

MỌI NGƯỜI ĐƯỢC CHÀO ĐÓN TẠI ĐÂY
TOUT MOUN BYENVENI ISIT LA
الجميع مرحب هنا
TODOS SON BIENVENIDOS

EVERYONE IS WELCOME HERE

HÄR ÄR ALLA VÄLKOMMNA

TUDU ALGUEN Ê BENVINDU
波士頓歡迎您
AQUI, TODOS SÃO BEM VINDOS

CITY of BOSTON



The Engagement Center (EC)



City of Boston
Mayor Martin J. Walsh

The Challenge

- **Large on-street population in the Mass/Cass area struggling with substance use disorder, homelessness, and behavioral health conditions.**
- Individuals use **public spaces, sidewalks, parks, and public libraries**, to spend time during the day.
- For some people, **daytime social services have prohibitive barriers**, like security checks and no tolerance for substance use.
- These individuals are **often in need of a safe place to go during the day, medical care, or access to recovery services.**

The Need

**A safe, welcoming and low-barrier space for
daytime use as a crucial need in the Melnea Cass /
Mass Ave neighborhood.**

The Question

Can we design **a welcoming and safe place for people struggling with substance use disorder or homelessness** to escape the elements and engage in services?



The Approach

The Engagement Center (EC) began with a **collaborative, community-based approach to improve quality of life** in the Mass Ave/Melnea Cass neighborhood and surrounding areas:

- Mayor's Office of Recovery Services created a City of Boston **internal working group**
- **Engaged individuals living on the street and in emergency shelters, local businesses & neighborhood associations** in design process
- Pilot began August 2nd, and **reached maximum capacity within 30 days of opening**

The Approach

The City of Boston, under the leadership of Martin J. Walsh and the **Mayor's Office of Recovery Services**, invested \$1.87m.

Programmatic Leadership provided by **Bureau of Recovery Services**, BPHC.

The Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics (MONUM) was a key partner in the design of the EC.

Boston Healthcare for the Homeless Program provides medical care.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health contributed \$250,000 to the Engagement Center for additional staff coverage.

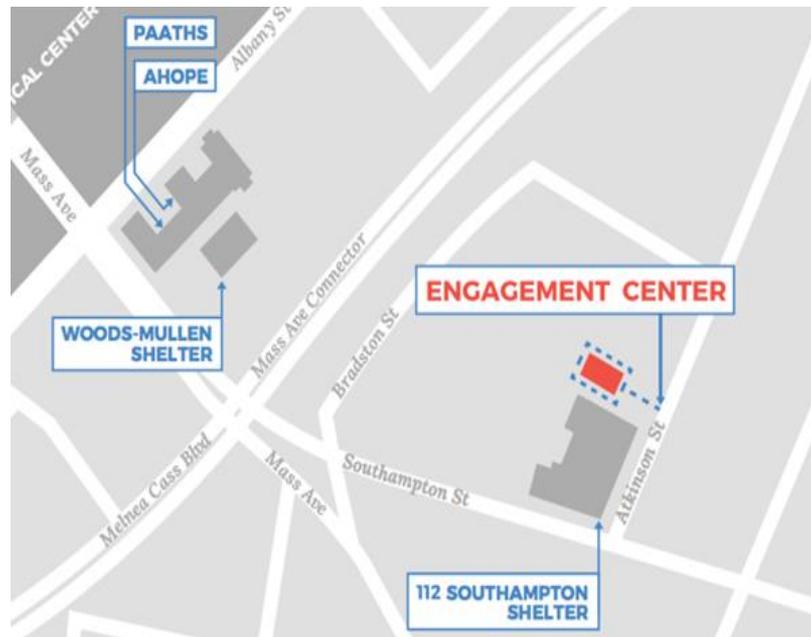


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Goals of the EC

The Engagement Center aims to:

- Create a comfortable space for individuals to **begin or continue engagement in services**
- Provide a **safe, low-threshold space** for neighborhood residents to spend time during the day
- **Address neighborhood concerns** regarding sidewalk congestion
- Offer BPD and street outreach workers a **place to guide individuals** in need of services and support





