Homelessness and Feminine Hygiene

Crystal Arellano, Gabriela Flores, Gigi Ady and Lucy Chen
Population

According to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (2016), homelessness in Los Angeles County has continued to rise with a total of 46,874 in 2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homeless Count Totals</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County of LA</td>
<td>44,359</td>
<td>46,874</td>
<td>+5.7%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, OpenStreetMap, Mapbox
Jon Schleuss / @latimesgraphics
SPA 4 also known as Metro LA, encompasses many communities, but most importantly, **Downtown Los Angeles (including Skid Row)**. SPA 4 is our target population because it has the largest homeless population in comparison to other parts of Los Angeles.
Although this area has a large male population, the female population is prevalent and 58% of them are between ages 25-54 and 16% are below the age of 24. This means that 74% of the homeless women in SPA 4 are within menstrual age and utilize feminine hygiene products.
Homeless women are not considered a sub population and are usually generalized with the rest of the population. Specific data on our target population is limited, but we were able to identify that due to their prevalence and their age, they meet the need of feminine hygiene products during menstruation.
A woman menstruates about 3,000 times in her lifetime.

During menstruation, it is important to have safe and sanitary feminine hygiene. Products needed to absorb blood flow include: underwear, maxi pads, tampons, feminine cleansing wipes, reusable menstrual cups, reusable rags, etc.

When an individual is homeless, these products are not feasibly affordable, hard to find or not easily accessible.
Public Health Implications

Poor feminine hygiene includes reusing unsanitary materials, not washing as needed, leaving materials for absorption for too long or simply not using the right hygiene supplies. Unsafe and unhealthy personal hygiene during menstruation can result in:

- Reproductive Tract Infections
- Increase the risk for HPV infection
- Increase risk for cervical cancer
- Irregular vaginal discharge
- Severe pelvic pain
- Bacterial skin infections
- Dysuria
- Toxic Shock Syndrome

Overall, lack of feminine hygiene during menstruation can exacerbate certain health risks, trigger mental health issues, increase their susceptibility to discrimination and can overall put individuals at a higher risk for mortality.
In order to address this public health issue, The Ladybugs Movement will advocate, educate, organize communities, mobilize volunteers and create a sustainable solution to increase the access of feminine hygiene products.

Mission Statement: The Ladybugs Movement is a non-profit campaign with the mission to empower and improve the lives of homeless women in Los Angeles by increasing access of hygiene products.
The Ladybugs Movement Approach

The Ladybugs Movement is different than other existing organizations with a similar focus:

- We are not recreating the wheel by doing what shelters/missions/non profit organizations are already doing. We are collaborating with them to create uniformed sustainability to feminine hygiene products.
- We are using evidence based practices (strength based) and evaluating outcomes.
- Looking at the issue more broad (safe spaces, preventive services, social determinants of health).
- Aiming for policy development.
Specific Activities and Strategies

The Ladybugs Movement as the organizer will advocate on the importance of addressing this issue to organizations who help homeless women by phone calls, in person meetings and online discussions.

- Organize a campaign to collect funds and supplies
- Collections will be redirected back to the initial organizations partnered with
- Volunteer opportunities for members and community
Specific Activities and Strategies

Grant Funding

- Not enough safe and sanitary spaces for women to utilize for feminine hygiene purposes
- Strategy: Work with community stakeholders, organizations, and businesses within the area to increase the access to safe and sanitary public restrooms
- Create a resource book of safe and sanitary places for women to go to maintain their feminine hygiene
The specific activities TLM has done to involve the community, gain support and create a sustainable supply of donations is outreach through flyer distribution, a website / blog, social media page via Instagram and a GoFundMe page for monetary donations.
Specific Activities and Strategies

Ladybugs in Action - Feminine Hygiene Kit Making Day
Sustainability

Increasing awareness

● Using social media as a strategy
  ○ Increased chance that people from different social networks will find your cause and join without being constrained by geography, time, or disability
  ○ Individuals become involved in collective action through their personal connections

Creating partnerships

● Community Organizing Approach
Challenges

The biggest issue with addressing feminine hygiene is the cultural and social taboo norms around menstruation and reproductive health.

Funding for a consistent supply of feminine hygiene products is difficult to sustain.
Strengths

- Media / Internet sources have helped spread awareness and gain community support
- Strengthening organizations resources of hygiene products and creating a more sustainable method
- Strength based and evidence based campaign
- Has great potential to gain recognition because it is innovative, health focused, undeniable, local, as well as empowering
Thank you!

Please contact us for more information, donation questions or ways to get involved!

Email: theladybugsmovement@gmail.com

GoFundMe page: https://www.gofundme.com/289xxn6g

Instagram: theladybugsmovement


