

THE OTHER ONES FOUNDATION

State Homeless Campground Needs Assessment Report

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Background and Overview	5
Methodology	5
Results	6
Demographics.....	6
Preferred Language.....	6
Age.....	6
Gender.....	6
Race & Ethnicity.....	7
Highest Level of Education.....	7
Veteran Status.....	7
Sexual Orientation.....	8
Lived Experiences.....	8
Past Experience with Homelessness.....	8
Number of Past Experiences with Homelessness.....	8
Length of Current Bout of Homelessness.....	8
Length of Time Living at Campground.....	8
Current Living Situation.....	9
Last Living Situation Before the Camp.....	9
Access to Transportation.....	9
Access to Case Management.....	9
Past Experience of Interpersonal Violence.....	9
Health and Quality of Life.....	10
Self-Reported Health.....	10
Chronic Illness (prevalence).....	10
Physical Disabilities (prevalence).....	10
Health Conditions.....	10
Interview Themes: Health Needs.....	11
Desired Health Services.....	12
Prescribed a Medication.....	12
Taking Prescribed Medication.....	12
Reasons for Not Taking Prescribed Medication.....	12
Interview Themes: Service Needs.....	13
Interview Themes: Environment Needs.....	14
Interview Themes: Safety Needs.....	15
Interview Themes: Community Needs.....	16

Executive Summary

Established in November 2019, the State Homeless Encampment on US Hwy 183 in Austin, Texas is a 7-acre former Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) maintenance yard. In June 2020, The Other Ones Foundation (TOOF) initiated a project to create a community services complex on-site and begin coordinating the provision of homelessness services at the campground. The social services available at the campground steeply declined as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has contributed to an expanding humanitarian crisis at the campground.

This needs assessment used mixed methods of interview and Photovoice to identify the wants, needs, and priorities of the residents of the campground in order to inform service provision. 73 of the estimated 118 individuals who live at the campground participated in in-depth interviews and 4 of those individuals also participated in the Photovoice project, a method in which participants take photos of their daily life and identify the issues they felt were most pressing for their community

Demographic Highlights

The majority of camp residents are between 35 and 65 years old, with the largest population between the ages of 45 and 54.

The majority of residents were white and/or male, but more LGBTQIA+ individuals than the general population.

Lived Experience Highlights

The resident population is split nearly 50%/50% between individuals who have never experienced homelessness before and those who have. Among those who have experienced homelessness before, the majority of them said the number of times they had experienced homelessness was “a lot.”

The resident population is split nearly 50%/50% between individuals who have been staying at the campground for less than 6 months and individuals who have been at the campground for more than 6 months.

Many more individuals live in tents, cars, and built structures than live in the converted truck bays. Individuals who live in the bays, are more likely to be able-bodied, while those who are living in tents are more likely to be disabled and/or elderly.

Roughly half of residents have experienced interpersonal violence at some point in their lives.

85% of residents said they did not have access to case management they needed.

Health and Quality of Life Highlights

Just over half of residents said they had at least one chronic illness and 40% said they had at least one physical disability.

The most common health issues reported by residents were heart disease and physical problems with the back, neck, hands, and/or legs. The next most common health issues are diabetes, Hepatitis-C, and lung disease. Many residents reported symptoms that would indicate a greater health problem was present, but due to lack of access to a doctor, did not have a diagnosis to explain their symptoms.

Health Needs

Residents expressed having had negative interactions with healthcare and social service providers who did not understand issues specific to homelessness and did not use trauma-informed practices. Many expressed the need for better understanding of their lived experience among providers.

Residents frequently described not knowing when certain medical situations required medical intervention or going to the Emergency Room, nor what to do in situations like dog bites or stepping on a used needle.

Many residents experienced challenges getting and storing their medication as well as properly administering it to themselves and asked for assistance with all of these.

One of the most requested services at the campground was mental health services of all kinds: psychiatric services, counselling, and substance use, domestic violence, and relationship counselling were all highly requested.

Substance use services were also highly requested, particularly safe needle disposal, education, detox, and peer support groups.

Service Needs

Overwhelmingly, residents felt they had lost supportive services in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and needed more support, consistency, and reliability from providers.

Many residents were concerned with issues related to qualifying for, finding, applying to, and keeping jobs. Needs included identification documents, and access to phones and computers.

Most residents had limited or no access to basic mail services due to transportation and service navigation barriers.

Environment Needs

The majority of residents expressed desire for more equitable access to water and electricity for those living in tents compared to those living in bays, who had significantly more access to both of these.

Heat was overwhelmingly one of the largest concerns of all residents, who are concerned about managing and preventing heat illness and death.

Pest control measures for insects, rodents, and snakes were highly requested as many residents have suffered illness and injury from contact with these pests.

Assistance with improving the weather resistance, safety, and structural integrity of existing tents and bays was frequently requested, as well as more permanent shelter situations such as tiny homes.

Safety Needs

Many residents identified theft, violence, and fighting as major safety issues at the campground and suggested that community conflict resolution and mediation would be their preferred method of managing these issues.

Hate crimes were discussed as having taken place at the camp and many residents expressed that they were often fearful about the potential for violence at the campground.

Theft was overwhelmingly identified as a major issue at the campground that residents felt unable to address.

Community Needs

Community guidelines and rules were frequently requested by residents generally focused on areas of concern such as safety and hygiene.

Residents frequently expressed a desire for increased trust, structure, and better communication within the community at the campground.

Recreation and access to tools for different trades like carpentry and welding were often requested.

Overview and Background

Established in November 2019, the State Homeless Encampment on US Hwy 183 in Austin, Texas is a 7-acre former Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) maintenance yard. In June 2020, The Other Ones Foundation (TOOF) initiated a project to create a community services complex on-site and begin coordinating the provision of homelessness services at the campground.

The Other Ones Foundation is a nonprofit organization that provides extremely low barrier employment, case management, and humanitarian aid to people experiencing homelessness in Austin. In June, TOOF began the needs assessment, providing daily work opportunities, and offering shower access to campground residents. In August, TOOF opened the Community Services Complex, expanding the services provided to residents.

The State Homeless Encampment has been referred to by several names, including Camp Abbott, Abbottsville, and Camp R.A.T.T. (Responsible Adult Transition Town). TOOF is working with the community to reach consensus about the name of the campground.

Methodology

The Other Ones Foundation's needs assessment interviews took place over three weeks in June and July, reaching 73 of the estimated 118 residents at the campground (61%). The needs assessment surveys asked a range of demographic, service utilization, and individual opinion questions about the wants, needs, and priorities of the residents at the camp.

Interviews were anonymous and lasted about 40 minutes. Participants were compensated with a \$25 gift card. TOOF's outreach efforts included providing coffee daily, visiting with residents, and providing services and employment on-site. After the interview, participants were given the option to have the interaction recorded in the HMIS so that further outreach could be done to assist them with Coordinated Entries and accessing Continuum of Care services.

