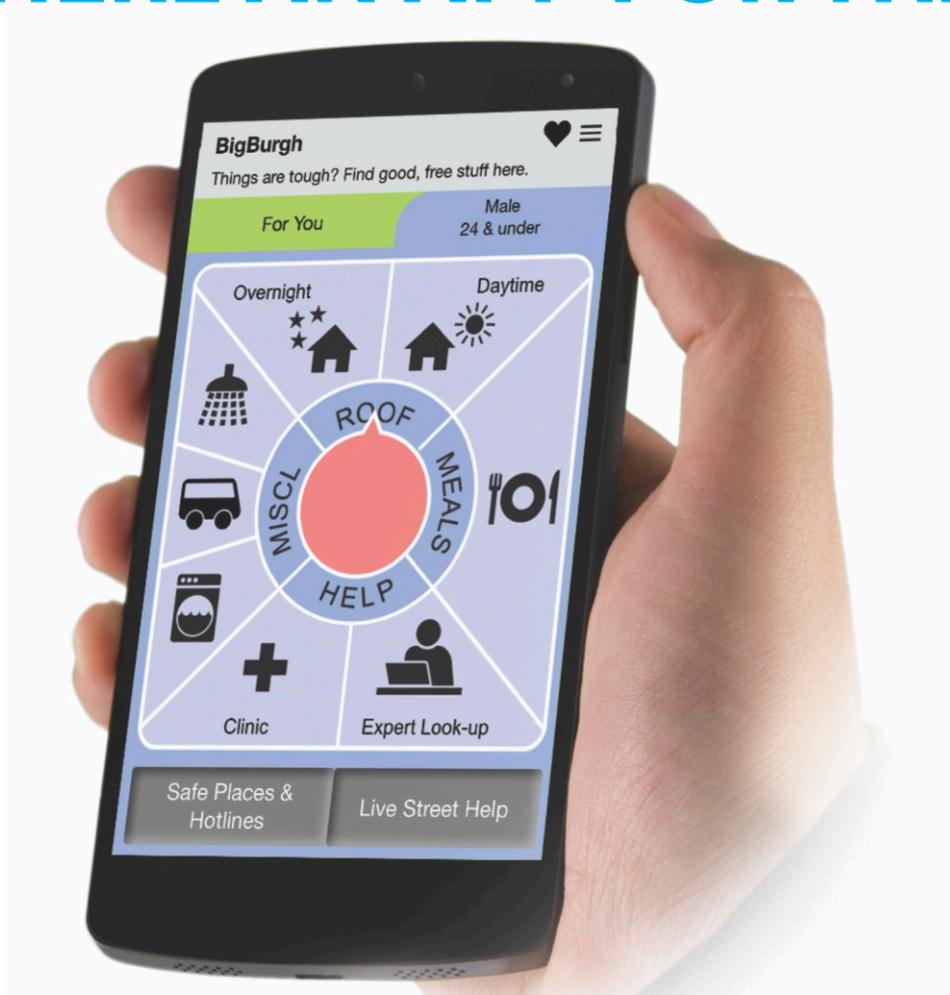


BigBurgh.com App

Helps Individuals
Experiencing Homelessness

“IS THERE AN APP FOR THAT?”



BigBurgh.com

BIGBURGH.com App Helps Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

Introduction

Since its inception 35 years ago, the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation (PCGF) has advocated for children and youth through grant-making and collaborating with public and private organizations to address critical issues that challenge our community through programs, practices and policy changes. In 2014, the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation committed to devoting its resources to address the issue of families with children experiencing homelessness in Allegheny County.

The challenges funders, service providers, law enforcement and others face are numerous. Those experiencing homelessness all too often are invisible and nomadic. These factors create challenges in securing accurate counts, understanding how they survive, determining what services are needed and/or delivering vital services to them.

It is estimated that:

- Nearly 1,165 individuals in the County are experiencing homelessness and living on the streets¹;
- About 150 unaccompanied youth (those 18 and older) live on the streets;
- Roughly 900 students from the Pittsburgh Public Schools system are experiencing homelessness;
- These statistics do not include people who “couch surf” by moving from home to home, living with family and friends.

PCGF is pleased to support the efforts of the Homeless Advisory Board that seeks to find permanent solutions to this urgent community issue. This Abstract is designed to document the development of the BigBurgh project and captures work completed through May 1, 2017. In the meantime, the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation is committed to partnering with numerous organizations to mitigate the circumstances of our fellow citizens experiencing homelessness.

Pamela W. Golden

**Executive Director
Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation
and Chair, BigBurgh Steering Committee**

¹ DHS Point in Time count from January 2016

Since Allegheny County set the ambitious goal to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring by 2022, numerous stakeholders – including city and county government departments and officials, social service providers, law enforcement officers, education, medical, funding communities and a host of nonprofit agencies – are collaborating to address this pressing issue.

