



# Flint Springs

## Street Outreach Team Evaluation Report

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Presented to  
Street Outreach Team  
Howard Center

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## Introduction

The Howard Center Street Outreach Team provides a range of services for persons in and around the downtown Burlington Business District. Services are primarily focused on assisting persons with psychiatric disabilities, including assessment, support, and active referral to needed services. Services are also provided to individuals dealing with substance abuse, homelessness, and other unmet social service needs. The majority of these individuals are underserved as they do not meet eligibility requirements for existing services or have “burned out” of available programming. The program was initiated in 2000 as a response to concerns from merchants, service providers, the Burlington Police Department, and the general public. In the summer of 2002, the program was expanded, with support from University of Vermont Medical Center Community Benefits, from one staff person to three and one half FTE positions. At the current time the program is funded by the State of Vermont, University of Vermont Medical Center Community Benefits, Howard Center, United Way of Chittenden County, City of Burlington (Mayor's Office) Burlington Police Department, Church Street Marketplace, Chittenden County Transportation Agency (CCTA), and local area contributors.

In 2009 Burlington Police Department Chief Mike Schirling initiated an Interventionist pilot project. The project, a collaboration with Howard Center, was designed to reduce the reliance on Burlington Police to respond to and address social service problems in city neighborhoods. The program became operational in January 2010, directed by BPD and supervised by Street Outreach. This program expanded in 2012, and again in 2014. There are currently three Street Outreach clinicians covering seven evenings per week and five days per week. The program provides pro-active support services to at-risk individuals identified by community partners and Burlington Police. The clinicians are also dispatched by Burlington Police, both with or without officers to respond to calls for service that have a social service component attached to them. In total, Street Outreach employs 5  $\frac{3}{4}$  FTE providing coverage both downtown and city-wide 5 days and 7 evenings per week.

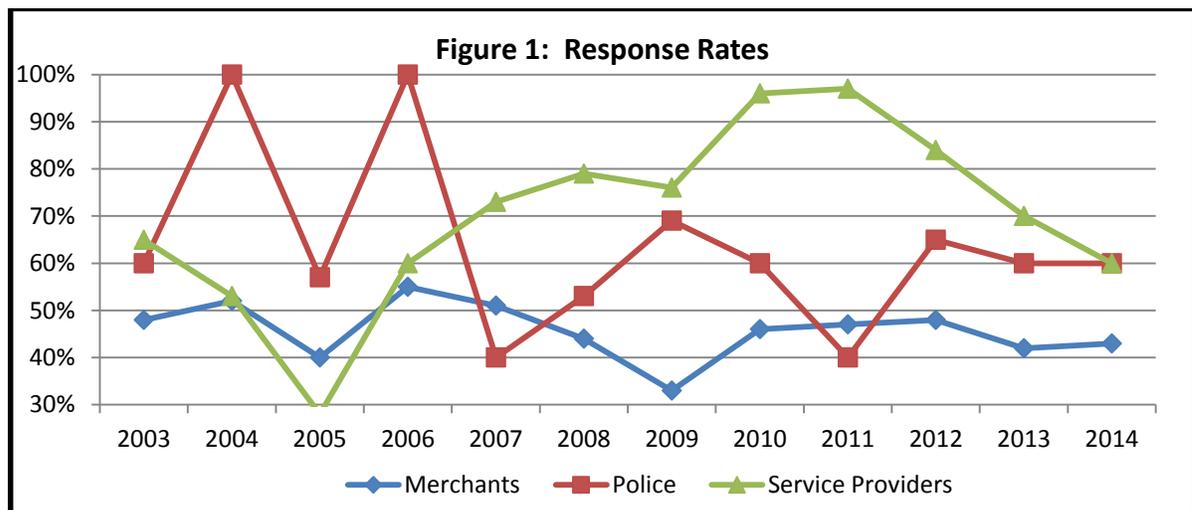
In January 2003, the first survey study was conducted to assess the impact of the Street Outreach Team in the eyes of merchants, service providers, police officers, and the persons served by the Team. To evaluate the ongoing impact of the Team's efforts, similar survey studies have since been conducted annually. Results of these studies continue to indicate that the Street Outreach Team has a significant impact on the Marketplace in downtown Burlington. Team members are well known by merchants, police officers, and service providers. The services provided by the Team are understood, used, and highly valued by clients as well as merchants, service providers, and police officers. Each year, merchants report the Team is able to reduce the number of disturbing incidents downtown, and police officers report that the Team's efforts contribute to public feelings of safety. Year after year, survey respondents are nearly unanimous in their strong support for the Street Outreach Team and its work.

In December 2014 and January 2105, the annual survey study was again conducted to track the Street Outreach Team's continued impact. This report summarizes results of the 2014 survey study and examines these results in relation to past survey results.

## Survey Respondents

One of the greatest challenges across the years of survey studies has been gathering client feedback. Many of these individuals do not see themselves as clients of the Street Outreach Team. There is no formal intake process to receive Team services denoting an individual as a client. Individuals may receive services on a daily basis, but do not perceive this as service, rather they often see the Team as a resource for information. The survey requesting client feedback has been modified several times to encourage participation. Client response rates reached a high of 62% in 2008, but have been as low as 12%. In 2014, seven of the 10 persons receiving surveys responded; yielding the highest response rate to date at 70%. It is the Team's experience that individuals only "feel like clients" when they are handed a survey, and most prefer a different relationship with the Team. Indeed, many merchants, police officers, and service providers cite a key strength of the Team as developing respectful rapport with individuals.

Response rates for merchants have been relatively consistent and high for this type of survey (see Figure 1); in 2014 response rates remained high (n=34, 43%). Response rates for police officers have fluctuated over the years as shown in Figure 1; 60% (n=12) in 2014. Response rates for service providers steadily improved until 2011; over the past two years this response rate has decreased somewhat but remains high at 60% (n=12) in 2014.



In past years, respondents to the merchants survey were more often business owners than employees; in 2013, and again in 2014 more respondents were employees (n=19, 56%) than owners (n=15, 44%).