Three interviewees were Spanish speakers and were interviewed by a Spanish fluent TOOF staff member with translation experience, who translated the interview questions verbally and on-paper for these participants.

Limitations of the interview included self-report bias, and that participants often talked about the immediate issues they were experiencing on a given day. For example, on hot days, most interviewees focused almost entirely on needing shade, ice, and cooling. While best efforts were made to recruit a representative cross section of community members to interview, there was a small number of residents who were uninterested in participating.

The needs assessment also included a Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) method called Photovoice. For this, TOOF staff recruited 4 residents from the interviews to take photos of their daily life and identify the issues they felt were most pressing for their community over a two-week period. The themes and results of the Photovoice project have been included in this report.

Results

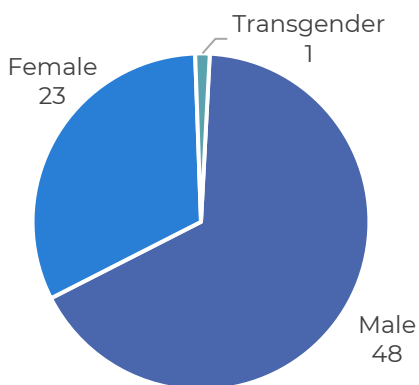
Participants were allowed to skip any questions they did not want to answer, and some questions were posed as follow-up questions. Because of this, the number of people sample for each question varied. The number of participants who responded to each question is indicated below its graph.

Demographics

Preferred Language

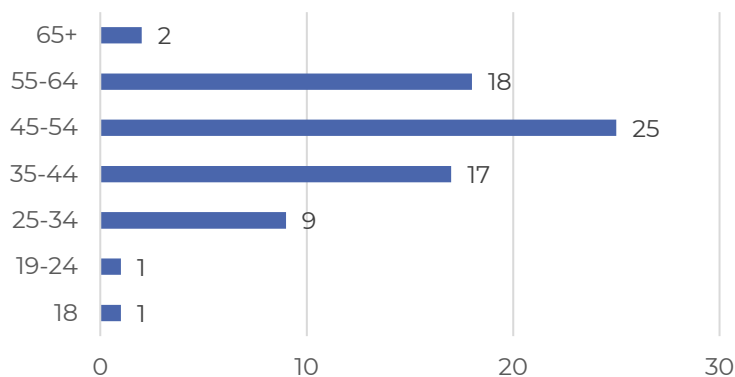
	English	English & Spanish	Spanish
Number of Respondents (n=73)	64	6	3

Gender



Number of Respondents (n=72)

Age



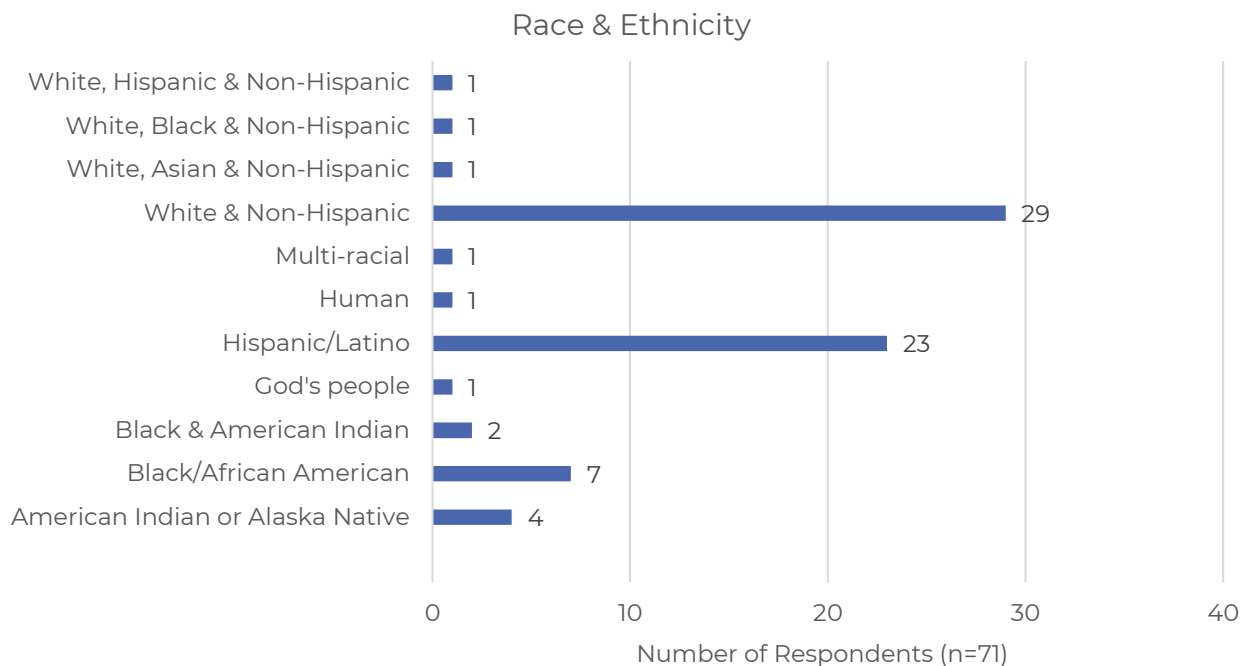
Number of Respondents (n=73)

Sexual Orientation

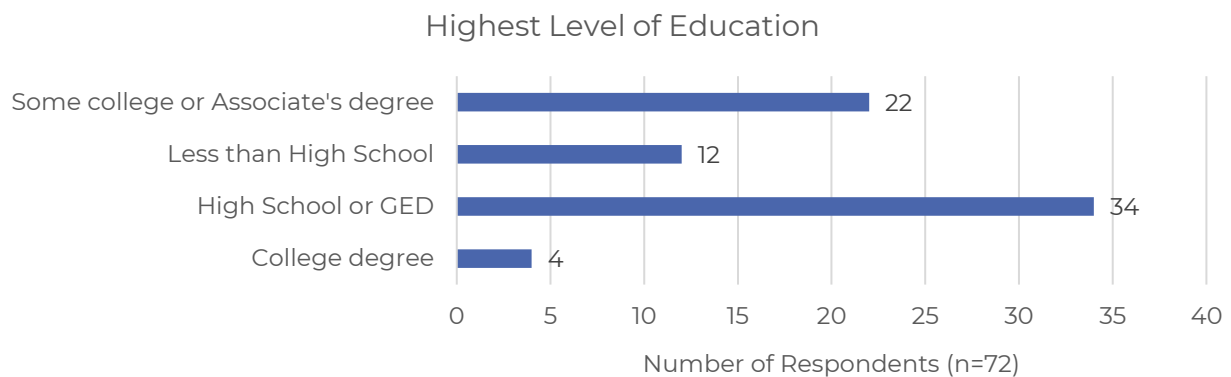
	Heterosexual/ Straight	Bisexual/ Pansexual	Gay	Queer	No label
Number of Respondents (n=71)	60	5	3	2	1

LGBTQIA+ individuals experience homelessness at a much higher rate than the rest of the U.S. population, so it was important to us to understand this population at the state campground. Although 82% (60) individuals identified themselves as heterosexual/straight, 13% (10) of participants identified as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, which is nearly 3 times higher than in the general U.S. population.¹

¹ Gallup. "In U.S., Estimate of LGBT Population Rises to 4.5%" Frank Newport. (2018)



Participants race and ethnicity were captured in one question, to accommodate for the reality that many people perceive their race and ethnicity as one, and to allow us to reflect the lived experience of those who identify their ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino, but do not feel that 'White' accurately reflects their race. We also chose to report responses as they were communicated to us, rather than lumping them into a "Multi-racial" or "Other" category.