The Engagement Center: Before



The Engagement Center: Before



The Engagement Center: After



The Engagement Center: After

The EC provides basic amenities and access to a range of recovery services

- Water, snacks, coffee, and bathrooms
- Computers, phone chargers, and TV
- Medical care from Boston Healthcare for the Homeless
- Referral to medical care, behavioral health care, recovery services, and housing services
- Fitness groups by Phoenix Multi-sport
- Writing groups by Writers Without Margins
- Services requested by clients, including foot care, dental care, and workforce development
- Social space



Community partners have engaged to support the EC

Examples include:

- **Clothing and toiletries** [Newmarket Business Association](#)
- **Food and meeting space** [Corcoran Jennison](#)
- **Books and board games** [Andrew Square Business Association](#)
- **Books for library** [Boston Public Library](#)
- **Holiday breakfasts** [Boston University](#)
- **Holiday client party** [Hope House](#)
- **Research evaluation** [DoIT and MONUM](#)



Programming the EC

the
**Writers'
Workshop**
at the
Engagement
Center

Storytelling
Sharing & Support
Thursdays
3:00–4:00pm
Facilitated by
**Faith Breisblatt
& Skoot Mosby**



HANDS TO HEART - CENTER -



YOGA FOR THE PEOPLE



Programming the EC

The EC has resulted in improved service engagement

Open 7 days/week 7am-7pm

Number of client contacts/week = **5,147**

Unduplicated guests/day = **300**

Number of Program Referrals/week = **27**

Number of BHCHP visits/week = **35**

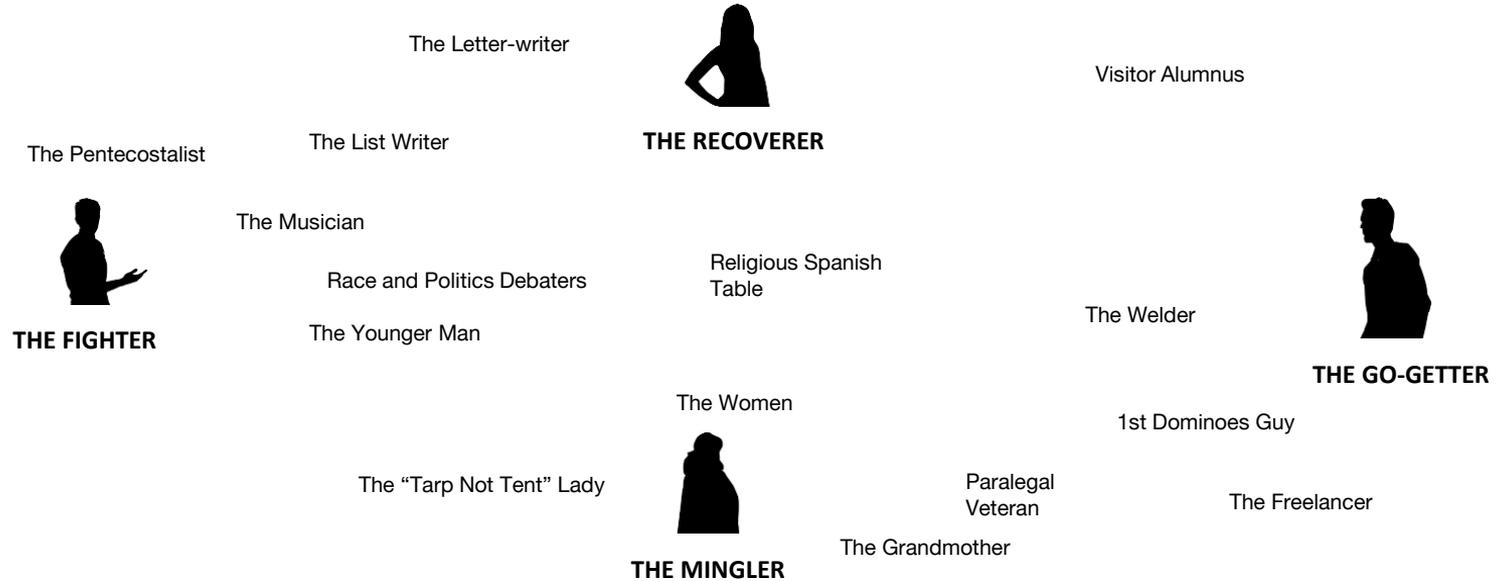


Qualitative Evaluation

- What draws guests to the Engagement Center, what makes them stay, and where are they coming from / going to?
- What unexpectedly positive or negative uses have emerged since the Engagement Center opened?
- How can we support the needs of guests with further pilot programming and amenities?
- What areas can the Engagement Center most improve upon?



