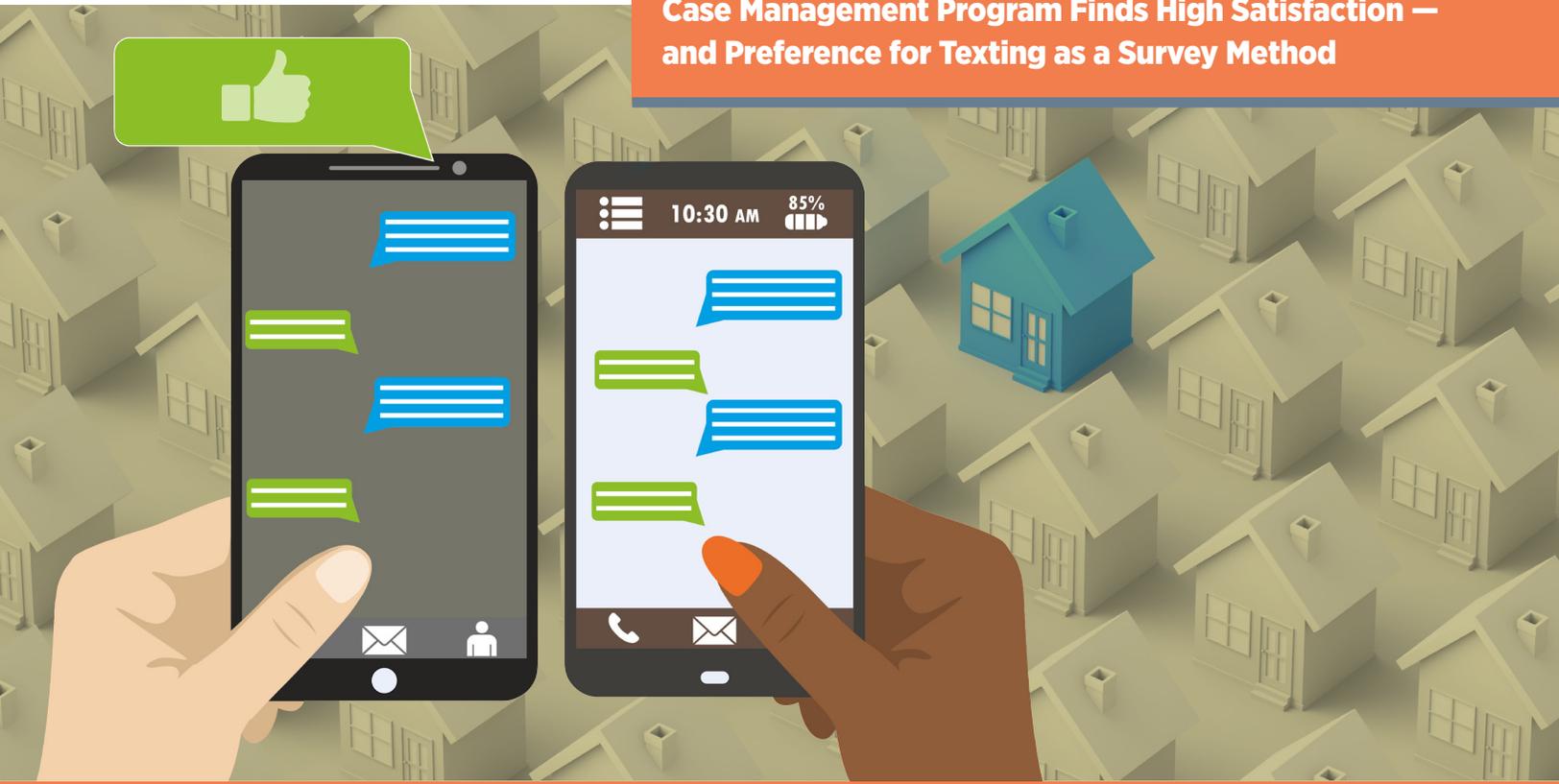


Text Message Survey of Families Using Homelessness Case Management Program Finds High Satisfaction — and Preference for Texting as a Survey Method