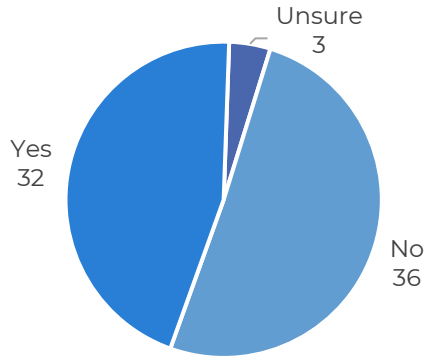
Veteran Status

	Veteran*	Unsure	Non-Veteran
Number of Respondents (n=73)	2	1	70

*One participant who identified themselves as a veteran was a veteran of a foreign military service

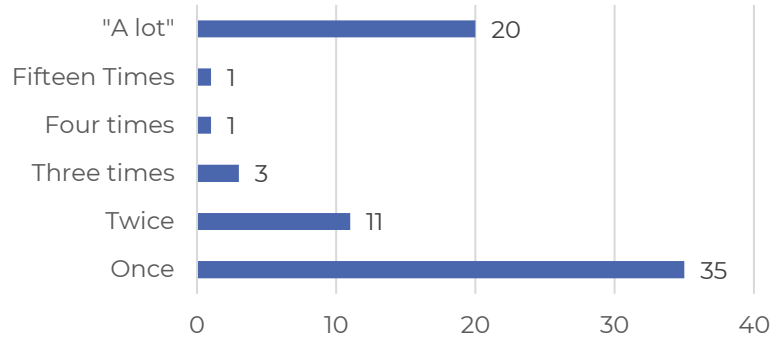
Lived Experiences

Past Experience With Homelessness



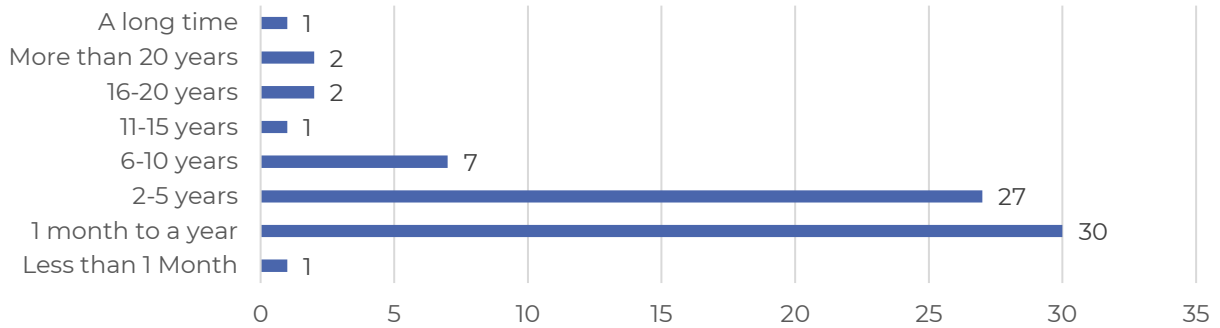
Number of Respondents (n=72)

Number of Past Experiences With Homelessness



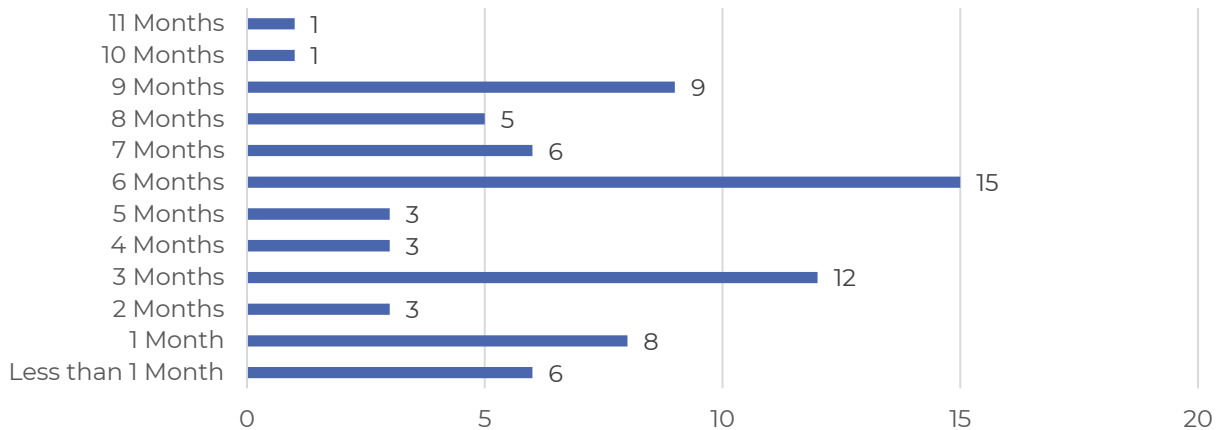
Number of Respondents (n=71)

Length of Current Bout of Homelessness



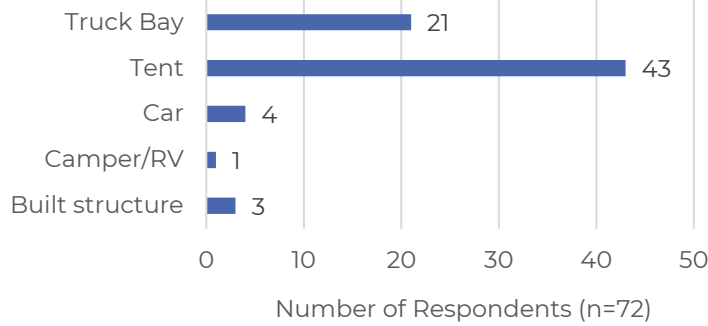
Number of Respondents (n=71)