Similar to past surveys, merchants responding to the 2014 survey had worked in downtown Burlington for an average of 14.5 years; 11 (32%) had been downtown for five or fewer years, while 17 (50%) had been in the area 11 or more years; indeed four respondents had been downtown more than 30 years.

As in past years, merchant respondents were distributed around the downtown area (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Merchant Survey Respondents' Downtown Location**

Location of workplace/business	2013 Survey		2014 Survey	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Upper block of Church St.	12	29%	9	27%
Mall block of Church St.	10	24%	5	15%
Lower block of Church St.	10	24%	10	30%
Main St. or side streets off Marketplace	7	17%	9	27%
Other Location in downtown area	2	5%	0	0%
Total	41	100%	33	100%

The type of agencies represented by respondents to the service provider survey has varied widely across previous surveys. In 2014, of the 12 respondents, agencies included community mental health (n=4); various municipal, state or federal offices (n=3); human service providers such as residential programs (n=2), substance abuse treatment center, and peer support; and, a church.

Of the 12 persons completing the Burlington Police Department survey, five were police officers; two were in management or administrative positions; three were dispatchers; and, two were in other positions (e.g., victim advocate).

## Awareness and Knowledge about the Street Outreach Team

Merchants, police officers, and service providers were asked if they were aware of the Street Outreach Team. In previous years, nearly all survey respondents were aware of the Team. In the 2014 surveys, 100% of police and service providers were aware of the Team; 97% (n= 33) of merchants were aware of the Team. One merchant had not been aware of the Team until receiving the survey; this individual, a manager, had worked in downtown Burlington for 18 months.

Merchants were asked if new employees were made aware of the Team. The majority of respondents reported that new employees were regularly made aware of the Team (n=25, 75%), most often by managers or business owners (n= 21, 62%). Over the years, as shown in Figure 2, at least 75% of merchants responding to the survey regularly provide employees with information about the Team, while less than 10% do not provide staff with this information.



Merchants, service providers and police were asked if they had enough information about the Team to understand their services. Results from 2014 indicate that most respondents had sufficient information about the Team (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Survey Respondents' Knowledge of Outreach Team Services (2014 Survey)**

Information about team and services	Merchants		Police		Service Providers	
	Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent
Complete information explaining services	4	12%	7	58%	7	58%
Enough information to meet needs	21	62%	5	42%	3	25%
Some information, but could use more	8	24%	0	0%	1	8%
No information at all	1	3%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	34	100%	12	100%	11	92%

Additionally, service providers were asked if they were aware of the Team's ability to provide assessment, monitoring, support, active referral, and service coordination. 2014 results indicated that all of the service providers were aware that the Team could provide support and referrals; while most understood that the Team could provide monitoring (n=11, 92%), service coordination (n=11, 91%) and assessment (n=10, 83%). These results were similar to past years although in 2012 only one-third of service providers were aware of the Teams' ability to provide service coordination.

Police were asked if they knew the Team could provide social services coordination. Each year, including 2014, all police respondents knew the Team could provide this service and all reported that this was a helpful service.

Merchants and police were asked if they knew how to reach members of the Team if there was a concern about someone in the downtown area. Each year, including 2014, all of the police responding to the survey knew how to reach the Team and knew that they could contact the Team through the Burlington Police Department Dispatch. As in past years, most merchants knew how to contact Team members; 94% (n=31) of merchants who knew about the Team reported knowing how to make contact.

## Adequacy of Team's Hours of Coverage

Merchants and police were asked if the Team was available when needed. As shown in Table 3, respondents reported that the Team was available when needed, in both 2013 and 2014. Over the past years, merchants have most often said the Team was *always* available; however, this year merchants more often said the team was *mostly* available. On the other hand, police have more often rated the Team as *mostly* available, but this year said the Team was *always* available. Merchants may see the team as *mostly*, rather than *always* available because many calls have been late in the evening or early in the morning when the Team is not staffed, and therefore not able to respond to requests.

**Table 3: Respondents Report Team is Available When Needed**

Availability of Team to address concerns	2013 Survey				2014 Survey			
	Merchants		Police		Merchants		Police	
	Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent
Always available when needed	24	57%	6	40%	12	36%	6	50%
Mostly available when needed	8	19%	9	60%	15	45%	3	25%
Sometimes not available when needed	1	2%	0	0%	1	3%	1	8%
Rarely available when needed	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Does not apply	9	21%	0	0%	5	15%	2	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>100%</b>

Consistently, police officers and service providers have said it is important for the Team's hours to include weekdays during general business hours and evenings and early morning hours. Weekend hours, particularly in the evenings and early morning, have also been seen as important by police and service providers.

