



Answers to Lyndale Neighborhood Association's Questions Regarding Simpson's Temporary Shelter

In order to better understand your organization, we would like to know:

1. Where do the people who will use this service come from?

Any single adult, age 18 and older, in need of emergency shelter in Hennepin County contacts the Adult Shelter Connect (ASC), which coordinates assessment and placement for all of the single adult shelters in the county operated by Agate, Our Saviour's, Catholic Charities, Salvation Army and Simpson Housing Services. ASC is staffed and managed by Simpson Housing Services (SHS) and operates in the basement of St Olaf Catholic Church in downtown Minneapolis. Following assessment, ASC staff assign shelter beds based on availability in one of the Hennepin County shelters, including Simpson's shelter. Simpson provides individual attention to each shelter guest; due to our unique small-shelter model, the ASC often refers guests who are stuck in the system and need the individualized attention available at our shelter.

When the Simpson shelter has an available shelter bed, shelter staff contact the ASC which provides a new referral. SHS operates our shelter at 100% capacity every day and strives to both address the high demand for shelter in our community, and the need for services that ensure long-term stability for the people we serve. Unfortunately, the number of individuals seeking shelter far outnumbers the available shelter beds each night in our area. In its 2018 Minnesota Homelessness Study, Wilder Research found that 32% of all homeless adults interviewed had been turned away from a shelter in the three months prior to the survey.

2. What is the average length of stay in the extended stay shelter?

Currently, the average length of stay is about 120 days; however, some guests stay longer. Our goal when people enter the shelter is that ours is the last stop before housing or another positive outcome, so we tend to have longer stays to allow for time and effort to overcome barriers to housing.

3. Where do the residents go after the Zion location? What does success look like for the residents?

Success looks different for every individual. Shelter guests exit to a variety of destinations such as permanent housing (often supportive housing where people can get the assistance needed to maintain stable housing), transitional housing programs which are programs lasting two years or less and are a stepping stone to permanent housing, and board and lodge facilities which provide meals and a hotel style room. Other exit destinations include care facilities such as nursing homes for those in need of medical care, and treatment facilities for those who struggle with substance use. Other shelter guests may reconnect with family members or friends and exit the shelter to live with family or friends. Simpson considers it a success when shelter guests are able to exit to a destination that meets their current needs and self-defined goals. In our last fiscal year, 55 shelter guests exited from shelter to permanent housing.

Also, we do have guests that exit unsuccessfully from our shelter. Some guests just give up their bed and we don't know where they go, some struggle with living in a community shelter environment and are asked to leave. Whenever possible if we are asking someone to leave, we attempt to find a placement at another shelter where they might be more successful.

4. What is the demographic make-up of residents in your extended shelter program?

In the Twin Cities area, roughly 35% of the 3.2 million residents identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). By contrast 82% of people in SHS' programs and more than 60% of shelter guests identify as BIPOC, populations overrepresented in homelessness due to systemic racism. Simpson is also the shelter of choice for the Latino/a community, with over 30% of the male population in our shelter identifying as Hispanic/Latino. We've always had at least one full-time shelter staff who is fluent in Spanish, and currently two staff are fluent.

All shelter guests have incomes 100% below the level of poverty, and more than 80% of shelter guests have a disability, with mental illness, substance use, and physical disabilities the most common disabilities. Roughly 2/3 of shelter guests are men and 1/3 are women. Simpson shelter also welcomes non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals. Currently, the majority of guests are between the ages of 35 and 54, with ages 25-34 the next most common age range, however in the last fiscal year 27 guests were over the age of 62.

5. What percentage of residents have substance use concerns/issues?

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "The U.S. is experiencing the most significant substance use and overdose epidemic it has ever faced, exacerbated by a worldwide pandemic, and driven by the proliferation of highly potent synthetic opioids containing primarily fentanyl and other analogues." The opioid epidemic is evident throughout Minnesota, including in community members who have been unhoused in the past. In fiscal year 2022 (7/1/21-6/30/22), 82% of shelter guests struggled with mental health, substance use, or both.

All SHS shelter staff are trained in harm reduction, which aims to reduce negative consequences of substance use. Staff work directly with individual guests to help prevent overdoses and improve guests' wellbeing, while also reducing negative behaviors that affect themselves and others. Simpson shelter does not require sobriety to enter the shelter; however, substance possession and/or use is not allowed on shelter property, both inside and outside, and on neighboring properties. We do require that all guests are respectful to one another, to staff, and others. Staff meet people where they are and connect people with treatment if desired. We have found that people are less likely to use substances when they have safe shelter.