Length of Time Living at Campground



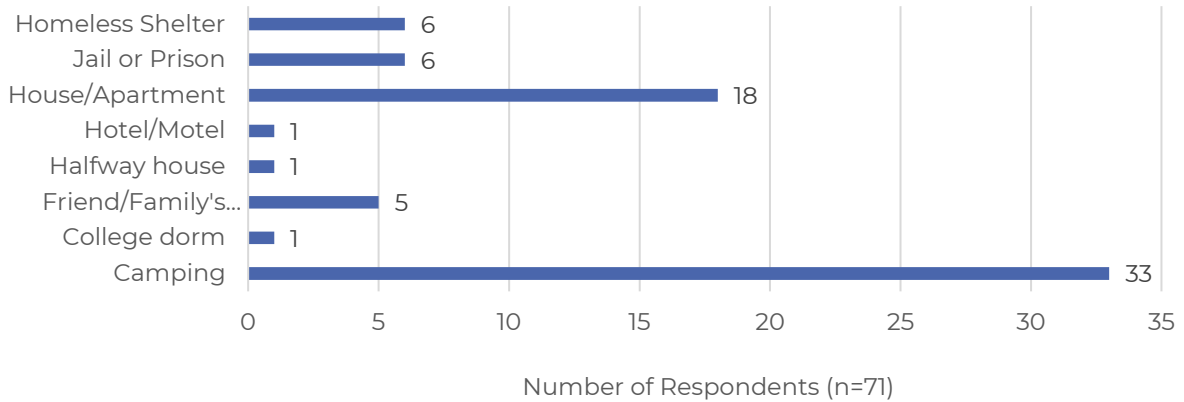
Number of Respondents (n=72)

Current Living Situation

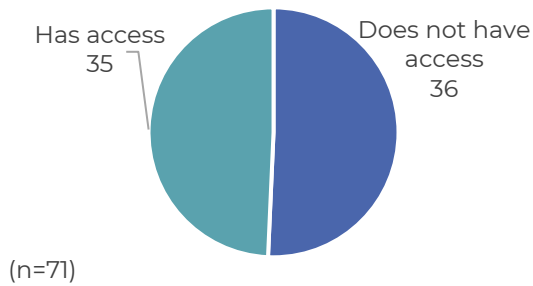


The campground is a former TxDOT maintenance yard, almost entirely paved with asphalt. There are few trees, and the majority are at the front of the property where no dwellings are located. The front section has 23 truck bays that residents have renovated themselves and occupy, the rest of the camp is subdivided into numbered lots where residents camp in tents, cars, and structures they built themselves.

Last Living Situation Before the Camp

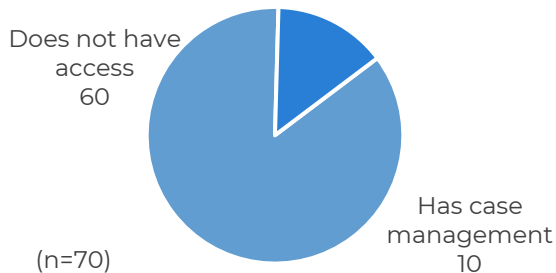


Access to Transportation

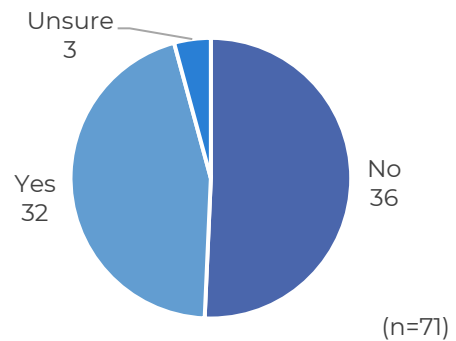


The primary mode of transportation used at the camp is the CapMetro bus. However, residents reported numerous barriers to using the bus including being unable to afford it, mental health challenges, and language barriers. Those who own cars said they also struggled to afford upkeep, gas, and parking fees.

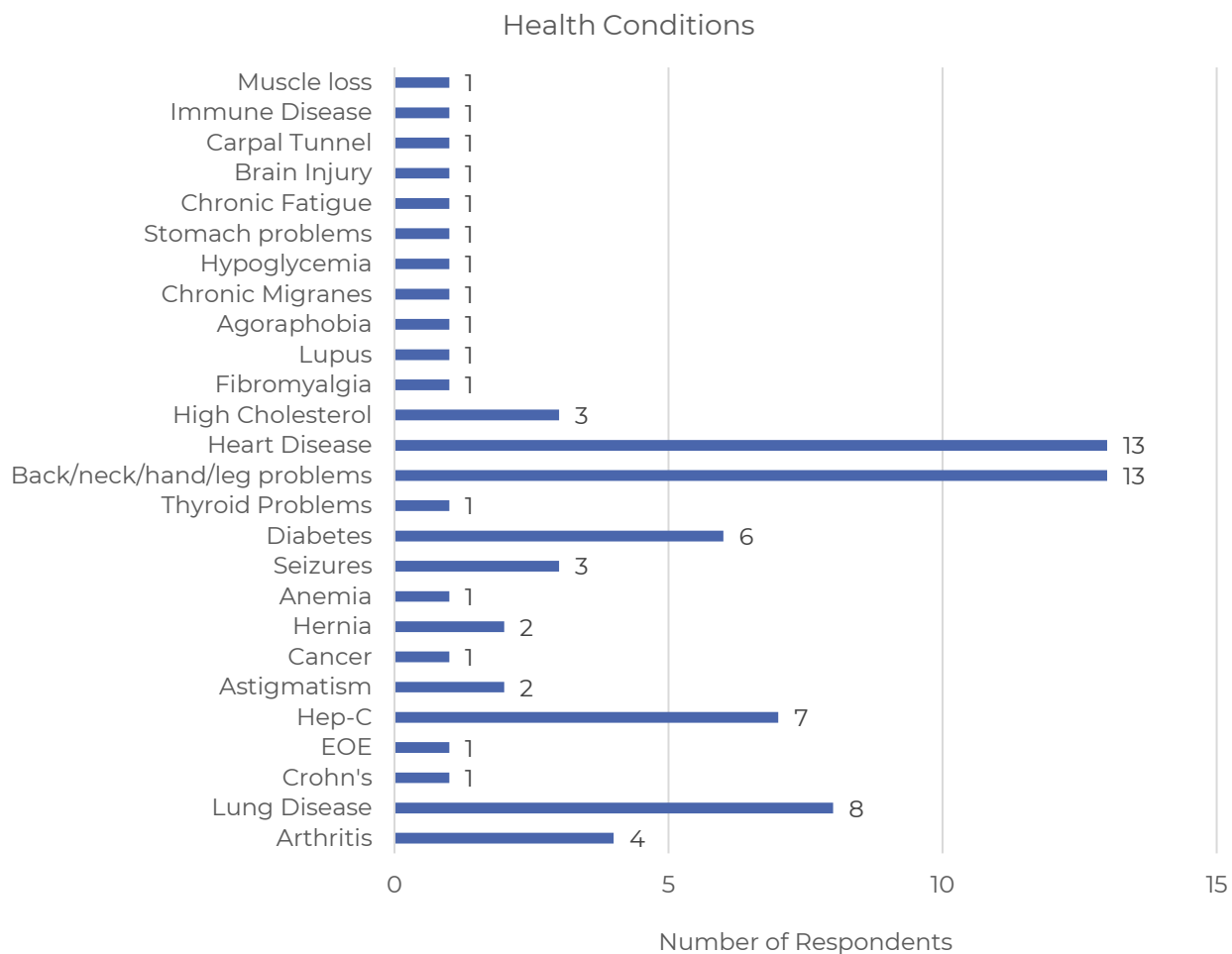
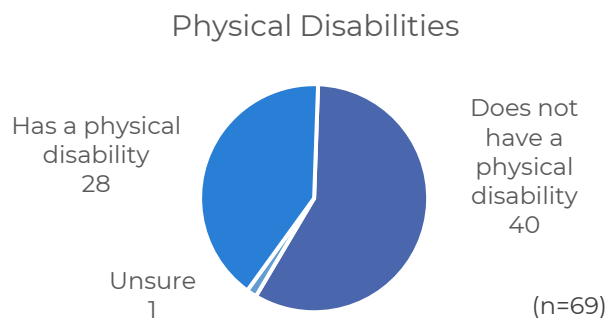
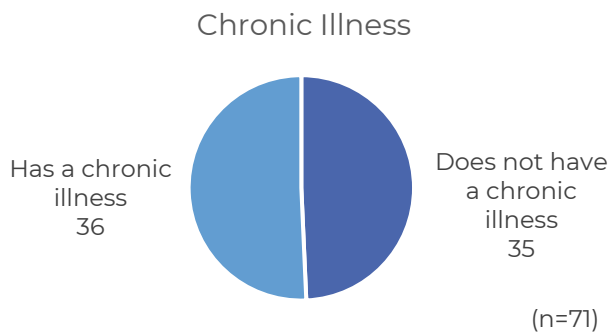
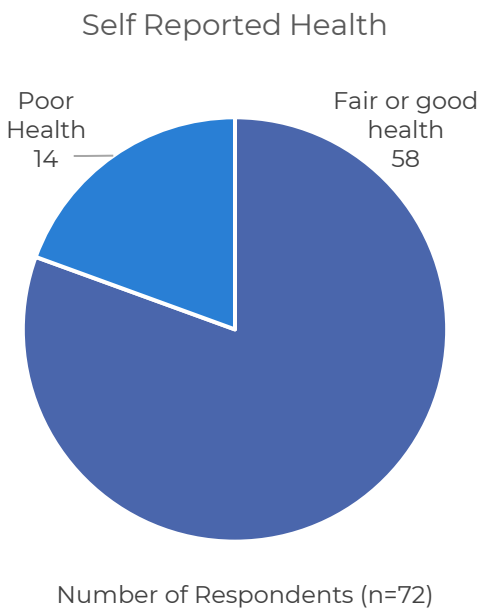
Access to Case Management