August 2019



The Allegheny County
Department of Human Services
One Smithfield Street
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15222

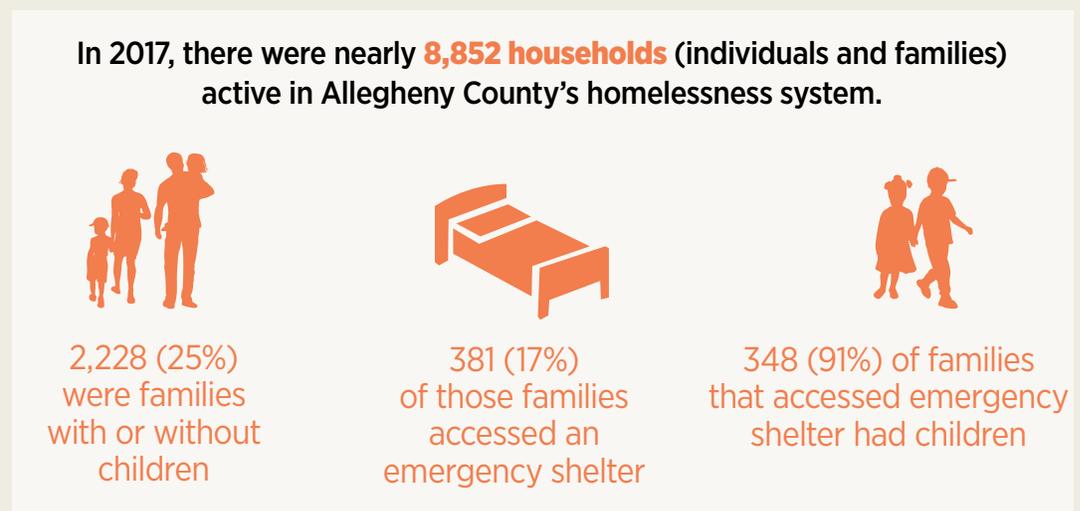
PHONE 412.350.5701
FAX 412.350.4004

www.alleghenycountyanalytics.us

The Homeless Services and Supports Coordination (HSSC) program, implemented by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) in December 2013, provides comprehensive service coordination for families that enter emergency homeless shelters. Upon entering an emergency shelter, families meet with service coordinators who offer housing services and community resources (e.g., applying for and maintaining public benefits, finding affordable housing, and linking to community services such as early childhood development and job training programs). The program was designed to assist families with supports and referrals until they are stably housed and ensure continued stability to prevent future episodes of homelessness.¹

¹ For more background about the HSSC program, see [Homeless Services and Supports Coordination: A qualitative program evaluation \(December 2016\)](#).

FIGURE 1: Allegheny County Households Experiencing Homelessness in 2017



In an attempt to systematically collect client feedback about service experience and satisfaction, a pilot survey was conducted to examine (1) client experience with the services they received, and (2) feasibility and acceptability with Short Message Service survey technology (SMS, commonly known as text messaging) among homeless families. This project was designed as a pilot that, with further refinement after data collection, we could utilize to collect client feedback on a more regular basis.

METHODOLOGY

Survey Design

The survey tool was designed based on feedback from staff, themes identified from the earlier qualitative evaluation, and standardized satisfaction items for DHS programs and services (in development). See **Appendix A** for survey instrument.

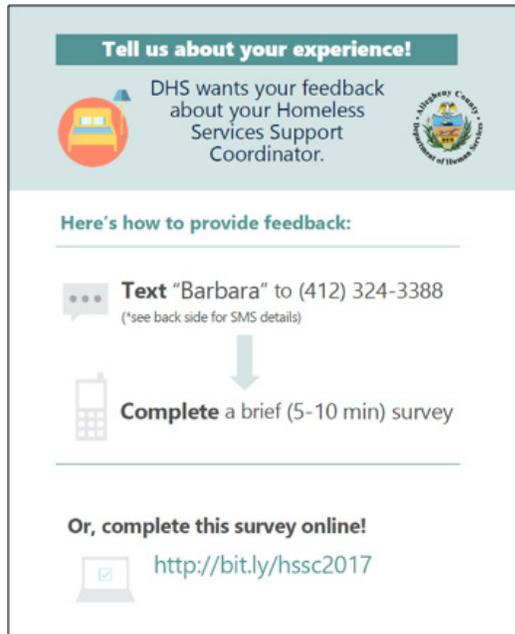
Survey Administration and Data Collection

Surveys were collected from November 2017 through February 2018. Clients were first recruited to participate in the survey by their HSSC service coordinators, who introduced a recruitment flyer with instructions to complete by SMS (text) or web (see **Figure 2**).