Beginning in 2013, many working in the field requested technological assistance in response to the ongoing challenge of accessing up-to-date information by both homeless individuals and service providers. All too often, the system was too complicated for people to quickly access information in the field. It lacked centralization and details, and/or vital information was out of date. When aiding a homeless person seeking assistance, police officers often relied on a decades-old practice of referencing a single sheet of folded paper kept in the caps of their hats.

During a series of conversations taking place between and among Joseph Lagana (founder of Homeless Children’s Education Fund), Maurita Bryant (then-Assistant Chief of Pittsburgh Bureau of Police), Charles Keenan (Housing Coordinator of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services) and Bob Firth (President of Informing Design), one simple question repeatedly surfaced. “Is there an app for that?” referred to an obvious need to alter the system of connecting people (especially youth experiencing homelessness) with available services and agencies in a position to help them.

“Is there an app for that?” Those six words set in motion a collaboration that has created a highly successful model worthy of replication throughout the nation.

ABOUT BIGBURGH.COM

Dr. Lagana – a respected community connector and networker – took the question to Bob Firth of Informing Design. Before proposing potential solutions, the company spent 18 months evaluating the current situation, holding focus groups and benchmarking three of the two dozen-plus similar apps used around the world: San Francisco, Los Angeles and Australia. The foundation of BigBurgh’s design would provide answers to immediate issues that arise on the street with the touch of a fingertip, immediately eliminating the experience of wading through long lists of primarily irrelevant search results.

At the conclusion of their research phase, the Informing Design team reported a resounding, “Yes, there can be an app for that,” and, with the help of 10 local funding sources, the BigBurgh.com pilot project was born.

The project began with the formation of a coalition of well-informed and experienced partners, including the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, the City of Pittsburgh Bureau of Police, the United Way and its PA 2-1-1 service, Operation Safety Net, coordinators of the City's outreach team, foundation leaders, consumers and social service agency representatives.

A myriad of crucial elements and protocols have contributed to the success of BigBurgh.com:

- **EXPERTISE** – From the outset, law enforcement officers were involved in the conversation. In addition to working with management, several focus group discussions were held with officers patrolling city streets.
- **INCLUSIVENESS** – Guiding the process was a Steering Committee representing the County Department of Human Services, the United Way, City of Pittsburgh Police, Allegheny County Police, outreach service providers, the foundation community and the Homeless Children's Education Fund.
- **MANAGEMENT** – Involving the Homeless Children's Education Fund (HCEF) as the lead agency for fiscal and fundraising work provided premier project management since HCEF's mission in summary is "to advance the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness, guiding them to be productive, empowered citizens through programs and advocacy for systemic change."
- **BENCHMARKS** – Organizers researched similar apps already in use elsewhere in the world to incorporate strengths and avoid shortcomings.
- **FREE** – All services featured on BigBurgh are free.
- **FEEDBACK** – Youth who were experiencing or had experienced homelessness took part in focus groups. Organizers asked them to test BigBurgh by using smartphones (provided if an individual had no phone) and provide feedback.
- **DESIGN** - The app's simple design coupled with its free access is a true incentive to use BigBurgh.
- **UPDATES** – A staff outreach liaison ensures that the information in the app remains accurate and up-to-date by visiting several agencies per week and calling/emailing a half dozen organizations each week.
- **ENGAGEMENT** – More than 2,000 individuals have been trained on the use of BigBurgh.com. While the app is highly intuitive and simple to use, 50+ training sessions have enabled the developer to obtain feedback and make improvements throughout the process.
- **SUPPORT** – Numerous high-ranking elected officials have personally backed the project. Pittsburgh Mayor William Peduto, Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald and U.S. Congressman Mike Doyle co-hosted a press conference to unveil the app to the public and generate media attention to create awareness of the app and foster support from various departments within local government.

BigBurgh.com, a mobile-optimized website, is what emerged from this work. Completely free and accessible without the need for any login or app store account, BigBurgh.com can be viewed on any smartphone, tablet, laptop or desktop computer with a data plan or Internet connectivity. It is an invaluable resource for police, teachers, clergy, medical and social services professionals, parents and ordinary citizens alike. Most importantly, it's for the homeless themselves – more than 60% of homeless youth have smartphones, and homeless adults frequently access computers at libraries and other centers.

BigBurgh opens with a “For You” dial that enables the user to pre-filter results based on his or her gender (including transgender), age, and veteran or family with young children status. The categories themselves parse out the most important everyday human needs for the homeless: shelter (both during the day and overnight), meals, clinics (further broken down into type of health need), showers and laundry, clothing and diapers, food pantries, transportation, and expert help with financial, legal and employment matters. Results then appear in order of distance from the user.