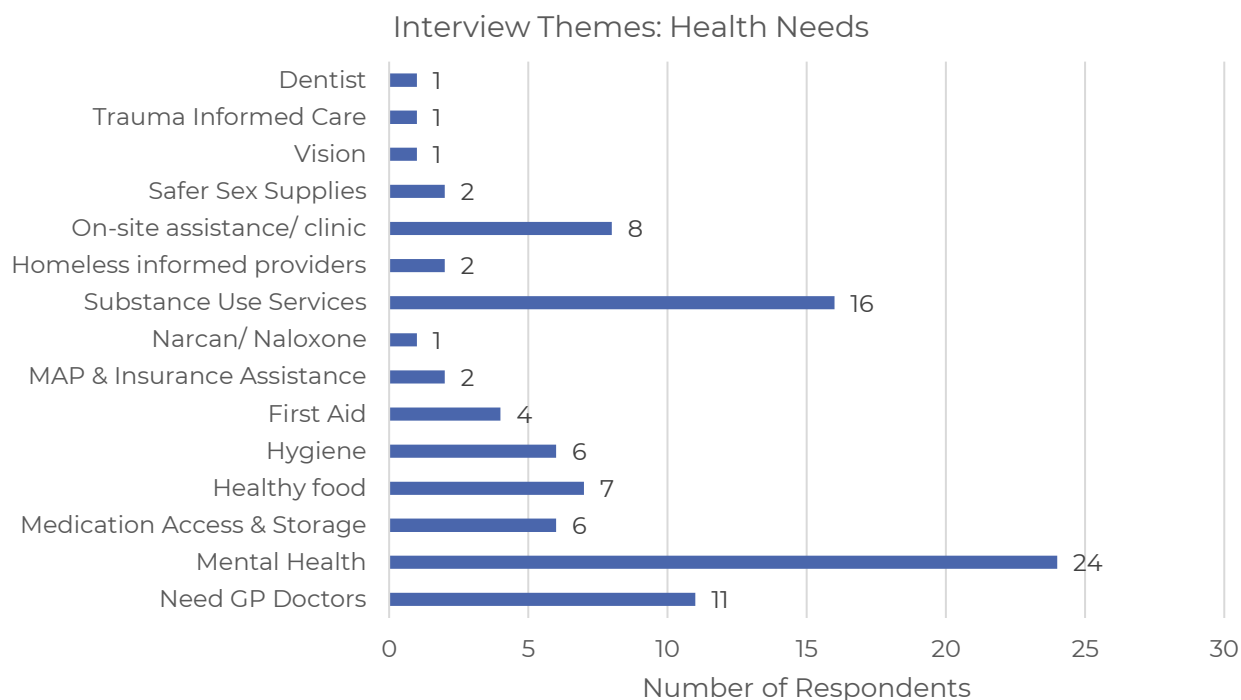


Past Experience of Interpersonal Violence



Health and Quality of Life





Health Needs Interview Theme Summary

Providers who understand issues specific to homelessness and trauma-informed practices

Several interviewees recounted experiences with medical and mental health providers who misunderstood them or did not properly treat them because they did not have an adequate understanding of issues specific to their experience of homelessness.

Medical triage system

Processes are needed that can help residents with first aid on-site and direct residents to necessary off-site services like ER, specialist medical care, etc. when needed.

Medication access and storage

Interviewees described having difficulty getting and keeping their medication and requested help getting, storing, and administering meds.

Mental health

Psychiatric services, counselling, especially substance abuse, domestic violence, and relationship/marriage counselling were highly requested by interviewees. One interviewee recounted that there have been 3 suicide attempts at the camp.