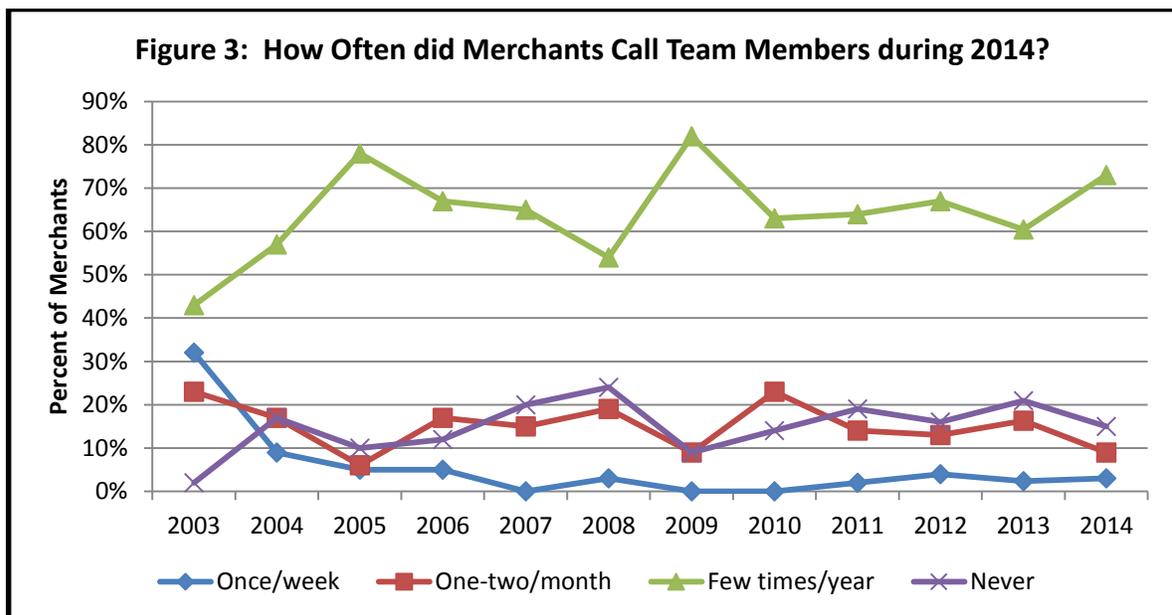
### Contact with Team Members

Service providers had more frequent contact with the Team than did merchants (see Table 4). As in past years, nearly all 2014 survey respondents reported that communications with Team members were of “excellent” quality. Nearly all the police who had contact with the team rated the communications “excellent” (n=11, 92%); one respondent rated communications “good.” The majority of service providers (n=11, 92%) said communications with Team members were “excellent;” one provider (8%) said communications were “adequate.” Of the merchants who had contact with the Team, 25 (93%) rated communications “excellent;” two (7%) rated communications “adequate.”

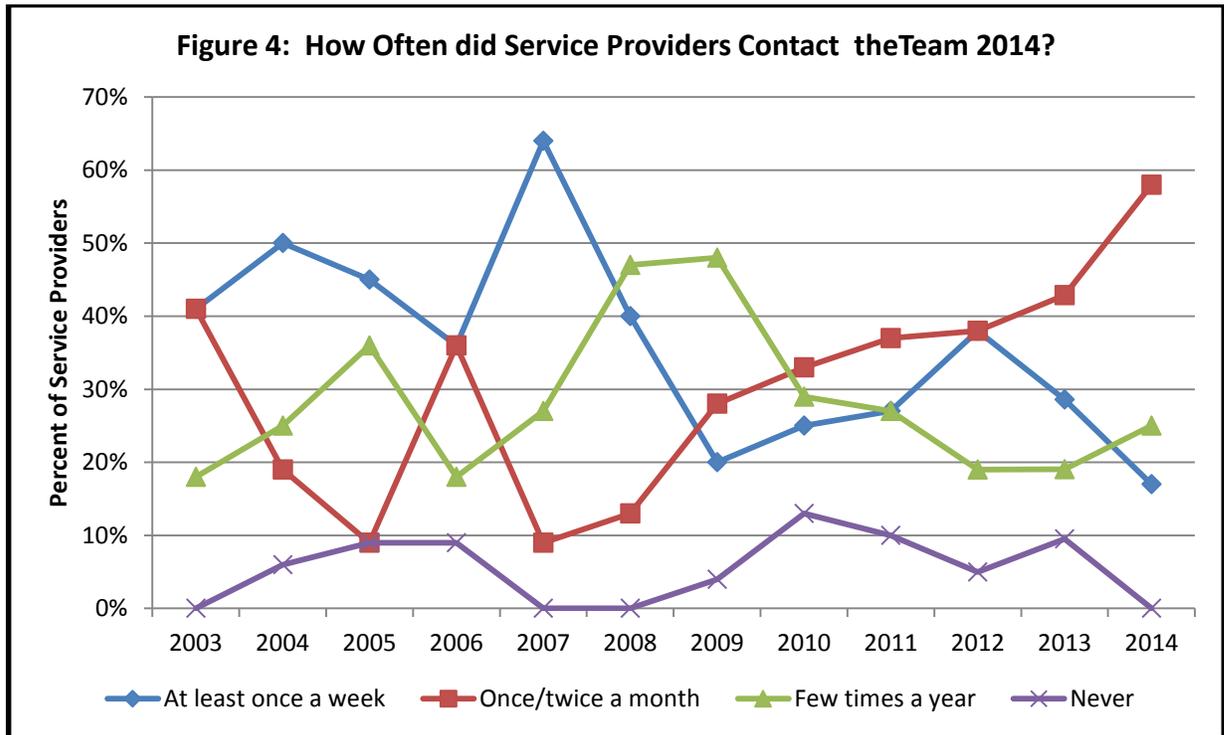
**Table 4: Merchants and Service Providers Contact with Team Members**

	2013 Survey		2014 Survey	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
<b>Merchants</b>				
At least once a week	1	2%	1	3%
About once or twice a month	7	17%	3	9%
A few times a year	25	60%	24	73%
Never	9	21%	5	15%
Total	45	100%	33	100%
<b>Service Providers</b>				
At least once a week	6	29%	2	17%
About once or twice a month	9	43%	7	58%
A few times a year	4	19%	3	25%
Never	2	10%	0	0%
Total	21	100%	12	100%

For merchants, frequency of contact with the Team has remained relatively steady; most often at a few times each year (see Figure 3).



Service providers have reported varied levels of contact with the Team over the years (see Figure 4). In part this may be due to the variety of service providers responding to the survey. As in past years, in 2014 service providers contacted the team via telephone or voice mail (n=12, 100%). Service providers also communicated via email (n=4, 33%) and by attending meetings with Team members (n=3, 25%). Two providers (17%) talk in-person with Team members. One provider wanted to be able to text with Team members.



## Outreach Team Services

Merchants were asked if they had called upon Team members in the past year for assistance. About three-quarters of the 2014 merchant respondents (n=26, 76%) had called upon the Team to address “concerns raised by witnessing behavior or activities;” this is slightly higher percentage than in past years. Consistent with past years, not quite half the merchants (n=14, 41%) had called upon the Team for “assistance addressing safety or security concerns.” Three merchant (9%) reported calling upon the Team to help with concerns about employees.