6. What does success look like for the Simpson group?

While the guests staying at our shelter do not have the home they deserve, staff work to create a welcoming and affirming environment that is safe and dignified for all. Simpson shelter is known for its small-shelter model that emphasizes relationships. This model reflects one of SHS' core values: We celebrate and embrace the uniqueness and dignity of every person.

Equity and a deep respect for the inherent worth of every individual and their culture are foundational in our organization, staff, and the work we do. In programming, this is demonstrated through person-centered services which tap into the personal and cultural strengths and desires of each individual. Individual advocacy helps guests overcome barriers, reducing the incidence of repeated and generational homelessness and poverty. SHS views its work as a partnership to build self-efficacy, stability, and a life beyond Simpson.

Simpson's success is not its own. SHS' vision for change is that people, who have been marginalized and denied equity due to systemic racism, can achieve *their* vision – individuals and families in our programs, and shelter guests. We facilitate positive change through close conversations, and create authentic, collaborative relationships with participants, but we are not the authors of change. We encourage others to take ownership of their own narrative, to push back against harmful narratives that keep disparities in place, work from their strengths, acquire new skills and resources, and be the author of their change. Success achieved is not ours; instead, it resides in the individuals and families that benefit from their time in SHS' programs and the new futures they create for their life beyond SHS.

7. How many other locations do you have throughout the metro?

Founded in 1982, Simpson Housing Services, Inc. (SHS) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit which provides emergency shelter for single adults and affordable housing with support services for youth, single adults, and families experiencing homelessness primarily in Hennepin County, while also serving families and individuals in Anoka, Ramsey, and Carver counties.

SHS provides comprehensive services to people experiencing homelessness. Our programs include three key areas: Emergency Shelter, which serves 70 adult men, women, and gender non-conforming individuals (this interim site will house 64); Single Adult Supportive Housing for more than 250 people each year; and Family and Youth Housing, which provides rental assistance and support services, including Early Childhood and Children & Youth Services, for roughly 70 youth, and 300 families with over 600 children per year.

SHS owns one emergency shelter for single adults and one apartment building for transitional housing for families (Passage Community), both in the Whittier Neighborhood. SHS also partners with developers throughout the metro area and provides housing with supportive services to individuals and families at these “site-based” programs in new developments. In addition, we partner with more than 300 property owners in the metro area for “scattered site” housing programs.

8. How does this organization fill a need in our community?

In the Wilder Research 2018 Homelessness in Minnesota Study, researchers estimated that nearly 20,000 people are homeless on any given night in Minnesota. In addition, there has been a steady increase in the number of people who are unsheltered in our community and are not staying in a formal shelter. Evidence of this increase is clearly seen throughout the metro area encampments. The need for emergency shelter, along with housing and supportive services for unhoused community members remains urgent. Housing is a human right which all people deserve.

SHS’ mission is to *house, support, and advocate for people experiencing homelessness*. Our short-term goal is to get people off the streets and into housing; mid-term to ensure housing stability; and long-term to end homelessness in our community. Our values: We believe that everybody has the right to safe and affordable housing; we celebrate and embrace the uniqueness and dignity of every person; we encourage people to draw upon their strengths and promote self-advocacy; we advocate against the injustices of society that cause homelessness and poverty; we strive to create a collaborative community with the individuals we serve, within SHS, and with the greater community; and we are committed to working for racial equity and ending homelessness.

For 40 years, SHS has helped single adults and families with children make the transition from homelessness to stable housing. SHS is known for innovative programs and was one of the first agencies to address the growing need for emergency shelter in our community in 1982. Simpson has deep knowledge of, and experience in, shelter operations. Many of our practices have been replicated by other agencies, including our savings program, which helps shelter guests build the resources needed to move into permanent housing. The primary goals of the shelter are to provide a safe place for people to stay in absence of a home of their own, to make the shelter a community that is as welcoming and dignified as possible, and to help end homelessness by doing whatever we can to help people find stable housing.

In addition to a place to sleep, shelter guests have access to three meals per day, showers, toiletries, and laundry facilities on site. Our shelter provides services using a team approach. Guests are assigned a specific advocate who acts as lead coordinator for services and referrals during the guest’s stay at the shelter, conducting one-on-one meetings with shelter guests, however all advocates can assist any guest as needed. Appointments are not required for shelter guests to meet with staff. In addition, we have two Housing Advocates who work with guests to help them identify housing goals and barriers and expedite guests’ transition into housing. The Housing Advocates are a vital component in the overall strategy to facilitate guests’ move to permanent housing. The Housing Advocate meets with guests who have self-identified as ready for the next step. Currently 42 of 70 (60%) shelter guests have formal housing case management.

