundaries. Here are some examples to consider:
 - Time: how much will you work or how often?
 - Communication: will you use your personal phone number or establish a new one? Will you communicate with people via your personal social media account or create a separate one?
 - Money: Will you use your own resources to contribute to needs?
 - Transportation: will you offer rides? When? Where to? How often?
- Ways to set healthy boundaries when working with individuals experiencing homelessness
 - Set clear and consistent boundaries from the very start.
 - Be prepared to enforce those boundaries you set.
 - Think before disclosing personal information or experience. While disclosure can be helpful and build rapport, it can also be stepping over a professional boundary.
 - Listen to your gut and assess how a situation made, or is making you, feel.
 - Discuss concerns with your supervisor or a colleague or a partner agency.
 - You may have to stop working with an individual or group of people if either you, or they, are unable to maintain healthy boundaries,
 - Work in a team. A cohesive team or cooperative group allows for support and consistency and adds safety when you are building new relationships and rapport.

Here is some sample language to try when setting or reinforcing a boundary

I understand you need [] AND I really want to support you with...[resolving your need/concern]. Explain why not..[our policy is..., I have another commitment x agency provides that resource, this is the location that works for the most people in this area...] What I can do is... or what if you tried [offer an alternative that reaffirms the limit you set].

Training Available

- We urge everyone doing outreach to participate in training offered by area service providers, the Homeless Leadership Coalition or nationally recognized resources.
- Homeless Leadership Coalition holds licenses to various training modules and facilitates trainings annually on topics such as human trafficking, working with victims of domestic violence and fair housing practices. Sign up for our newsletter or email us for future training dates or to request a training.
- Here are some suggested resources:
 - Healthcare for the Homeless [Trauma Informed Care training](#)
 - [National Alliance to End Homelessness resources, click here](#)

For additional resources or questions, please email info@cohomeless.org