To be included in the app's content, services must be free, with a minimum of documentation (i.e. photo ID only). Each service is described in succinct, jargon-free terms that speak directly and welcomingly to the user. Built into the database is an “Access Narrative” field to provide users with unique details of building access (i.e. the entrance may be through a particular, not-obvious door, or unexpectedly be down a back alley).

Currently, BigBurgh includes more than 170 free services available from 80 different providers within the City of Pittsburgh. To spread the word to those who can benefit the most, BigBurgh promotional materials were distributed to 60+ centers, including clinics, libraries, churches and food banks, i.e. agencies most likely to provide services to individuals experiencing homelessness.

Recent features include the introduction of “Panic Button” tabs at the bottom of the display. The main Services dial covers everyday needs but underneath the dial are two buttons: one for “Safe Places & Hotlines” and the other for “Email Street Help.” The first button provides users with instant access to hotlines for crises such as rape and domestic violence. The second option enables users to connect to outreach workers who can then come to them with help. Another recent addition is a “Forum” feature to facilitate direct communication between police and outreach workers. An “Empty Bed Alert” function enables shelters with no-shows to make those beds available on a nightly, ad hoc basis through professional outreach workers out on the street.

Plans are underway to expand the geographic coverage area to all of Allegheny County. Beginning in April 2017, BigBurgh.com became available in Spanish.

To download the app to an iPhone, Android or desktop, simply type in “bigburgh.com” in the browser.

NOTE: It is not an app that is sold in the app store.

BigBurgh.com PITTSBURGH'S HOMELESS SERVICES WEB SITE

Safari Chrome ee Windows Firefox

For You: Customize the results . . . or go straight to **All Services**

Offerings divided between everyday needs and urgent needs

Click for Listings: See services mapped out and listed in distance order

Save Listings to Favorites (& recover them when off-line)

Click for Full Info: Then get the lowdown or how a service works.

find Safe Places fast

Email Street Help connects Police and the homeless themselves with outreach workers. Users can send pictures and their GPS location too.

INDEPENDENT AUDIT

An independent evaluator has reported (based on bimonthly randomized spot checks) that in BigBurgh’s first six months: “91% of queries returned at least one service listing, 100% of listings were relevant to the information requested with 0% error rate in contact info, and the BigBurgh app returned more specific information than other online searches.”

FINANCIALS

Due of the length of time required to develop, test and launch the app, organizers sought financial support from foundations for a two-year period. The Homeless Children’s Education Fund provides project management and serves as fiscal agent. Expenses to date are approximately \$130,000. Generous in-kind donations from numerous individuals and organizations supported the effort from its inception, including an in-kind donation from designer Bob Firth who did not charge for time invested, which is estimated to be 1,000 hours.

FOUNDATION SUPPORT

Ayres Family Foundation
Birmingham Foundation
Buncher Foundation
Heinz Endowments
Highmark Health Foundation
Margaret Ritchie R. Battle Fund
McCarten Foundation
Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation
Pittsburgh Foundation
Serafini Foundation (and Terry Serafini)

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Numerous individuals have contributed a wealth of knowledge and expertise to ensure the success of the BigBurgh project.

STEERING COMMITTEE

Since the project's inception, the Steering Committee has met on a regular basis to provide project oversight.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Pamela Golden, Executive Director, Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation, and Steering Committee Chair

Joseph Lagana, Founder, Homeless Children's Education Fund

Bob Firth, President, Informing Design, Inc.

MEMBERSHIP

Phil Hallen, President Emeritus, Falk Foundation

Charles Keenan, Housing Coordinator, Allegheny County Department of Human Services

Anna Kudrav, Assistant Chief of Operations, Pittsburgh Bureau of Police

Angela Reynolds, Director, 2-1-1 and Helping Families Thrive, United Way of Allegheny County

Chris Roach, Outreach Supervisor, Operation Safety Net and Homeless Outreach Coordinating Committee

Jeff Shook, Professor, University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work

STAKEHOLDERS

In addition to the Steering Committee, a host of stakeholders contributed their expertise to the project and included:

Maurita Bryant, Assistant Chief, Pittsburgh Bureau of Police (retired), currently Assistant Superintendent, Allegheny County Police

Carlos Carter, Executive Director, Homeless Children's Education Fund

Stephanie Ciappini, Program Manager, Pittsburgh Mercy Community Health

Julie DeSyn, Vice President, United Way/PA 2-1-1 Southwest

Joseph Elliott, Manager, Specialized Integrated Services and Supports, Allegheny County Department of Human Services

Anne Fogoros, Operations Director, United Way/PA 2-1-1 Southwest

David Gloss, Clinical Outreach Lead, Pittsburgh Mercy Community Health

Abigail Horn, Senior Adviser, Allegheny County Department of Human Services

Breanna Jay, Crisis Team Leader, Community Human Services

Jeff Korczyk, Lieutenant, Allegheny County Police

Jacob Miller, formerly with Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC

Nick Pashel, Officer, Pittsburgh Bureau of Police

Aimee Plowman, Director, Auberle 412 Youth Zone

CREATIVE TEAM

The Creative Team at Informing Design consists of mathematics and design professionals with decades of experience in mapmaking, transit planning, and untangling urban road networks.