Barriers to housing are addressed and staff draw upon resources from a vast array of community partners, including 300 landlords who work with Simpson participants. Simpson has close relationships with other social service agencies and community partners to connect clients to benefits such as food support, emergency assistance, mental health, or employment assistance. Our impact, and the diversity of people served, is expanded through the strong partnerships and relationships that we have developed with outside partners over the years. Shelter guests can access this network and reduce barriers, thus facilitating the transition into permanent housing.

The Simpson shelter is a vital component in our area's homelessness response. It is critically important that the shelter remain in operation during the demolition of the current shelter and the construction of the new Simpson Community Shelter and Apartments. For more information on this project, please click [here](#). Following completion of construction, shelter operations will resume at the permanent location in the Whittier Neighborhood.

In order to better understand your move, we would like to know:

1. Where will the intake be held? Is this a new procedure or a current practice?

After someone is referred to Simpson shelter by the Adult Shelter Connect, they are directed to the Simpson shelter, which is open 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year. Intakes normally occur in the late afternoon, prior to dinner, however staff will accommodate guests' schedules. SHS staff work to keep intakes as low barrier as possible by sitting down with new guests and together reviewing the house rules, meal schedule, and services available. Because all referrals come through the ASC, it often isn't necessary to get much additional information so as not to overwhelm guests.

We plan to continue with the current referral and intake procedures at our temporary location, as this process works well for both shelter guests and staff.

2. How does the Simpson group plan to ensure safety for residents of their program, the proximity to the school, and neighborhood at large? How do you anticipate the entire site will be used by Simpson residents?

Safety for shelter guests, SHS staff and volunteers, and the surrounding neighborhood is of critical importance to SHS. At intake, all shelter guests receive a copy of the House Rules, which includes the shelter's Code of Conduct and Good Neighbor Agreement. Respect is the first thing listed in the Code of Conduct, as it's the cornerstone of good relationships. Violence of any type is not tolerated, nor is theft and/or destruction of property. Weapons are not allowed on the property. As mentioned earlier, possession and/or consumption of alcohol and drugs is prohibited both inside and outside the building, including on properties in the neighborhood.

Guests must check in to the shelter by 9:00pm unless they provide proof of employment that necessitates a later check in. Once guests have arrived for the night, they are expected to stay in for the night and are not allowed to come and go. Designated smoke breaks are provided, and guests must stay on the property during those breaks.

Guests may come and go freely during the hours of 6:00 am and 6:00 pm. During the daytime hours, if guests want to enjoy the weather outside, they are instructed to leave the property instead of congregating outside for extended periods of time. Guests are also not allowed to congregate on neighboring properties. People that are not shelter guests are not allowed to congregate on our property.

In our current location we have security cameras around the property and at all entrances, and we will continue this practice at Zion. We anticipate adding additional lighting at the property. Our staff regularly walk around the property as part of their duties.

As Simpson has done for 40 years in the Whittier Neighborhood, we aim to be a good neighbor and community resource for the Lyndale Neighborhood. In our current location we are across the street from a daycare and are 8 blocks from a school. We are situated among residential housing for families, as well as businesses. In Whittier, our neighboring residents, businesses, and neighborhood association are all valued partners in our work. As stated in one of our core

values: we strive to create a collaborative community with the individuals we serve, within SHS, and with the greater community. We look forward to deepening our relationship with the Lyndale Neighborhood and its residents.

3. Are any zoning changes or conditional uses needed for the project?

SHS submitted an interim use application to the City of Minneapolis for the Zion Church site and our application was approved by the Minneapolis City Council. This interim use permit will be valid for 5 years. If use for the shelter would need to continue beyond 5 years we would need to apply for a Conditional Use Permit.

Analysis has identified several building improvement items that will be addressed prior to shelter guests' arrival at Zion. Primary among those are a fire protection sprinkler system, improved ventilation, and increased toilets, lavatories, and showers. We are working with LHB Architects and Watson Forsberg Construction to address these needs, along with City officials and inspectors.

4. How long do you intend to use the Zion space as an extended stay shelter?

SHS plans to transfer shelter operations to Zion Church in November of 2022, following the church's final worship service. We have a five-year interim use permit with the City of Minneapolis; however, we anticipate the temporary shelter may be in this location for a period of around two to three years. Two years is the minimum that would be needed, and if there are delays in the construction at our new site it may be longer.

5. How many police calls are there at your Whittier facility each quarter and what is the typical concern?

While we don't track the number of calls to either the police and/or medics, we do occasionally request assistance. The majority of 911 calls are for medical assistance.