Merchants were asked whether they would prefer to call upon the police or the Team when they have “concerns about individuals in the downtown area.” Each year, the majority of merchants have said they would prefer to call upon the Team. Among 2014 respondents, 79% (n=27) merchants said they would prefer to call upon the Team, while 18% (n=6) said it would depend on the “severity of the situation.” Five merchants (15%) preferred contacting the police; reasons were most often related to endangerment of employees or others.

Most frequently, merchants explained they preferred the Team as a more appropriate response to address “behavioral issues” and because the Team “team is great at diffusing situations and it frees up police for other things” (n=12); for example:

- *More diffusive way to deal compassionately with mentally ill folks.*
- *They may be less threatening to certain individuals.*
- *Most issues are non-criminal involving people who could be helped by the Outreach Team.*

Six respondents identified the Team’s knowledge of the individuals involved as the reason for calling upon the Team. For example:

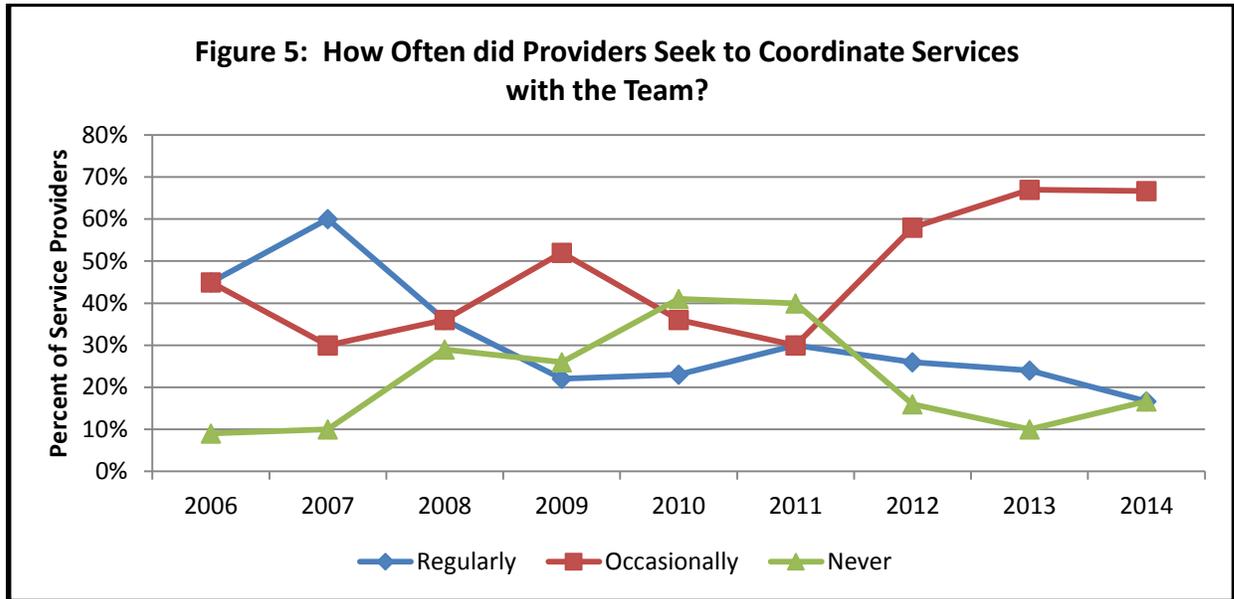
- *They usually know the individual that we’re calling about and are able to offer immediate assistance.*
- *They know the members in our community and can help them without force.*

In addition, merchants called upon the Team because of their ability to respond quickly and effectively (n=5), for example:

- *Often it diffuses the situation quickly and they respond faster.*
- *They respond faster and are more communicative, supportive, and active with responses.*
- *Low key, faster, less involved way to solve problem.*

Three merchants said the Team members were “humane individuals” who cared “about us and them” with a focus on “making things better, not just solving an immediate situation.”

Service providers were asked if they seek to coordinate services for clients with the Street Outreach Team. The proportion of providers that reported regular coordination with the Team has remained at about 20% to 30% over the past five years, with a slight decrease in 2014 (see Figure 5). Since 2011, the more providers report occasionally coordinating services with the Team. Of those service providers who have coordinated services with the Team, all rated the Team’s service coordination as “excellent.”



Service providers were also asked if they consulted with Team members about individual clients. The majority of respondents (n=8, 67%) *occasionally* consulted with Team members about specific individuals, while 25% (n=3) said they *regularly* consulted with Team members. These results were similar to most past years.

The service provider survey also asked about information the Team could offer that providers might find helpful. Over the years, providers initially asked for more information about the Team, and then information about individual clients including notification about individuals and strategies or support for problem solving. 2014 results were consistent with past years: seven providers wanted information about individuals, including: “updates on behaviors in the community,” “tips on how to support the clinical team involved,” and “how to communicate better with a person.” Two providers wanted more information about services, including “other Howard programs” and “possible housing options.” One provider wanted “some information on each Team member’s specialty” and another said that “schedules would be great.”

Police were asked if they believed that the Team was the “appropriate program to address behaviors of concern associated with mental illness in the downtown area,” using a five-point scale with 1 = “definitely appropriate” and 5 = “definitely not appropriate.” In past years, nearly all police respondents rated the team as “definitely appropriate.” The 2014 respondents were similar, 10 (83%) rated the team as definitely appropriate; two (17) police respondents rated the team as somewhat appropriate.

The police survey asked about information sharing between the Team and the Burlington Police Department. Most police respondents (n=11, 92%) felt the type and amount of information from the Team was “just right;” one respondent (8%) wanted more information about the Team. The Team has received consistently high ratings on this item over the years.

Police were asked what type of information would be useful to receive from the Team. Police most often asked for information about individuals (n=8). These requests included:

- *Current issues with local individuals regardless of our interaction or how frequent we as police interact with them.*
- *When certain individuals are escalating their behavior and what works best when communicating with them.*
- *What people are being active and their needs. What resources are there.*
- *Who has needed acute services, intense services on a daily shift basis.*
- *If someone is a Howard client and the name of the caseworker.*

As in past surveys, police said the best time to receive information from the Team was at roll call (n=8, 67%). Two (17%) police also felt it would be helpful to receive information at the time of the incident.