Bob Firth, Design Lead

Will Hackney, Cartography

Deborah Knox, Social Services Liaison

Yelena Lamm, Graphic Design

a programming team, headed by **Chris Harrington** (Active Interface, LLC)

INITIAL RESULTS

BigBurgh started in beta mode in May 2016 and went public in August. Within months, BigBurgh has become a viral success.

Within its first year, BigBurgh attracted 53,000 site visits. From December to February, the homeless app for the 24 million residents of Australia received slightly fewer than BigBurgh and the homeless app for the 850,000 residents of San Francisco received 67% fewer visits. Moreover, BigBurgh sees 3.0 page views per visit compared to Australia's 2.1 page views and San Francisco's 1.2 page views. This means users are *actually accessing* BigBurgh – they are drilling down from category to subcategory to a description of a service. More importantly, the reaction from users has been outstanding.

The anecdotal stories are plentiful. The “Email Street Help” function was used to get first aid for a man with a leg gash who refused to go to the emergency room; to help move an encampment that had become a neighborhood nuisance; and secure glasses for a homeless high school student. One service provider that saw a significant increase in the number of holiday meals served attributed it to awareness created by BigBurgh.

FUTURE PLANS

Moving forward, training programs will continue and the outreach liaison will keep the content current. Information is being gathered to expand the geographic footprint beyond the City of Pittsburgh to include all of Allegheny County. Ultimately, the goal is to identify a permanent home for BigBurgh.

Plans are underway to develop a more robust measurement and evaluation component to determine the impact that BigBurgh is having on all users. County Executive Rich Fitzgerald and Mayor Bill Peduto appointed a task force to assist with the transition of the project to a permanent home within the government. Finally, other regions across the country have expressed interest in creating similar apps for their areas.

BIGBURGH TIMELINE

2013 QUESTION FIRST VOICED: “IS THERE AN APP FOR THAT?”

2015

- Informing Design begins research
- Bob Firth develops specs, functionality and data model
- First police focus group assembled

2016

- Informing Design work is funded and project begins
- First Steering Committee meeting takes place
- First youth focus group assembled
- Second police focus group takes place
- Beta released (May 1)
- Social Service Liaison begins working on project
- Public launch features press conference with Mayor Peduto, County Executive Fitzgerald and Congressman Doyle (August 29)

2017

- Spanish translation introduced
- Many new app functions added including empty bed alert
- Expansion to Monongahela Valley
- Outreach forum with police takes place

UPCOMING

- Training for Pittsburgh Council on Higher Education (PCHE) campus police, Crisis Intervention Team police, City EMS/Fire and Downtown Ministerium
- Spin-off initiatives to create similar apps for opioid addition, incarceration and mental health crisis

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING...

“You’re meeting youth where they’re at in terms of technology use: A+ for sure. You’re trying to simplify things with user-friendly searches: again A+ ... can’t commend you more. I was shocked to hear that you engaged street outreach workers and police as end-users. I’ve never heard of anyone doing this before. This is such a big deal.”

Prof. Eric Rice, USC,
Huffington Post homeless issues reporter
and expert on homelessness

“Every day, I find out there is another kid who has used the app and was able to get the resources that they needed.”

Debra Smallwood, parent volunteer and
organizer, Brashear High School

“We have the resources to get people exactly what they need quickly. That makes our relationship with the homeless much stronger than it’s been in the past and eases the tensions that can arise when a uniformed officer interacts with a member of a vulnerable population.”

Assistant Chief Anna Kudrav of the
City of Pittsburgh Bureau of Police

“Super excited about the app. It is truly a great resource and tool!”

Vaughn Skinker,
Youth Outreach & Care Coordinator,
Children’s & Adolescent and Young Adult
Health Care Center, Children’s Hospital
of Pittsburgh of UPMC

“Times are tough, but this app truly treats us with dignity and respect.”

Beta tester visiting 412 Youth Zone

“It’s very exciting. I feel like Pittsburgh is at the forefront of this innovation and this technology.”

Chris Roach, Outreach Supervisor,
Operation Safety Net and member of the
BigBurgh.com stakeholder group

“Instead of leaving the young people to their own volition to solve their problems, now they can actually use that mobile app to get the services they need rather than simply relying on each other.”

Joseph Lagana, Founder,
Homeless Children’s Education Fund