Understanding “who” is using the EC



NOTE: This is not a quantitative study, and this “map” should not be taken as quantitative data.

*Names are pseudonyms

Homelessness and stigmatization strips people down. The Engagement Center builds people back up.



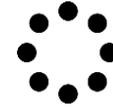
A PIT STOP

“I come here for coffee”



MY COMMUNITY

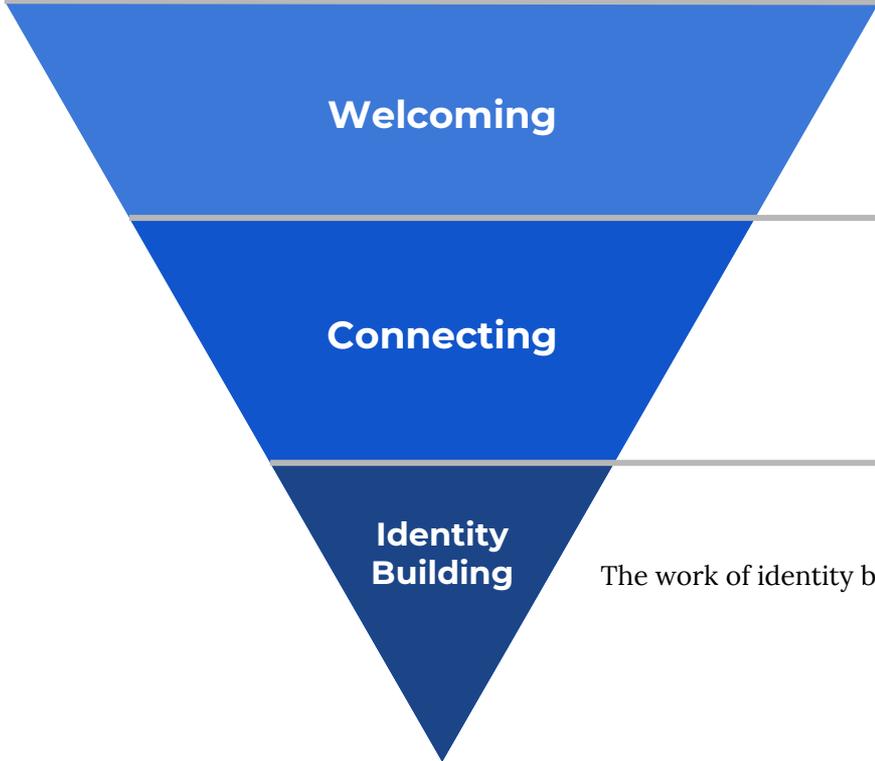
“I asked for fruit cups – and the staff ordered it for me”



MY HOME

“When I don’t need to be anywhere else, I’m here”

Homelessness and stigmatization strips people down. The Engagement Center builds people back up.