In this method of recruitment, the participant goes to a specific URL or initiates the survey by texting a start word to the survey platform phone number, in this case their service coordinator's name. Upon initiation of the SMS survey, the participant's service coordinator's name is confirmed and they are sent the first survey question. When the platform receives the response, the next question is sent to the participant's mobile phone. See **Figure 3** for an example of what a survey would look like via SMS. This flyer-based recruitment approach yielded a response rate of approximately 12 percent (of all active clients at the time) over a six-week period.

The next recruitment strategy we used was service coordinators texting their clients with images of the survey flyer and instructions from the flyer. If clients chose to participate, the survey continued as described above. And finally, clients who had not yet taken the survey (based on cell phone numbers) were sent a message directly to their phone from DHS research/evaluation staff. Phone numbers of all active clients (during data collection period) were pulled from the case management database and reconciled against the phone numbers of those clients who had already responded to the SMS survey. The phone numbers of clients who had not yet responded to the survey were then sent a text message inviting them to take the survey (see **Figure 3**). Clients completed the survey only after opting in. In total, 36 percent (n=53) of all clients active in the program at the time responded to the survey.

FIGURE 2: Client Feedback Recruitment Flyer



Tell us about your experience!

DHS wants your feedback about your Homeless Services Support Coordinator.

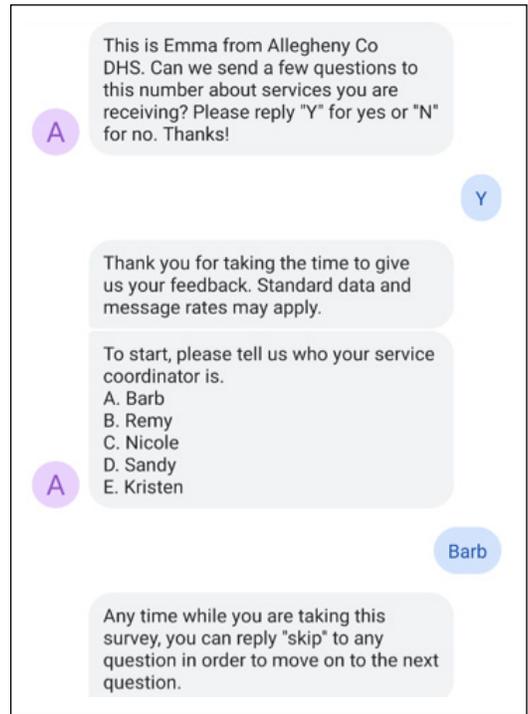
Here's how to provide feedback:

Text "Barbara" to (412) 324-3388
(*see back side for SMS details)

Complete a brief (5-10 min) survey

Or, complete this survey online!
<http://bit.ly/hssc2017>

FIGURE 3: SMS Survey Invitation



This is Emma from Allegheny Co DHS. Can we send a few questions to this number about services you are receiving? Please reply "Y" for yes or "N" for no. Thanks!

Y

Thank you for taking the time to give us your feedback. Standard data and message rates may apply.

