



MINNEAPOLIS NAVIGATION CENTER

LEARNINGS AND OUTCOMES



In November 2018, Simpson Housing Services was identified as the shelter operator for the Navigation Center. Given Simpson's decades of experience providing shelter, housing, support, and advocacy to people experiencing homelessness, the agency was recognized as a leader in the field, strongly suited to serve in this role.

SIMPSON'S PIVOTAL ROLE OPERATING THE NAVIGATION CENTER

Collaboration Leads to Safety and Stability

The Navigation Center was an innovative community partnership model built to quickly accommodate safe and dignified temporary shelter for the primarily Native community members who had lived outdoors at the Franklin-Hiawatha encampment in Minneapolis.

The eight-week collaborative effort of creating the Navigation Center engaged the leadership of Red Lake Nation, the City of Minneapolis, Metropolitan Urban Indian Directors, Hennepin County, State of Minnesota, and shelter providers in the Minneapolis shelter collaborative, which includes Simpson Housing Services. Additional community partners for the project included the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the Minneapolis police and fire departments, other Native-led organizations, and several social service providers.

Simpson's approach to operating the Navigation Center incorporated guidelines that created a safe, welcoming, and respectful environment for guests. Using Simpson's current emergency shelter program model, staff developed a low-barrier and service-rich shelter that afforded flexibility for guests to exit and reenter the premises according to their own schedules. Guests connected with on-site community services focused on stable housing, as well as physical, mental, and chemical health resources.

Marian Wright, a Leech Lake tribal member and 10-year Simpson shelter staff member, was selected to serve as the manager of the Navigation Center. With her strong ties to the Native community and valued expertise in providing support to vulnerable populations, her presence and contributions were instrumental in the success of operating the temporary shelter.

The selection and hiring of the diverse staff were critical to the success of shelter operations. Staffing decisions supported the cultural heritage and specific needs of guests. More than 30 staff members including three case managers and a large team of shelter advocates were entrusted with the responsibility of supporting the safety and needs of guests.

Simpson welcomed and coordinated with more than a dozen on-site housing, health, and culturally specific resources offering a groundbreaking approach that accelerated housing and other positive outcomes for guests.

Housing First and Harm Reduction

Embracing a Housing First philosophy, each guest was welcomed with dignity and provided safe shelter no matter what their current or past life circumstances. Having a safe place to stay at the Navigation Center, guests could address other issues such as substance use, mental health concerns, or other barriers.

Harm Reduction strategies were implemented at the Navigation Center and expanded based on guest needs. Simpson case managers, Native Navigators, and Harm Reduction specialists talked openly with guests about chemical use and offered resources to reduce risks and enhance well-being.

Grounded in the Community's Culture and Values

The Navigation Center incorporated culturally-specific resources that supported the strengths, needs, and rich heritage of the Native guests. Staff and volunteers engaged in training that examined the historical trauma of the Native community and focused on cultural sensitivity.

Native Navigators provided support and healing through case management, clinical support, traditional practices, and access to other community resources. Traditional activities led by Native resource providers included beading, making dream catchers, naming ceremonies, and more. Respected elders led drum and talking circles, teaching Native songs and providing a time for guests to connect and build community.

Relationships: At the Heart of the Work

Central to the Navigation Center's success — and a cornerstone of Simpson's philosophy — was its focus on building relationships. The round-the-clock dedication of the Navigation Center staff paired with this strength in relationships created a supportive environment in which guests found stability.

A close-knit community emerged at the Navigation Center. The mutual support of guests was evident, and the celebration of success for one community member inspired a sense of hope for other Navigation Center guests.

"When we had guests who were packing up and moving out, everyone crowded around the Simpson van. They were so happy for them, saying, 'You're moving out! You're leaving.' They were just so excited about it. That was the perfect time to say, 'What about your plan?' And they would say, 'Yeah, I think it's time to talk about it.' 'People saw positive things happening, and it was real. When people saw other people moving out it encouraged them to work on housing and their goals as well.'"

— Marian Wright,
Navigation Center Manager



Everyday is a
struggle and we
still make our
day the best
Our family is
100 and we
if like





The Navigation Center opened its doors on December 11, 2018, providing safe shelter and on-site resources 24 hours per day. The Navigation Center ended operations on June 3, 2019.

176 Individuals stayed at the Navigation Center.

74 individuals achieved positive destinations like housing, nursing homes, or treatment programs. **64** of these were an affordable housing placement.

67 individuals did not achieve positive housing outcomes but received safe shelter and supportive services at the Navigation Center. These individuals were restricted due to behavior, or individuals were not active in engagement and services on the site.

13 individuals had a housing move-in date at the closing of the Navigation Center. These individuals were offered beds at a shelter or stayed with family temporarily while they waited till their housing move-in date.

At the time of closing, **22 individuals** were still actively working towards a housing placement option and were offered a bed at a shelter.

“ *I liked being there. I was warm, and I had food. I could get help. There’s no help on the street.*

— Navigation Center guest

Staff helped this guest connect with a chemical health treatment program, and they are working diligently toward housing and sobriety.

“ *The staff was wonderful. There was mutual respect. They went out of their way to help people.*

— Navigation Center guest

The Navigation Center was a ground-breaking approach to help people experiencing homelessness in our community. The learnings and outcomes realized through the development and operation of the Navigation Center can inform the process of creating future 24/7 low-barrier, service-enriched shelter models in the Twin Cities and across the nation.

Wilder Research’s 2015 Homelessness Study highlights the disproportionate impact of homelessness in the lives of Native people: 1% percent of adults in the overall Minnesota population identify as American Indian, but 8% of homeless adults in Minnesota identify as American Indian.

Thank you to the community partners who provide support to Navigation Center guests.



AMERICAN INDIAN
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



PROJECT FOR
PRIDE IN
LIVING



CATHOLIC
CHARITIES
of St. Paul and Minneapolis



Livio | EPF | Sage Prairie

Special thanks for a service funding grant from an Anonymous Family Fund at the Catholic Community Foundation of Minnesota.

Over 100 volunteers

helped serve meals at the
Navigation Center.

We greatly appreciate their
support and commitment
to volunteering with us.

THANK YOU!

Building relationships. Helping people experiencing homelessness. It's what we do.

Over the last three decades, Simpson Housing Services has provided emergency shelter, supportive housing for individuals, families, and young adults experiencing homelessness.

In Fiscal Year 2018, we:

Served 2,452 people
experiencing homelessness.

Placed 1,454 people
into safe and affordable housing.

Please join Simpson's efforts to end homelessness in our community
by making a donation today.

OUR MISSION

To house, support, and advocate for
people experiencing homelessness.



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