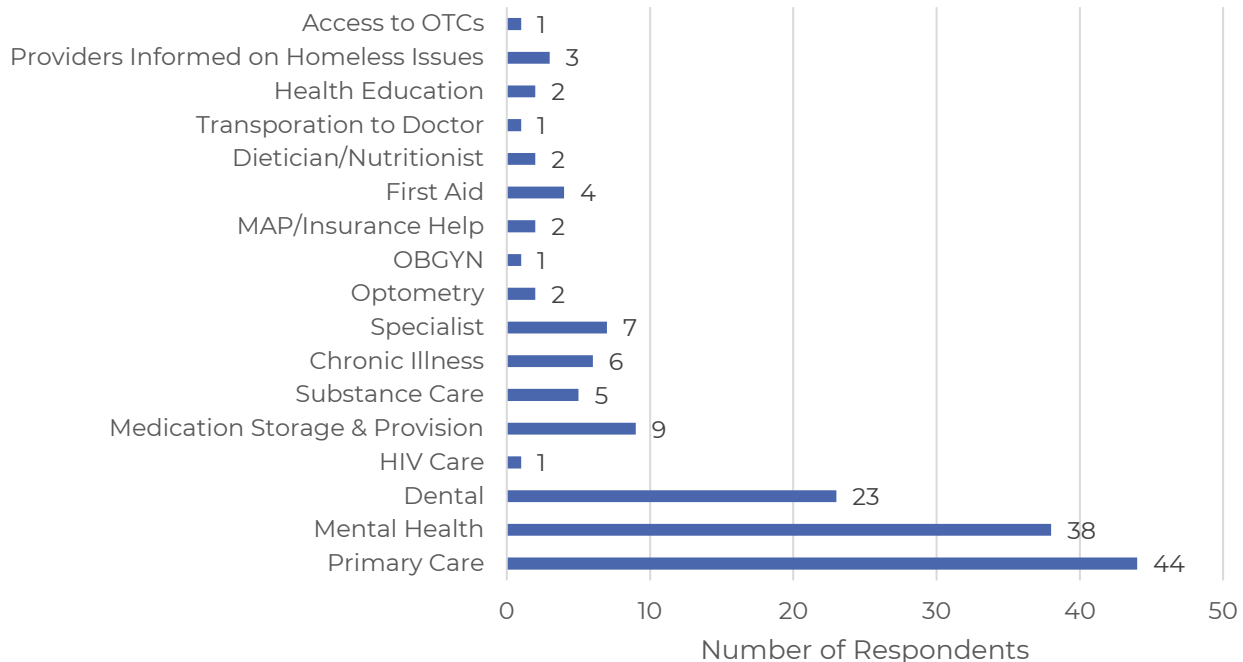
Healthy food

Interviewees described needing food that fit medical needs such as diabetic diet.

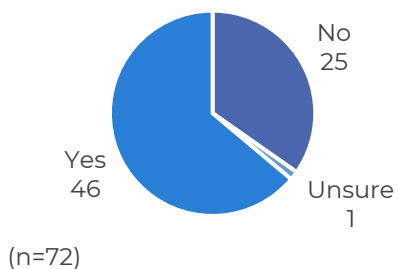
Substance use services

Interviewees expressed that substance use services were deeply needed, particularly safe needle disposal, safe needle use education, and access to Naloxone for residents to carry.