Welcoming

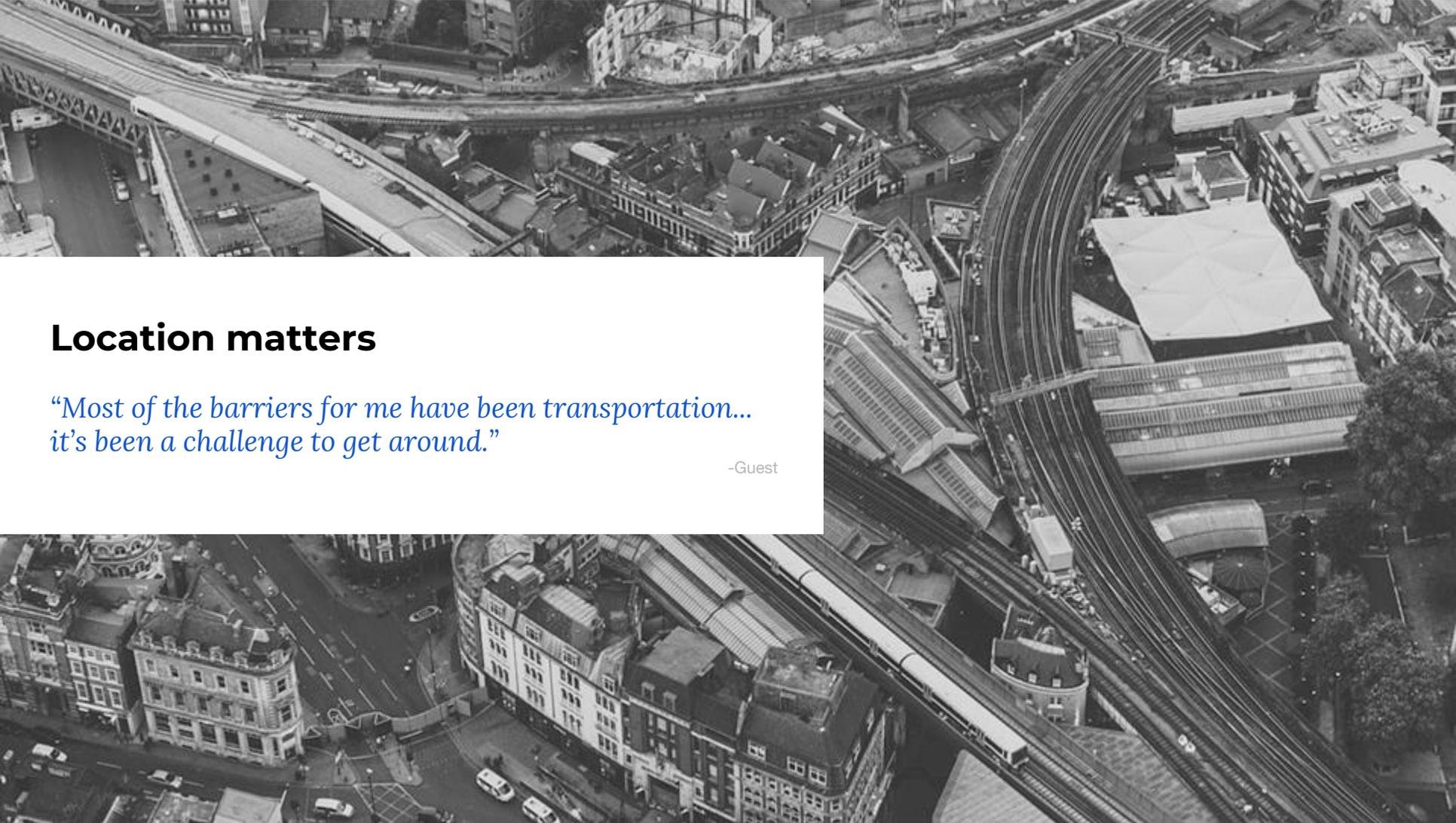
Location matters
Security is performed discreetly
There are no conditions for access
But openness operates in tension with a need for security

Connecting

Guests have their “go-to” staff member
Social groups form
Shared rituals and shared values create a sense of community
Shared use of the space encourages thoughts of recovery
But for those in early recovery, it’s hard to be around active users

Identity Building

The EC helps people (re)acquire social capital
People begin to contribute to their community
The work of identity building gets people to a place where they are ready to look for help

An aerial, black and white photograph of a city street scene. A major railway interchange with multiple tracks curves through the center of the image. The tracks are surrounded by various buildings, including multi-story residential or commercial structures and a large, flat-roofed industrial or warehouse building. The overall scene depicts a dense urban environment with significant transportation infrastructure.

Location matters

*“Most of the barriers for me have been transportation...
it’s been a challenge to get around.”*

-Guest



There are no conditions for access

“They don’t tolerate the drug stuff at the shelter. If they catch you doing drugs, they will kick you out of there for 30 days.”