When asked where in the chain of command it was best for the Team to transmit information, police officers most often said the officer in charge (n=7, 58%). One respondent (8%) said the information should go to the police officer on the scene. In addition to the officer in charge, two (17%) respondents said the information should also go to the police officer on the scene or the downtown officer and three respondents (25%) said the information should also go to dispatch.

## Incidents of Concern Downtown

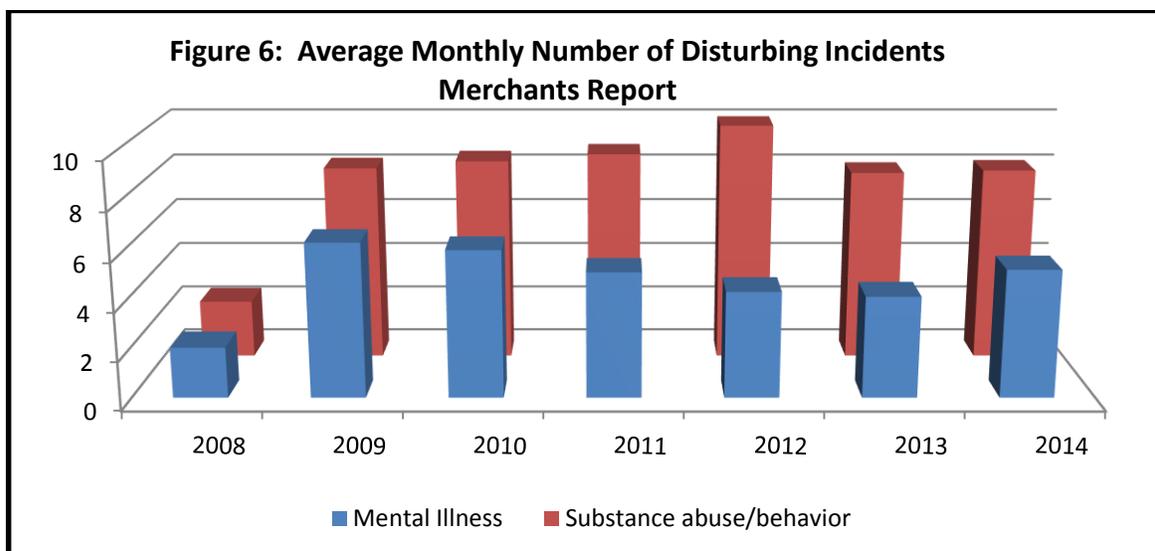
Merchants were asked “on average, over the past year in the downtown area, how many incidents involving persons with mental illness did you experience each month?” In the 2015 survey, merchants most often reported one to three incidents a month (see Table 5), with an average of 5.2 incidents per month. As shown in Figure 6, the average number of incidents related to mental illness slowly decreased from 2009 through 2013, and showed a slight increase in 2014.

The Merchant Survey also asks merchants to estimate the number of monthly incidents involving “persons with behavioral or substance abuse concerns.” In the 2014 survey, 52% of respondents reported 1-3 such incidents each month and 19% reported more than 10; the overall average was 8.0 incidents per month (see Table 5). The average monthly number of these incidents increased through 2012, came down slightly in 2013 and remained steady in 2014, as shown in Figure 6.

Taken together, these data indicate that merchants were much more likely to report incidents involving substance use than mental illness.

**Table 5: Number of Monthly Incidents Merchants Report (2014)**

Average number of Incidents per month	Involving Mental Illness		Involving Behavior/Substance Use	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
None	1	3%	2	6%
1 - 3 per month	18	60%	16	52%
4 - 7 per month	6	20%	4	13%
8 -10 per month	3	10%	3	10%
More than 10	2	7%	6	19%
Total	30	100%	31	100%



Six police provided estimates on the number of incidents “involving persons with mental illness” that they responded to each month while on Downtown Dayshift tour of duty. These estimates ranged from a low of 3.5 to a high of 30 over the course of a month. In the past, most police responding to the survey have not provided an estimate, and those that have reported wide ranging estimates, from 10 to 100 incidents per month.

The Team tracks the number of contacts made with individuals, as well as the number of incidents involving behaviors that cause concern to those witnessing the behavior, perceptions of threat, and actual threat (see Table 6). In FY14 on average there were 63 incidents each month that rose to these levels of concern; the majority of the incidents (n= 55, 88%) involved behavior that was of concern to witnesses. Merchants reported a monthly average of 5.2 incidents involving mental health issues, and 8 involving substance abuse; together this totals an average of 13 incidents monthly, notably lower than the actual number of incidents the Team responded to.

**Table 6: FY14 Team Data on Number of Incidents Downtown Causing Concern**

Month	Behavior causes concern to witnesses	Perception of threat	Actual threat	Total Number of Incidents
Jul 13	77	17	10	104
Aug 13	49	5	6	60
Sep 13`	43	1	0	44
Oct 13	47	3	2	52
Nov 13	53	5	1	59
Dec 13	40	1	0	41
Jan 14	42	0	0	42
Feb 14	61	4	5	70
Mar 14	82	9	3	94
Apr 14	52	6	1	59
May 14	43	5	2	50
Jun 14	71	7	0	78
Total	660	63	30	753

Merchants rated the impact of all categories of incidents on the business atmosphere in the Marketplace, again using a five-point scale, with 1 = “significant impact” and 5 = “no impact.” Merchants saw these incidents as having an impact on business; 13 (39%) felt the incidents had a “significant” impact on the business atmosphere while 14 (43%) felt the incidents had a moderate impact. Three merchants (9%) felt there was very little impact on the business atmosphere. These findings were consistent with those from 2013; before 2013 more merchants said the incidents had a significant, as compared to moderate impact on business.

Ten merchants commented on the impact of incidents on the Marketplace business atmosphere. One respondent who said the incidents had little impact on business explained, “I often navigate complicated questions from visitors to the area. It impacts

how people view the town; it is up to retailers to be positive about it and the great social services programs we have here to help.”