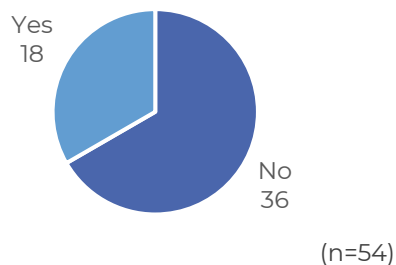
Desired Health Services



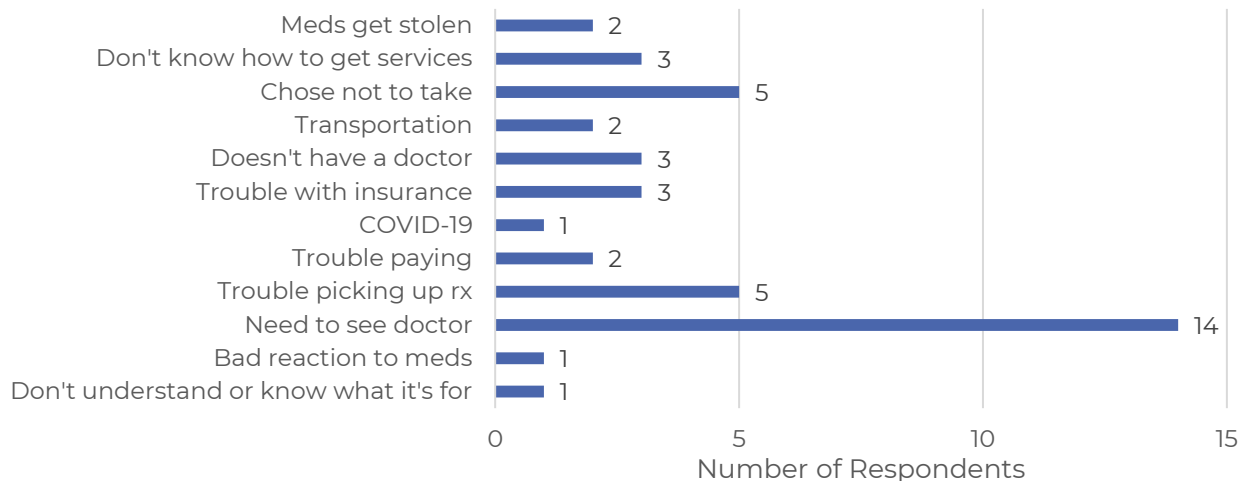
Prescribed a Medication



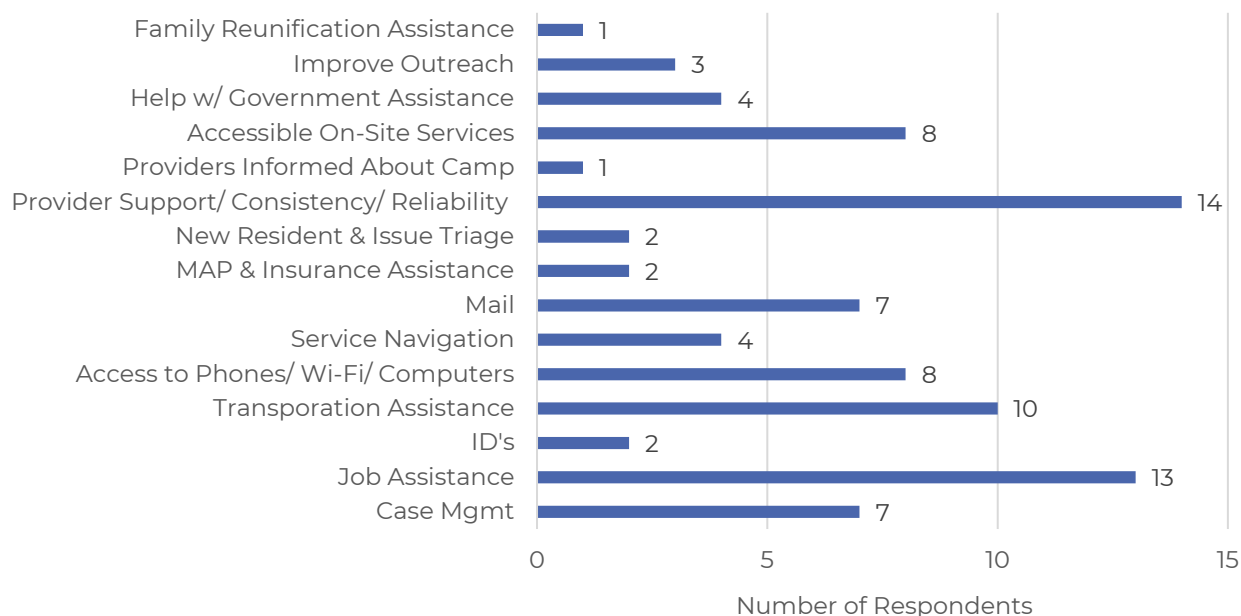
Taking Prescribed Medication



Reasons For Not Taking Prescribed Medications



Interview Themes: Service Needs



Service Needs Interview Theme Summary

Increased support, consistency, and reliability from providers

Overwhelmingly, interviewees felt that they had lost supportive services in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and needed more support, consistency, and reliability from providers. Higher service barriers included: closed offices, transportation barriers, and difficulties getting in touch with providers over phone and email.

“THE TIME AND ENERGY IT TAKES FOR ME TO GET SERVICES NEEDS TO BE WORTH IT AND OFTEN, IT’S NOT. I HAVE A DISABILITY AND I HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN SPENDING MY ENERGY ON SURVIVAL OR SPENDING IT ON GETTING SERVICES.” -INTERVIEWEE

New resident and issue triage system

Frustration with issues like: who has the right to occupy bays and camping lots, and responding to a mental health crisis that could be mitigated with a triage system.

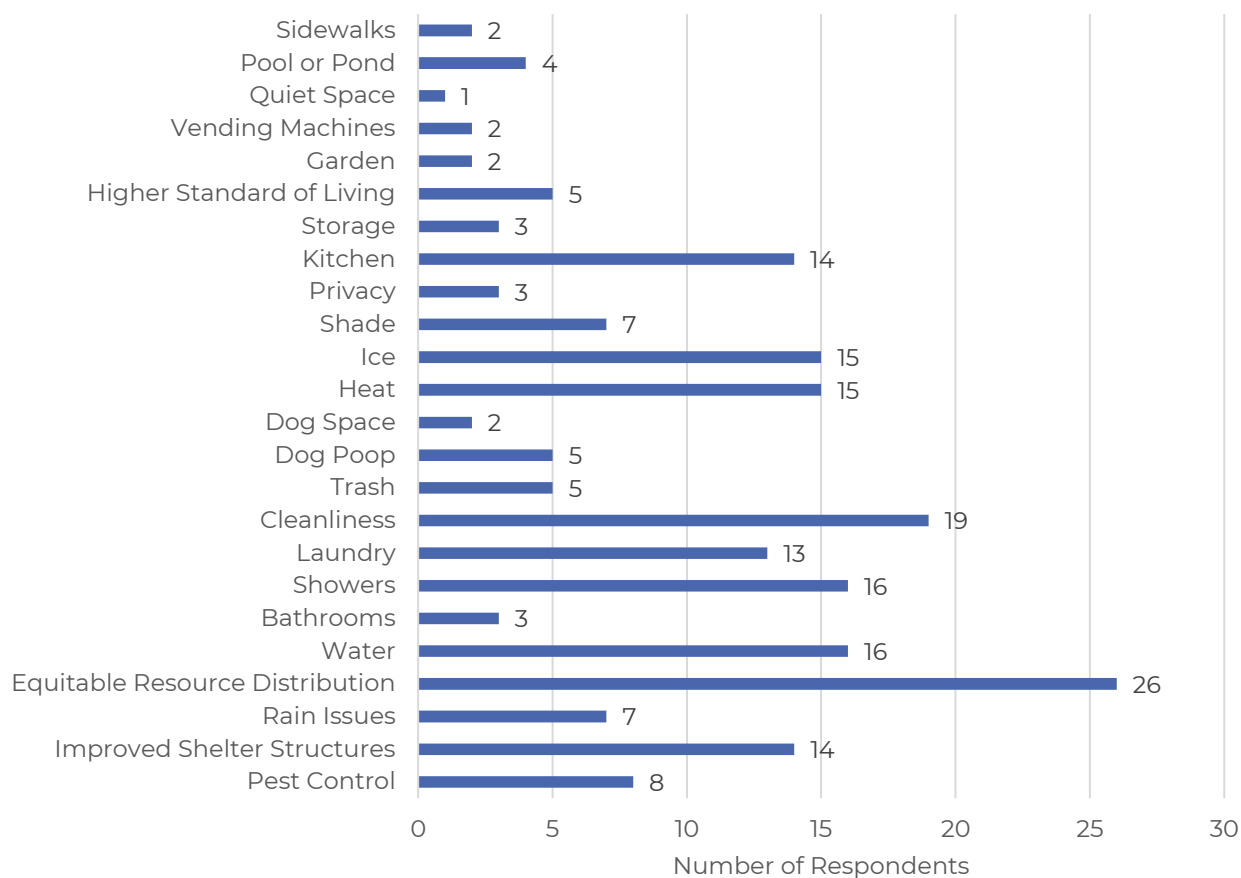
Job assistance

Interviewees requested help finding and applying to jobs, getting necessary ID documents, or professional licenses for jobs. Also requested for the purpose of employment was phones, Wi-Fi, computers, and transportation.

Mail

Basic mail services were highly requested due to transportation and service navigation barriers.

Interview Themes: Environment Needs



Environment Needs Interview Theme Summary

Equitable distribution of resources

Many interviewees expressed desire for more equitable access to water and electricity among those living in tents and those living in bays. Those living in bays are closest to the only sources of electricity and running water. One interviewee described this dynamic as, "The Haves and The Have Nots."

Heat

Interviewees overwhelmingly asked for access to ice, but also, a space with cooling such as fans or A.C., as well as cold water, shade, and other tools to mitigate heat illness.