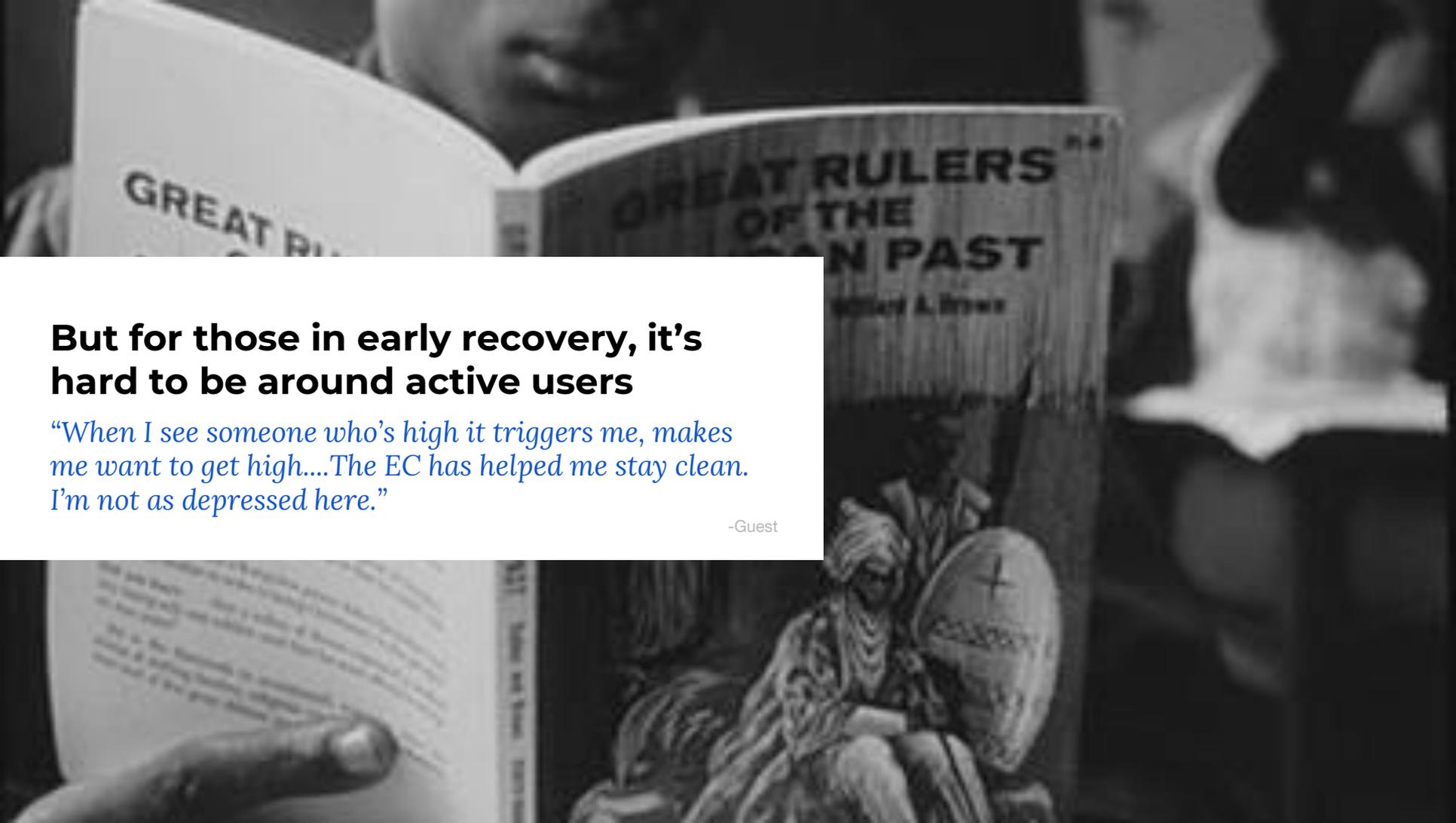
-Guest



Shared use of the space encourages thoughts of recovery

“You telling your story might help...People that have never been in this position fascinate me because I’m always like, “How?” It fascinates me to see people that are citizens.”

-Guest



But for those in early recovery, it's hard to be around active users

“When I see someone who’s high it triggers me, makes me want to get high....The EC has helped me stay clean. I’m not as depressed here.”

-Guest



People begin to contribute to their community

“I have my own footsteps in life, but if I could teach a few tricks of the trade... I’d want to help. I want to be a drug counselor, a youth counselor. I’ve been through a lot of shit.”