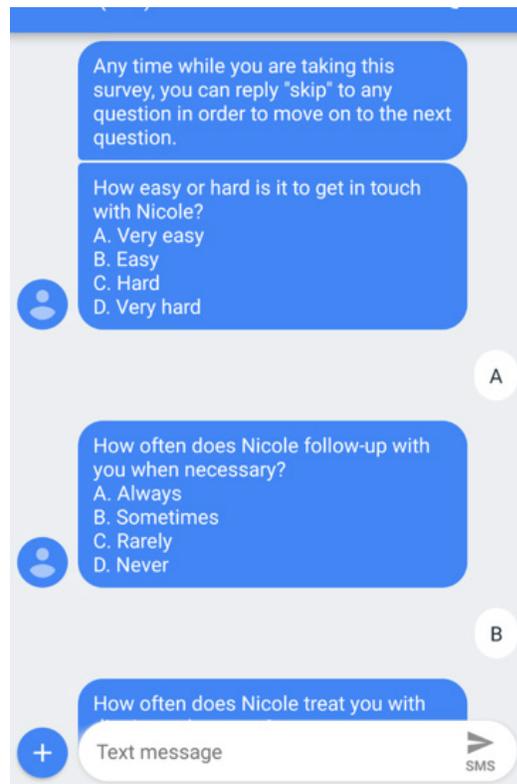
To start, please tell us who your service coordinator is.

A. Barb
B. Remy
C. Nicole
D. Sandy
E. Kristen

Barb

Any time while you are taking this survey, you can reply "skip" to any question in order to move on to the next question.

FIGURE 4: SMS Client Feedback Survey



Survey Respondents

Clients representing the head of household who were actively receiving services through the HSSC program were eligible to give feedback about the services they receive. Population information was drawn from source system data records.

The total response rate for the survey was 36 percent (n=53). Representation from various demographic groups was proportionate to their representation within the program (within 10 percentage points of the active population at the time of surveying), except for race and ethnicity. Black or African American clients were slightly under-represented in the survey sample (51% of survey respondents were black or African American, while 68% of program participants are). The difference in representation of ethnicities between survey respondents and program participants may result from additional response options available in the survey; for example, 16 percent of the sample indicated "another ethnicity," which is not an option available from program participant source data. Survey respondents were almost all female (90%), which is representative of the population at the time of surveying (94% female). The high representation of females can be attributed to the fact that the program serves primarily families, which are often composed of women and their children.

Table 1 displays an aggregate summary of survey respondent demographics compared to clients involved in the program who were eligible for the survey. Note that NA indicates that the option was not available for selection in the source data. If participants did not answer a demographic question, they were not included in the population comparison. For information about demographic representation across survey modes, see the table in **Appendix C** and an upcoming report on SMS feasibility.

TABLE 1: Allegheny County Homeless Services and Support Coordination Population Compared to Survey Sample²

² NA indicates that the option was not available for selection in the source data.

CHARACTERISTIC	POPULATION		SURVEY SAMPLE	
	N	%	N	%
Age				
18-24	32	22%	7	17%
25-34	60	41%	19	46%
35-44	35	24%	8	20%
45-54	16	11%	7	17%
55-64	3	2%	0	0%
65+	1	1%	0	0%
TOTAL	147		41	
<i>No Answer</i> ³	0		12	
Race	N	%	N	%
Black or African American	100	68%	21	51%
White	37	25%	14	34%
American Indian	NA		1	2%
Asian	1	1%	1	2%
Multiple Races	4	3%	1	2%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	1%	NA	
Other	NA		2	5%
TOTAL	143		40	
<i>Missing/No Answer</i>	4		13	
Ethnicity ⁴	N	%	N	%
Non Hispanic	144	98%	29	76%
Hispanic	3	2%	2	5%
Other	NA		6	16%
TOTAL	147		37	
<i>No Answer</i>	NA		16	

³ Survey participants who did not answer demographic questions were not included in the comparison with the population.

⁴ Source data identifies this category as Hispanic or Non Hispanic. The survey asked about Hispanic or/and Latinx ethnicity.