SHS' strategy is to train staff as extensively and specifically as possible to increase safety for all guests and staff and promote wellness. All SHS staff receive comprehensive and ongoing training, including training in de-escalation techniques. The purpose of de-escalation is to validate and address people's concerns in a manner that is respectful and confirms the dignity of all people, which helps prevent minor disagreements into escalating. Staff are also trained in trauma-informed care which recognizes that those with a trauma history may have heightened reactions in certain situations; all shelter staff are also trained in the use of Narcan to prevent overdoses. All full-time staff must complete at least 8 hours of job-specific training per year, while part-time staff must complete 6 hours.

Also, on-going staff training in antiracism, racial justice, and historical trauma is vitally important to our work in and with BIPOC communities and SHS takes this responsibility seriously. All full-time staff are required to have a minimum of 12 hours per year in racial justice training. Past trainings have included topics such as white saviorism, white supremacy, and historical trauma.

Our shelter manager, Robert Hofmann, has been with SHS since 2004 and has managed the shelter for seven years. In 2017, he received the Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless Bruce Vento Distinguished Service Award. His work is fueled every day by being in relationship with guests, working alongside exceptional volunteers and staff, and getting the chance to be a voice for Simpson in the broader community.

In order to build a close relationship between us we would like to ask:

1. As a community, how can we best support this organization to provide a welcoming environment and treat the residents with dignity and care?

Thank you to the Lyndale Neighborhood Association and its community members who are helping us make this transition to the temporary shelter location. We appreciate the community's support and look forward to our continued collaboration.

A key to SHS' continued success in both programming and in the community is our focus on relationships. We look forward to getting to know our neighbors and are committed to listening to your concerns and working in community with you to address any areas of concern, along with any opportunities for collaboration and connection.

To provide a welcoming environment that honors the dignity of all, we invite the community to engage with SHS staff and shelter guests as community members, in the same way as anyone else who newly moves into the neighborhood. The more that SHS shelter guests are greeted with welcome and compassion rather than mistrust and suspicion, the more they'll feel compelled to reciprocate. A simple thing neighbors can do is to nod, wave, or say hello when you see a guest staying at the shelter. People want to be seen and valued as human beings.

Another way to connect is through volunteering. Volunteers provide essential help and support for our shelter operations and we invite community members to learn more about volunteering at Simpson [here](#). Meal groups from our community of volunteers provide lunches and dinner at the shelter. We also have volunteers who help organize and distribute toiletries and other essentials to shelter guests. Another possibility is a neighborhood donation drive. As cold weather approaches, we are always in need of warm gloves and hats, long underwear, and other essentials. Our website lists our most urgent current needs [here](#). Neighbors interested in volunteering can call Katelyn Jaksha at (612) 455-0876 or email volunteer@simpsonhousing.org.

Another question for you to think about:

- 1. Would Simpson be open to setting up some kind of work group with neighbors and Simpson staff on it to help with the transition, or at least have some kind of structured open line of communication between neighbors and Simpson? What formats for this might be useful, in your experience, and could we define a period that the process would be in place for?**

Another thought is when Beacon moved Nicollet Square into the neighborhood, the neighborhood association actually signed a Community Benefits Agreement with Beacon. Would Simpson be open to co-creating something like that?

Simpson has operated our emergency shelter for 40 years and the last few years have been some of the most challenging years in our history, due to the pandemic. We continue to feel the effects of the pandemic with reduced volunteers and the possibility of new COVID variants as we move into the fall and winter. Shelter operations is extremely labor intensive, and our staff works to their fullest capacity to provide the services and environment our guests deserve.

Relocating the shelter to the temporary site is a massive undertaking which will require an "all hands on deck" approach with our staff, both before and after the move. As a result, unfortunately we do not have the capacity for regular meetings with the neighborhood. What has worked well in the Whittier Neighborhood is a less formal approach where neighboring residents and businesses are welcome to contact Simpson with any concerns or potential areas of improvement. Please contact us via email at Steve@simpsonhousing.org for Simpson's Executive Director, Steve Horsfield. Based on your concerns, messages may be routed to Associate Director Wendy Wiegmann, Shelter Manager Robert Hofmann, and/or Director of Business Operations and Volunteer Engagement.

After we have relocated the shelter to the Zion site and have had a chance to settle in, if the informal approach is not working well, we are open to scheduling a meeting with interested community members or attending the Lyndale Neighborhood Association housing committee meeting. SHS management and staff are responsive to our neighbors and appreciate your input. In fact, the Good Neighbor Agreement which every new shelter guest receives grew out of this type of conversation. Thank you for providing this opportunity to share with the Lyndale Neighborhood Association and its community. We look forward to further opportunities for engagement.