Other comments expanded on how the incidents impact on business, for example:

- *We are told constantly that this is not a destination most of our "local" shoppers enjoy. The tourists see beyond sometimes but we cannot survive on tourists.*
- *I have heard complaints from tourists about incidents they witnessed.*
- *Older customers comment on how they come to Church Street only once a year because they don't feel safe.*
- *Our customers sometimes tell us they are afraid to come downtown, people in front of the doors block traffic and frighten people.*
- *Some of our own employees are discouraged from going out at lunch due to varied drug/mental illness seen all the time on Church Street.*
- *The incidence of substance abuse is very disturbing.*

Merchants were asked to rate the degree to which they felt the Team had contributed to “decreasing the number of incidents involving persons with mental illness,” using a five-point scale with 1 = “no impact” to 5 = “significant impact.” The 2014 average rating was 3.9, which is consistent with past years. One-third of the respondents (n=10, 33%) rated the Team as having a “significant impact on the number of incidents;” 30% (n=9) felt the Team had “a big impact,” and 33% (n=10) said the Team “had some level of impact.” These results were consistent with years 2012 and 2013; however, in years prior to 2012, more merchants felt the Team had a very significant impact.

Two merchants explained their ratings that the team had “some level” of impact on decreasing incidents:

- *I don't see that they stop the incidents, they still happen though they seem helpful after the fact.*
- *The Team helps but more needs to be done so that same people can't continuously make others feel unsafe or uncomfortable.*

Comments from merchants who felt the Team had a “big impact” included:

- *Can't imagine how terribly worse things would be without them.*
- *The team has done great work in calming people with immediate issues and offering resources, but mental illness and substance abuse are still prominent on Church St.*

Merchants who felt the team had a “significant” impact commented:

- *I usually witness them daily taking action to solve or reduce problems.*
- *The Outreach Team is always a step ahead.*
- *This is a world-class service! I am so proud of the team and of Burlington to integrate the team with police as an alternative to calling police.*

Police were asked if they would expect a change in the number of incidents if the Team was not available. Across most survey years, every police survey respondent has said that the number of incidents and the calls from merchants would increase significantly if the Team was not present. In 2014, all the police respondents agreed that incidents and calls from merchants would increase significantly without the Team.

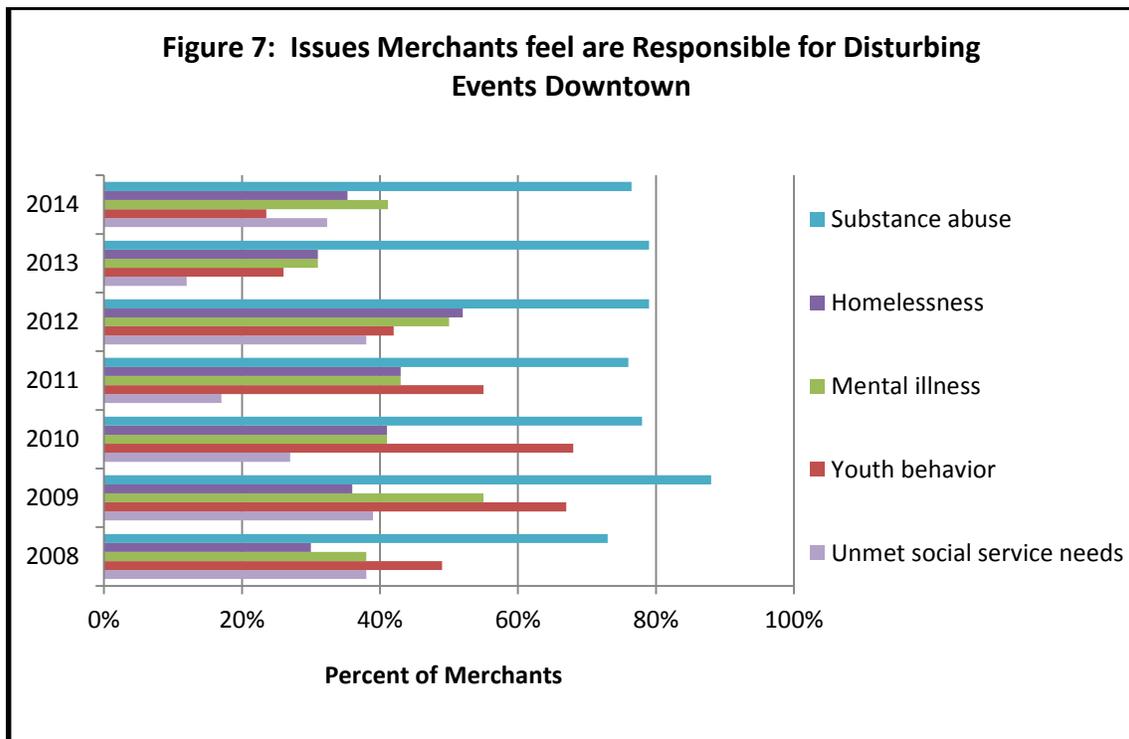
## Perceived Safety

Merchants were asked to rate their personal feeling of safety on the Marketplace and downtown. Again, a five-point scale was used, with 1 = “not at all safe and secure” to 5 = “completely safe and secure.” Most often merchants reported feeling “somewhat safe” (n=14, 44%), while 12% (n=4) felt “totally safe and secure.” About one-quarter of the merchants (n=9, 28%) weren’t sure and 16% (n=5) felt “somewhat unsafe” on the Marketplace and downtown. The average rating was 3.5, consistent with previous years. Compared to 2013, the proportion of merchants feeling safe downtown increased slightly.

