



Albert Schweitzer Fellowship Final Report  
Street Medicine Healthy Feet Initiative  
Eliana Small, April 2021



In Street Medicine, it is our mission to *go to the people* in an effort to bring those who have been excluded back into the fold of traditional healthcare. Through street medicine, we provide resources and treatment for both chronic disease maintenance and acute non-emergent care. The needs of our patients on the streets vary greatly, as do the resources we are able to provide. One of the challenges of street medicine is aligning our treatment goals with our patient's reality. If our patient does not have a safe place to sleep at night, they many times are not concerned when they are out of their blood pressure medication. In the same regard, foot care is an often underappreciated and overlooked aspect of care for our neighbors experiencing homelessness because of the many other challenges they often face, though many of our patients rely on their feet as a primary mode of transportation.

The Street Medicine Healthy Feet Initiative was set in motion in order to supplement the medical resources provided by Street Medicine teams in Detroit in order to broaden the spectrum of support we provide to our patients experiencing homelessness. As with all of our efforts, our ultimate goal is to form relationships and trust which will help to bring effective care to those who have been excluded. By providing foot care, we will strive to meet an unmet need of those we serve.

This project is multifaceted, providing both preventative resources and access to hands-on foot care. The preventative aspect of this project centered around the distribution of Healthy Feet Kits to our patients seen both on the street, and in shelter-based foot care clinics. The contents of these kits are designed with the intention of meeting the specific needs of this unique populations. In addition to these resources, another aspect of this project was to improve the education and training out street medicine volunteers get regarding foot care by providing curated resources and training tools, specific to the challenges faced by our unsheltered patients.

The overarching goal of the project was to provide much needed foot care services to our friends experiencing homelessness in a manner which breaks down power dynamics to promote the health and wellbeing of our patients, and the humility and compassion of our volunteers.

The target audience of this initiative was individuals experiencing homelessness in Detroit with an emphasis on preventative resources among the rough sleeper population. The individuals being served by this project were those outreach teams met with on the street with Detroit Street Care and Street Medicine Detroit, individuals receiving services from the Pope Francis Center and Fort Street Presbyterian Church, and individuals staying at the Neighborhood Service Organization and Kelly's. Initially the goal was to provide care on the street and in NSO, but given the circumstances created by COVID-19, being flexible with locations and timelines allowed delivery of services to a greater number of individuals.

At both our foot care clinics and through street medicine outreach, roughly five hundred foot care kits were distributed to our patients over the course of the past year. These kits – as seen in photos below - contained clean socks, nail files, nail clippers, foot powder, moisturizer, Vaseline, body wipes, face masks, hand sanitizer, and additional materials as they were available. In addition to foot care materials, these kits also included face masks, hand sanitizer, and information about COVID-19 specific to the unsheltered population. In addition to the kits, we distributed >1000 pairs of socks and >50 pairs of water proof winter boots to our unsheltered patients.





The term “foot care clinic” applies loosely to the shelter based, soup-kitchen based, and street-based operations we conduct. As seen in the pictures, our set up can take many different forms and be implemented in many different settings. One of our goals with everything we do is mobility and versatility. By traveling light with all of our essentials, we can truly bring foot care to people where they are, whether that be concrete steps (picture 1), behind a dumpster at a liquor store (picture 2), in a church (picture 3) or in a warming center/soup kitchen (picture 4).



Over the course of the year, we gradually were able to incorporate more and more foot care clinics into our weekly and monthly routine. Starting out with just one clinic per month at the onset of this project, foot care clinics are now being held on the following days:

Every Monday at Fort Street Presbyterian Church

Every 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday at Pope Francis Center (currently at TCF)

Every 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday at NSO

In addition to the 8 foot-care specific clinics each month, spanning three locations, foot care resources are now consistently available during all regular medical clinic runs:

Every Thursday at Fort Street Presbyterian

Every 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday at Pope Francis Center (currently at TCF)

As well as all street outreach runs:

Every Wednesday

Every Friday

Every 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday

**This adds up to 5 days of foot care resource availability per week, and over 20 days of foot care resource availability per month.**

**The total number of people able to receive care during each of these days varies by location and by number of volunteers available. On any given day, a minimum of 4 patients and maximum of 15 may receive foot care from our team.**

The care we provide is for a variety of things, including cutting nails, cleaning feet or trimming corns, to post-amputation wound care, fungal infections, trench foot and frostbite. The current foot care schedule and resources being provided will continue to be maintained by Detroit Street

Care and Street Medicine Detroit volunteers as a core feature of the services provided by street medicine teams.