CHARACTERISTIC	POPULATION		SURVEY SAMPLE	
	N	%	N	%
Gender				
Female	138	94%	38	90%
Male	9	6%	1	2%
Transgender Female	NA		1	2%
Transgender Male	NA		0	0%
Other	NA		1	2%
TOTAL	147			41
<i>No Answer</i>	NA		12	
Sexual Orientation	N	%	N	%
Heterosexual	NA		40	91%
Gay	NA		0	0%
Lesbian	NA		1	2%
Bisexual	NA		3	7%
Asexual	NA		0	0%
Other	NA		0	0%
TOTAL			44	
<i>No Answer</i>	NA		9	

Follow-Up Interviews

Follow-up interviews were conducted with a sample of service coordinators (n=3) and a convenience sample of clients (n=18) to better understand experiences with the SMS survey process. Open-ended comments were analyzed to identify themes and patterns in responses. Themes derived from this inductive analysis will be used to inform future survey work as well as to identify insights and opportunities for program improvement.

Analysis

Surveys were analyzed using descriptive methods (frequencies and proportions) to identify baseline indicators of clients' experience with their case management. Open-ended comments were analyzed to identify themes and patterns in responses. Themes and patterns derived from this inductive thematic analysis⁵ was conducted to inform indicators for future survey work as well as to identify insights and opportunities for program improvement.

⁵ Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2). pp. 77-101. ISSN 1478-0887 Available from: <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/11735>

FINDINGS

Client Experience and Satisfaction

The majority of clients shared positive ratings and feedback on staff's interpersonal communication, genuine care and concern, collaboration with clients in goal setting, and clients' confidence that the program is having a positive impact. See **Figure 4** (for full summary statistics, see **Appendix B**).

FIGURE 4: Client Experience and Satisfaction Ratings



⁶ Satisfaction percentage is defined by those with a score of “9” or “10” on the 0–10 scaling question, “How likely are you to recommend these services to a family member or friend?”

Participants most frequently commented in the open-ended survey items that staff were helpful with connecting them and their family to housing services and other community resources, and being able to meet their needs in general. In addition, participants also frequently referenced positive characteristics about the staff, such as their ability to understand and listen, knowledge about other programs, and timely follow-ups.

SMS Survey Feasibility and Acceptability

The flyer-based recruitment strategy was made available for a total of six weeks, but accounted for only a third of the total response rate. While monitoring the response rate (12% at the time), we met with staff and learned that one of them was finding success in texting the flyer to her clients. Therefore, we adapted our recruitment procedures and instructed staff to text either an image of the flyer or a brief description including instructions to their clients. During the next week, we saw our response rate increase from 12 percent to 18 percent. We texted our final recruitment strategy by sending SMS survey invitations directly to clients. Over a four-day period, we saw our response rate double, from 18 percent to 36 percent.⁷ See **Appendix C** for a complete breakdown and further details.

⁷ The text from research staff read: “This is [name] from Allegheny Co DHS. Can we send a few questions to this number about services you are receiving? Please reply ‘Y’ for yes or ‘N’ for no. Thanks!”

Client Responses to Open-Ended Survey Questions

“Staff never makes me feel less important in my situation.”

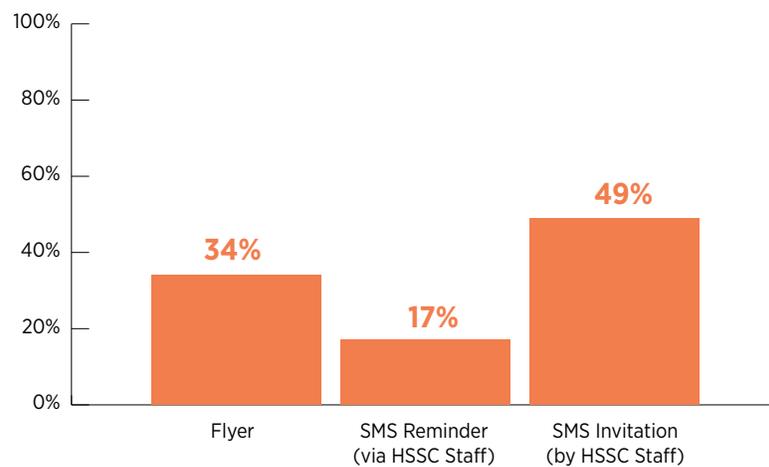
“I was able to receive help and still maintain my dignity.”

“I would recommend services because your services are helpful and you meet YOUR goals.”