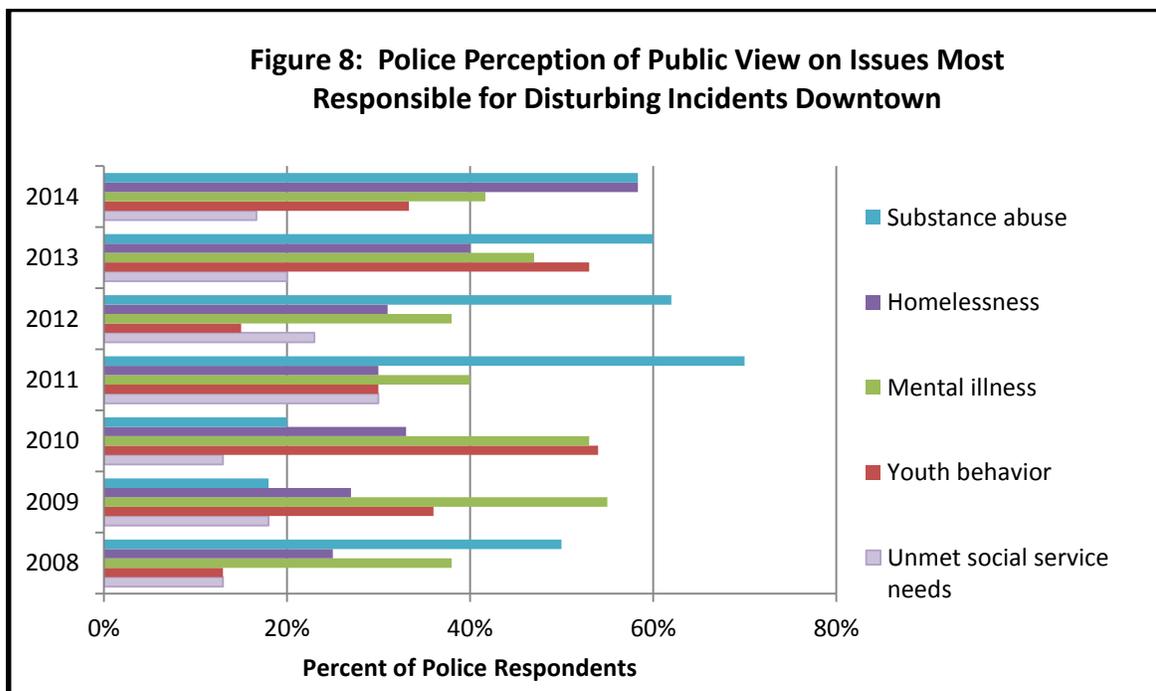
When asked how they would feel about their safety if the Team no longer existed, most merchants reported that they would feel “not at all safe or secure” (n=9, 28%) or “somewhat unsafe” (n=14, 44%) if the Team was no longer in operation. Seven (22%) merchants were not sure how they’d feel. These responses were consistent with past years’ results.

Police using the same scale were asked to rate how “the public would rate feelings of personal safety on the Marketplace and downtown over the past year.” Police reported that the public felt “somewhat safe” (n=5, 50%) or “not sure either way” (n=4, 40%). One respondent (10%) felt that the public felt somewhat unsafe. As in past years, police expectations for public feelings of safety were quite close to merchants’ ratings of personal safety – and this year both the merchants and police were more likely to say there was a feeling of some level of safety downtown.

Merchants were asked to identify factors they felt were “responsible for the majority of disturbing incidents downtown.” Substance abuse (n= 26, 76%) topped the list in 2014 as it has in every past survey (see Figure 7). Mental illness (n=14, 41%), homelessness (n=12, 35%), and unmet social needs (n=11, 32%) were seen as responsible for incidents by notably fewer merchants. Youth behavior (n=8, 24%) was least frequently cited. As shown in Figure 7, youth behavior was more often credited with causing incidents in 2011 and earlier, and has been less often cited in recent years.



Police were asked to identify factors they felt caused the public to feel insecure and unsafe. In 2014, police most often felt the general public held substance abuse (n=7, 58%) and homelessness (n=7, 58%) responsible for disturbing incidents downtown. Mental illness (n=5, 42%) and youth behavior (n=4, 33%) were identified less often as perceived causes of incidents. Overtime, substance abuse has become far more significant a perceived contributor to public feelings of insecurity than mental illness, consistent with findings from merchants (see Figure 8). In 2014, homelessness ranked as highly as substance abuse, for the first time.



The Merchant survey asks about factors that might be contributing to the number of disturbing incidents downtown. In 2014, merchants were most likely to believe reduced social services contributed to the incidents (see Table 8). From 2010, when this question was introduced into the survey, through 2013, the economic downturn and resulting poverty were most often cited contributing factors.

**Table 7: Factors Contributing to Downtown Incidents reported by Merchants**

Factors Contributing to Increase in Incidents	2010 (n=37)	2011 (n=42)	2012 (n=48)	2013 (n=42)	2014 (n=34)	
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Freq	Percent
Reduced social services due to decreased funding	32%	45%	40%	38%	15	44%
Lack of affordable housing	24%	43%	38%	33%	12	35%
Corrections initiatives to release prisoners into the community	35%	36%	33%	33%	10	29%
Economic downturn and resulting poverty	41%	60%	54%	52%	9	26%
Laws which limit police response	54%	48%	52%	45%	9	26%

Merchants also mentioned substance use as a contributing factor (n=3), for example: “the influx of drugs and drug culture.” Poor education was cited by two merchants, one merchant said “more UVM students, bigger student population.” Finally one merchant said, “Our willingness to allow it.”

## Issues of Concern in Downtown Burlington

Merchants, service providers and police were asked to identify issues facing downtown Burlington of most concern to them. As in past years, across all three groups, the primary issues of concern were panhandling and loitering along with drug use (see Table 8). It should be noted that non-aggressive panhandling and loitering are not illegal, nor are these social service issues that the Team was designed to address.