Initially, one of the major goals of this project surrounded educating and training medical student volunteers in the practice of foot care. Unfortunately, due to COVID, the number of volunteers we were able to involve in these activities was drastically limited, and subsequently so was the capacity for training. Over the last two months of the fellowship we have had the opportunity to include more students in foot care clinics, and held “on the fly” trainings with each of them individually, or in small groups. While previously I had planned to create training videos for students to view prior to attending a foot care clinic, after training students in person this year, I feel this is a much more appropriate method of training moving forward. While videos would be able to be seen by a larger audience, this would limit the students’ opportunities to ask questions and get hands on practice prior to seeing patients in clinic.



Student volunteer participation and feedback was planned to be a large part of my analysis of impact of this project. With the low number of students able to participate, I opted to ask for anecdotal feedback from students, rather than surveyed feedback before and after participation. Additionally, patient feedback was taken into great consideration as the project got off of the ground. We learned from our patients about what type of products they would like to be included in the foot care kits, what boots would be best for our future orders, what type of socks were the best at drying out quickly, and so much more. This feedback, and feedback about the care they

received, was incredibly constructive and helpful throughout the process.

Feedback from both student volunteers and patients seen at the foot care clinics can be seen on the following two pages.



## Patient Feedback

"I came in here with a limp and I'm walking out pain free. Thank you so much."

– Foot Care Patient

"My feet haven't felt this good in years. All that pressure GONE because you guys took your time and did something for me I don't imagine you love to do. Thank you."

– Foot Care Patient

"I came back again because this helped me out so much a couple of weeks ago."

– Foot Care Patient

"I hope you know this made a big difference to me. Thank you."

– Foot Care Patient

"Thank you, thank you, thank you. I can't say it enough."

– Foot Care Patient

"I could tap dance my feet feel so fresh now!"

- Foot Care Patient



## Medical Student Feedback

"When somebody comes in with such severe pain and they leave without discomfort, without a limp, tap dancing, because you were able to help them out in such a simple way, that is an incredible feeling."

"It was a very gratifying experience. It is really humbling to clean and take care of someone's feet. You forget the simple comfort of having healthy feet and you don't realize how much healthy feet can improve someone's day and life. I enjoyed this so much more than I thought I would."

"I had a lot of fun today and had a really great experience. It was relaxing and satisfying. It truly felt like a partnership between me and my patient and I felt like she was teaching me just as much, if not more, than I was helping her. We learned together the whole time and I really enjoyed my first experience here."

"You can see how taking care of someone's feet can transform them from when they walk in the door vs when they walk out it. Instant gratification for them and for us. It is awesome to see and be a part of."

"As a student, doing foot care for folks experiencing homelessness is a privilege. You get to learn about people's every day struggles and when someone comes in with such severe pain and they leave with no pain, no limp, and tap dancing... that is an indescribable feeling."

"It [foot care clinic] was a very gratifying experience. It is really humbling to clean and take care of someone's feet. You forget the simple comfort of having healthy feet and you don't realize how much healthy feet can improve someone's day and life. I enjoyed this so much more than I thought I would."



"I had one patient today who really let himself be vulnerable by coming here because he is so self-conscious of the appearance. Because of that he had really let his feet go but today we were able to normalize it and he was comfortable with us and got the care he needed."

"You can see how taking care of someone's feet can transform them when they walk in the door versus when they walk out of the door. Instant gratification for them and for us."



This year posed many challenges which required creative solutions. Through the teamwork and collaboration of Detroit Street Care and Street Medicine Detroit, we were able to accomplish so much. In addition to increasing the foot care resources we offered, this included:

- Building and maintaining field hand washing stations during COVID-19 shut downs
- Enacting a policy which prevented the eviction of encampments during COVID-19 and placed a series of checks and balances on how/when an encampment removal may be carried out in the future.
- Provided COVID-19 vaccines to our unsheltered neighbors
- Participated in numerous COVID-19 mass community testing days
- Hosted an advocacy workshop at the International Street Medicine Symposium
- Distributed thousands of face masks and “COVID-19 Safety Kits” to those experiencing homelessness in Detroit
- Strengthened our network of community allies

While none of these items were on my list of goals when I wrote out the pre-COVID plan for my Schweitzer Fellowship, these accomplishments were important pieces to keeping the community we serve safe over the past year. It was a privilege to get to play an active role in promoting the health of our community while adapting my initial goals to meet the everchanging rollercoaster of 2020. I look forward to the projects we have initiated this year – including the Healthy Feet Initiative – continuing to grow and adapt to the needs of the population we serve over the coming years, and I feel incredibly privileged to be a part of it.