“When you are in a situation like mine, [it’s important to find] the best resources with the best people who actually care about another person’s life problems such as mine. It’s a relief and strength at the same time so you can mentally handle things one day at a time.”

“It’s a big help and support system.”

FIGURE 5: Response Rate Distribution by Type of Recruitment Invitation



All service coordinators interviewed agreed that the real-time nature of texting was a crucial factor, allowing clients to immediately access the survey. However, there were mixed opinions on delivery, whether it should come from research staff or from the service coordinator (i.e., texting an image of the flyer). There were no mentions of specific concerns from clients about the SMS technology, although service coordinators noted clients did have specific questions or concerns about survey items, such as discomfort with sexual orientation questions.



What Participants Liked About the SMS Survey

"I like it because it made it pretty simple."

"It was convenient [and] it didn't take a lot of time to complete."

"It was easier than filling out one on paper or on phone."

"It was fast and easy to complete."

The service coordinators had the following suggestions for continuing SMS satisfaction surveys: (1) research staff texting clients directly, and (2) giving clients an incentive (e.g., gift card) to increase response rates. Future surveys may consider how the nature of SMS technology impacts sensitive questions such as these, and alternate ways to gather this information.

For the client follow-up interviews, everyone surveyed (100%, n=18) said they used a smartphone to complete the survey with no one stating they used a basic or flip phone. The majority (85%, n=15) said they used an Android phone with a few saying they used an iPhone. The majority (94%, n=17) of respondents also said they use their phone to text "several times a day" with only one stating "several times a week." Participants surveyed also said they are likely to complete an SMS survey from DHS in the future, with only one person saying somewhat unlikely.



What Participants Liked About the SMS/Text Survey Compared to Other Survey or Feedback Experiences

"Efficiency and the speed of it. The reasons why I don't take surveys is because they take too long and I'm not a people-person."

"It was simple. I didn't have to wait for someone to call me or complete it on paper. It was much more convenient to do it on the text."

"It was better than paper, the same for kiosk or on the computer."

"That way was easier than talking to someone on the phone."

Respondents overall said their SMS survey experience was "very good" (94%, n=17) with one person saying "neutral" or OK. Suggestions for making it easier to complete an SMS survey mainly included "unsure" or "nothing." Two quotes that stood out were one that mentioned incentive as unnecessary and the other suggesting a shorter survey:

- *"I'll do it for free, long as it is fast. I don't care, because I text all day anyway."*
- *"It needs to be shorter, because it was kind of long and I have an attention span of a two-year-old. That's why I stopped completing it and when I came back to it to finish completing it, it wouldn't let me get back in to complete it. However, I would like to complete it or start all over and complete it."*

Finally, participants were asked about their recent activity completing surveys.

Slightly more than half (56%, n=10) said phone interview was the last way they completed a survey or gave feedback, followed by almost a third (33%, n=6) saying web/online, followed by about a quarter saying paper (28%, n=5) and face-to-face or in person (28%, n=5). Half (50%, n=9) said the SMS survey "was better" compared to the other types of surveys they've done, and half (50%, n=9) said "about the same."

SUGGESTIONS, INSIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The clients who had feedback for improving direct services suggested the following:

- Having on-call or after-hours availability
- More tangible goods such as children's winter clothes and shoes and resources
- More consistency with programs/resources provided
- Computer assistance
- Offering helpful links that pertain to the situation so that the client has more than one or two options

Another theme that arose from the open-ended comments was that clients often mentioned staff as their “friend” or long-term “support system.” The importance that clients place on having supports suggests that we might consider a model that focuses on (1) developing natural, professional and community supports, and (2) developing knowledge and skills that will empower clients to maintain their housing stability and prevent a future housing crisis. The HSSC model might borrow from the peer professional model currently used in behavioral health services and recovery⁸ in which a peer resource specialist who has experience with the system partners with service coordinators to assist clients.

⁸ [Peers Supporting Recovery from Substance Use Disorders \(SAMHSA, 2017\)](#)

As a pilot project, the response rate, client responses to the survey tool, and our understanding of clients’ interaction with our new SMS technology inform logistics and procedures that can be implemented to collect standardized client feedback both within the HSSC program and across DHS.