-Guest

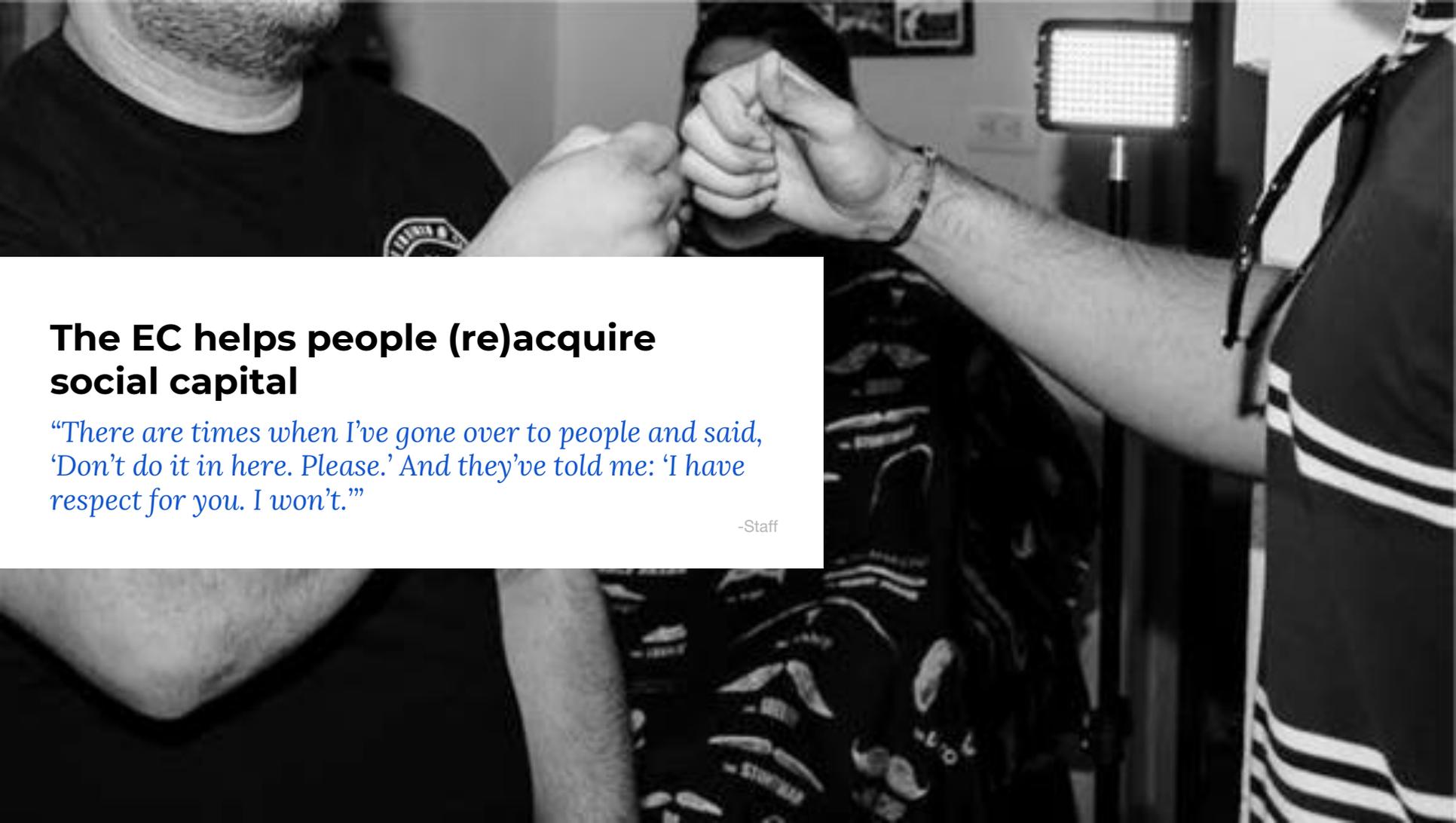


Shared rituals and shared values create a sense of community

“We at the EC love you.”

-Guest





**The EC helps people (re)acquire
social capital**

“There are times when I’ve gone over to people and said, ‘Don’t do it in here. Please.’ And they’ve told me: ‘I have respect for you. I won’t.’”

-Staff

Next Steps

How can we better serve our clients?

How can we better serve our staff?

Where should the EC live long-term?

What other services should we provide?

How can we improve our data collection practices?



Thank You!

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boston.gov/recovery
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