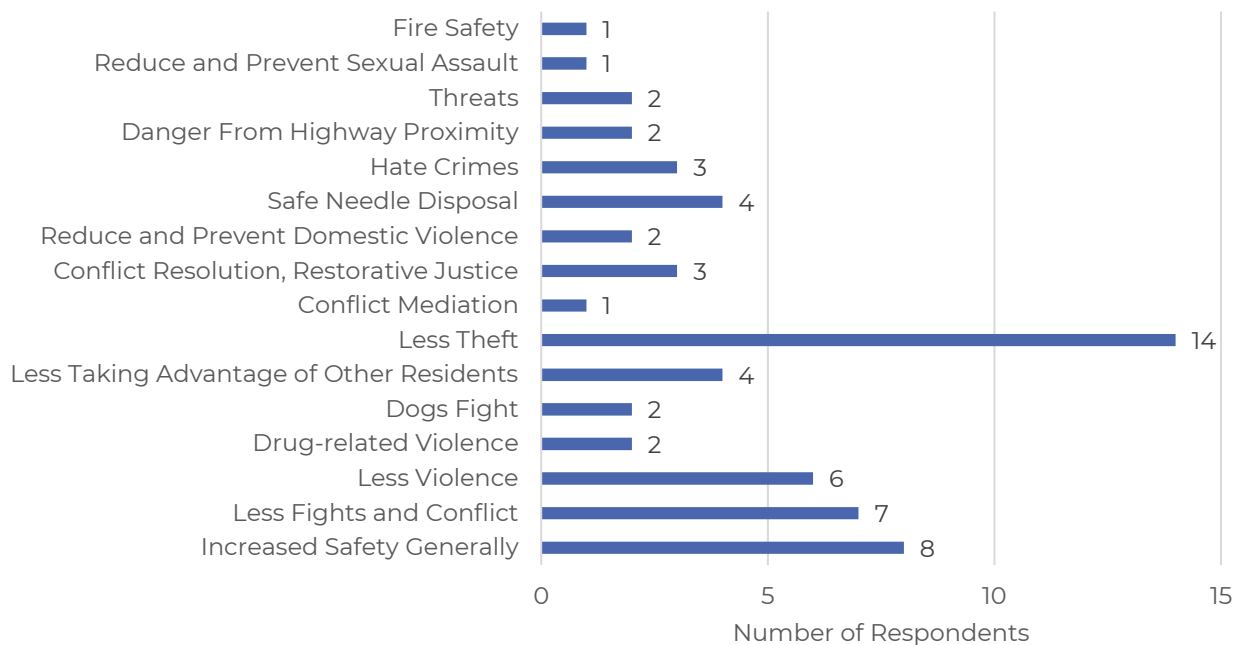
Pest Control

Pest control measures for insects, rodents, and snakes were highly requested as many residents have suffered illness and injury from contact with these pests.

Improved shelter structures

Assistance with improved water proofing for rain, and for safety and structural integrity of tents and bays. Interviewees also expressed various desires for tiny houses, pole barns, oilfield houses, and more.

Interview Themes: Safety Needs

**Safety Needs Interview Theme Summary****Community conflict resolution and mediation**

Many interviewees identified theft, violence, and fighting as major safety issues at the campground and suggested that community conflict mediation and resolution would be their preferred way of managing these issues.

Safe needle disposal

Need for both safe methods of needle disposal and greater education among residents about safe needle disposal practices.

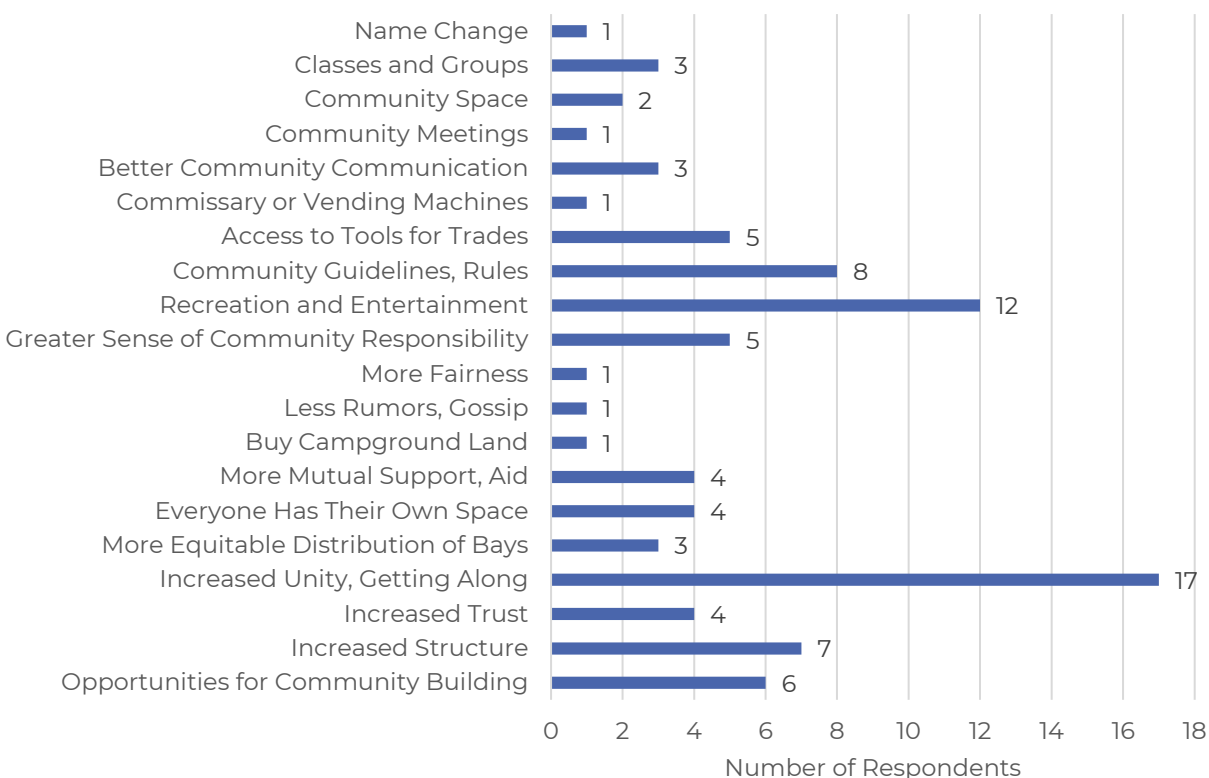
Hate crimes

Two people of color identified that race and gender identity motivated hate crimes had taken place at the camp, it can be assumed that this issue is likely greater than is reflected by its prevalence in the interviews.

Theft

Interviewees expressed that theft was a wide-ranging problem. Many expressed wanting community-based resolutions and a greater culture of trust.

Interview Themes: Community Needs



Community Needs Interview Theme Summary

Community guidelines and rules

Community guidelines and rules proposed covered a range from not allowing non-residents into the camp, to setting standards for individual hygiene and camp cleanliness, to creating mediation and judicial structures to manage conflict and reach resolution.

Increased trust, structure, and better communication

Interviewees expressed desires for a greater sense of security and predictability about campground operations and standards. Interviewees also expressed that community-level communication at the camp was challenging, leading to the spread of gossip and rumors.

Recreation and entertainment

Movies, TV, art supplies, and group activities like bingo and sports were requested. Exercise equipment for health and recreation was requested. Classes and groups such as: self-improvement classes, job licensure or resume building classes, GED classes, art and writing classes, and peer support groups were also requested.

Access to tools for trades

Trades and skills of campground residents include: carpentry, construction, iron working, welding, mechanics, plumbing, woodworking, cooking and barbering.