AUTHORS

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REVIEWERS

Sr. Michele Farabaugh, Lisa Lakenan

APPENDIX A: HSSC SATISFACTION SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to give us your feedback. Standard data and message rates may apply.

To start, please tell us who your service coordinator is.

- A) Barb
- B) Remy
- C) Nicole
- D) Sandy
- E) Kristen

Any time while you are taking this survey, you can reply “skip” to any question in order to move on to the next question.

How easy or hard is it to get in touch with <name of coordinator>?

- A) Very easy
- B) Easy
- C) Hard
- D) Very Hard

How often does <name of coordinator> follow up with you when necessary?

- A) Always
- B) Sometimes
- C) Rarely
- D) Never

How often does <name of coordinator> treat you with dignity and respect?

- A) Always
- B) Sometimes
- C) Rarely
- D) Never

How honest is <name of coordinator> with you?

- A) Very honest
- B) Honest
- C) Dishonest
- D) Very dishonest

**Appendix A
(continued)**

How often does your <name of coordinator> respect your privacy and confidentiality?

- A) Always
- B) Sometimes
- C) Rarely
- D) Never

How often does <name of coordinator> talk to you in a way you can understand?

- A) Always
- B) Sometimes
- C) Rarely
- D) Never

How often does <name of coordinator> meet your needs?

- A) Always
- B) Sometimes
- C) Rarely
- D) Never

How often are you involved in planning your goals?

- A) Always
- B) Sometimes
- C) Rarely
- D) Never

How prepared do you feel to meet your goals?

- A) Very prepared
- B) Prepared
- C) Unprepared
- D) Very unprepared

How helpful is <name of coordinator> in meeting your goals?

- A) Very helpful
- B) Helpful
- C) Not so helpful
- D) Not at all helpful

**Appendix A
(continued)**

Briefly describe what we could have done to better meet your needs.

How likely are you to recommend these services to friends or family who might need them?

Reply with a number from 0 (Not Likely) through 10 (Extremely Likely).

Briefly describe your most important reason for recommending or not recommending this service.

How long have you been working with <name of coordinator>?

- A. Less than 1 month
- B. 1-3 months
- C. 4-6 months
- D. 7-12 months
- E. More than 12 months

How do you identify?

- A. Female
- B. Male
- C. Transgender Female
- D. Transgender Male
- E. Prefer not to answer

You may also reply with a description.

What best describes you?

- A. Heterosexual/Straight
- B. Gay
- C. Lesbian
- D. Bisexual
- E. Asexual
- F. Prefer not to answer

You may also reply with a description.

**Appendix A
(continued)**

Please indicate your ethnicity.

- A. Hispanic or Latinx
- B. Latinx
- C. Not Hispanic or Latinx
- D. Prefer not to answer.

You may also reply with a description.

What is your race?

- A. African American
- B. American Indian
- C. Asian
- D. White
- E. Multiracial
- F. Prefer not to answer

You may also reply with a description.

What is your age?

- A. 18–24
- B. 25–34
- C. 35–44
- D. 45–54
- E. 55–64
- F. 65+
- G. Prefer not to answer

Thank you for your feedback! Please reply if there is anything else that you would like to share with us about your homeless services support coordination?

Ok. Thank you for taking the time to give us this feedback that will help us improve our services.

APPENDIX B: SUMMARY STATISTICS HSSC SATISFACTION SURVEY

Getting in touch with coordinator	#	%
Very Easy	46	87%
Easy	6	11%
Hard	1	2%
Very Hard	0	0%
Total	53	
Coordinator followed up	#	%
Always	49	92%
Sometimes	3	6%
Rarely	1	2%
Never	0	0%
Total	53	
Coordinator treats you with dignity and respect	#	%
Always	52	98%
Sometimes	1	2%
Rarely	0	0%
Never	0	0%
Total	53	
Coordinator has an understanding of your needs and concerns	#	%
Very Good	51	96%
Good	2	4%
Poor	0	0%
Very Poor	0	0%
Total	53	
Coordinator cares about you and your family	#	%
A lot	50	96%
Some	2	4%
A Little	0	0%
Not at all	0	0%
Total	52	
Coordinator is honest	#	%
Very Honest	48	91%
Honest	5	9%
Dishonest	0	0%
Very Dishonest	0	0%
Total	53	

Appendix B
(continued)

Coordinator respects your privacy and confidentiality	#	%
Always	51	96%
Sometimes	1	2%
Rarely	0	0%
Never	1	2%
Total	53	
Coordinator talks to you in a way that you can understand	#	%
Always	52	100%
Sometimes	0	0%
Rarely	0	0%
Never	0	0%
Total	52	
Coordinator meet your needs	#	%
Always	47	92%
Sometimes	3	6%
Rarely	0	0%
Never	1	2%
Total	51	
You are involved in planning your goals	#	%
Always	48	96%
Sometimes	2	4%
Rarely	0	0%
Never	0	0%
Total	50	
You feel prepared to meet your goals	%	#
Very prepared	69%	34
Prepared	31%	15
Unprepared	0%	0
Very unprepared	0%	0
Total		49
Coordinator is helpful in meeting your goals	#	%
Very helpful	45	92%
Helpful	3	6%
Not so helpful	1	2%
Not at all helpful	0	0%
Total	49	

Appendix B
(continued)

Net Promoter Score (NPS)	#	%
Promoter (rating 9 or 10)	40	91%
Neutral (rating 7 or 8)	3	7%
Detractor (rating 6 or below)	1	2%
NPS	89%	% Promoter- % Detractor
Total	44	

APPENDIX C: RESPONSE RATE BY SURVEY DISTRIBUTION METHOD

RECRUITMENT	SURVEY	RESPONSE N	RESPONSE RATE %	% OF TOTAL RESPONSE	TIME PERIOD
Flyer Recruitment					
Face to Face	SMS and Web	18	12%	34%	6 wks
Flyer Recruitment					
SMS Reminder	SMS and Web	9	6%	17%	4 days
Invitation Recruitment	SMS	26	18%	49%	4 days
Total response		53	36%		
Active N (pop)		147			

CHARACTERISTIC	FLYER		WEB		DIRECT SMS		POPULATION	
Age	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
18-24	5	25%	0	0%	2	12%	32	22%
25-34	7	35%	2	50%	10	59%	60	41%
35-44	6	30%	0	0%	2	12%	35	24%
45-54	2	10%	2	50%	3	18%	16	11%
55-64	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	3	2%
65+	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%
Total	23		4		26		147	
No Answer	3		0		9		0	
Race	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
African American	9	45%	2	67%	10	59%	100	68%
White	8	40%	1	33%	5	29%	37	25%
American Indian	1	5%	0	0%	0	0%	NA	
Asian	1	5%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%
Multiracial	0	0%	0	0%	1	6%	4	3%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	NA		NA		NA		1	1%
Other	1	5%	0	0%	1	6%	NA	
Total	23		4		26		147	
No Answer	3		1		9		4	
Ethnicity	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Non Hispanic	1	6%	0	0%	1	6%	144	98%
Hispanic	14	78%	2	67%	13	81%	3	2%
Other	3	17%	1	33%	2	13%	NA	
Total	23		4		26		147	

Appendix C
(continued)

CHARACTERISTIC	FLYER		WEB		DIRECT SMS		POPULATION	
No Answer	5		1		10		NA	
Gender	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	21	95%	3	100%	14	88%	138	94%
Male	1	5%	0	0%	0	0%	9	6%
Transgender Female	0	0%	0	0%	1	6%	NA	
Transgender Male	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	NA	
Other	0	0%	0	0%	1	6%	NA	
Total	23		4		26		147	
No Answer	1		1		10		NA	
Sexual Orientation	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Heterosexual	22	96%	4	100%	14	82%	NA	
Gay	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	NA	
Lesbian	1	4%	0	0%	0	0%	NA	
Bisexual	0	0%	0	0%	3	18%	NA	
Asexual	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	NA	
Other	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	NA	
Total	23		4		26		0	
Prefer not to answer	0		0		9		NA	