**Table 8: Number of Respondents Citing Issues Facing Downtown**

Issues of Concern	2014 Survey			
	Merchants	Service	Police	Total
Panhandling and loitering	11	0	2	13
Drug use	7	4	1	12
Perceived safety/environment downtown	7	0	1	8
Homelessness	3	3	1	7
Poor behavior/youth behavior	5	0	1	6
Lack of services, increased need	2	4	0	6
Crime (theft, vandalism)	3	0	0	3

Merchants were most often concerned with panhandling and loitering, drug use, and the resulting perception of downtown as not a safe place for families. Some of the merchants' comments included:

- *There seems to be an increase in the number of pan handlers on the Market place. I'm concerned it will have a negative impact on business.*
- *Blatant drug activity on the market place.*
- *The amount of drugs dealt/used in public spaces.*
- *Impact of bad behavior or unsettling behavior on our customers. When they witness fights, excessive panhandling, general aggression, they begin to rule out downtown as a fun, safe place to shop and bring their families.*
- *Locating so many services in the downtown area.*

Service providers were most often concerned with the lack of needed services as well as drug/alcohol use and homelessness. Sample comments from service providers:

- *Drug dealing that impacts vulnerable people.*
- *Substance abuse, community needs more support for these individuals, especially those also struggling with mental health issues.*
- *Lack of housing, a place to hang out, reduced money and benefits.*

Police offered a range of concerns, including:

- *Amount of congregating that occurs on Church St and City Hall due to relations between individuals and use of alcohol and drugs in those public areas.*

- *Lately, the youth and disruptions they're causing in the late afternoon.*
- *Homeless sleeping in business spaces, asking PD to move them along, but nothing further. Moves the problem doesn't work toward solution.*
- *Losing business because people are afraid to go downtown. They won't feel it is safe.*

## Attitudes toward Mental Illness

The merchant survey included four specific items drawn from questionnaires designed to measure attitudes toward mental illness. Merchants were asked the degree to which they agreed with each of the four statements. Attitudes have shifted somewhat over the past six years (see Table 9). In 2014, more than half of the merchants clearly did not believe people with mental illness are more dangerous than the general population; a noticeable improvement than from the past few years. However, one-third of merchants felt that most homeless persons are mentally ill, an increase from past years. Less than half of the merchants felt that people with mental illness can get well, a decrease as compared to past years. Over the years, and in 2014, merchants reject mental health treatment “behind locked doors.”

**Table 9: Number of Merchants Agreeing with Statements about Mental Illness**

Survey Year	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Not sure	Total
<i>People with chronic mental illness are more dangerous than general population</i>					
2009 (n=33)	13%	50%	31%	6%	100%
2010 (n=37)	21%	39%	33%	6%	100%
2011 (n=41)	29%	44%	17%	10%	100%
2012 (n=48)	21%	38%	17%	25%	100%
2013 (n=40)	13%	35%	35%	18%	100%
<b>2014 (n=34)</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<i>Most of the homeless today are, in fact, mentally ill</i>					
2009 (n=33)	12%	52%	27%	9%	100%
2010 (n=37)	20%	37%	31%	11%	100%
2011 (n=41)	32%	32%	22%	15%	100%
2012 (n=48)	21%	40%	12%	27%	100%
2013 (n=41)	15%	41%	27%	17%	100%
<b>2014 (n=34)</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<i>The best way to handle the mentally ill is to keep them behind locked doors</i>					
2009 (n=33)	0%	88%	9%	3%	100%
2010 (n=37)	6%	77%	14%	3%	100%
2011 (n=41)	5%	83%	12%	10%	100%
2012 (n=48)	2%	85%	4%	8%	100%
2013 (n=41)	0%	85%	7%	7%	100%
<b>2014 (n=34)</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<i>Most people with a serious mental illness can, get well &amp; return to productive lives</i>					
2009 (n=33)	53%	13%	22%	13%	100%
2010 (n=37)	56%	9%	18%	18%	100%
2011 (n=40)	53%	3%	28%	18%	100%
2012 (n=48)	52%	4%	10%	33%	100%
2013 (n=40)	65%	3%	25%	8%	100%
<b>2014 (n=34)</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Merchant, Police Officer and Service Provider Assessment of Team

Merchants, police officers and service providers were asked to identify what they thought the Team “does particularly well.”

Merchants said the Team communicates with respect and compassion; is knowledgeable about individuals and resources ; effectively de-escalates situations; responds quickly; maintains a presence downtown; and helps people in need. More specifically, responses were as follows:

The Team communicates well and with compassion for everyone, including businesses and individuals on the street (n=8), examples:

- *Communicate with merchants; know the ""lay of the land"" who's who and what they're up to.*
- *Engage individuals in a respectful way.*
- *Develops relationships of trust that are built on care and respect. As a result, they are extremely effective mitigators, mentors and mediators. They reduce harm and ill feelings.*

The Team is knowledgeable about people and resources (n=7), examples:

- *Get to know the folks on the street that are needing help.*
- *Know the community and the people who are on the street personally.*
- *Know the people and care to help.*

The Team effectively de-escalates and diffuses situations (n=6), examples:

- *Humanely talking down escalated situations.*
- *Their ability to gain the confidence and respect of the homeless and mentally ill, and to diffuse and manage problems that arise.*

The Team is responsive (n=6), examples:

- *Responding quickly, efficiently.*
- *They are quick to respond and make employees feel more comfortable.*
- *Respond with compassion and complete follow-through very timely with responses.*

The Team has a visible and clear presence on Church Street (n=4), examples:

- *Patrol Church St and handle situations calmly.*
- *Have a presence on the marketplace.*

The Team is also good at “helping people in need” (n= 3). One merchant commented, “they are wonderful and everything they do they do well!”

Service providers said the Team develops respectful relationships; provides a knowledgeable presence downtown able to de-escalate situations and communicate well with all stakeholders. More specifically:

The Team develops respectful relationships with individuals (n=4), for example:

- *Connect well with clients and very approachable.*
- *Make everyone feel some level of safety and understanding, non-judgmental.*

The Team is knowledgeable about individuals and resources (n=2), for example:

- *Their knowledge of the people on the streets and their problems. When they understand the people they have a better understanding on how to help them.*

The Team communicates well with all stakeholders (n=2), for example:

- *Work good with residents and respect them and staff point of view.*

The Team de-escalates situations (n=2), for example:

- *Their work de-escalating situations is phenomenal. I think their ability to accompany BPD on calls is beneficial to the officers, clients and service providers.*

Police cited a range of skills, particularly de-escalating situations so police are not required (n=6), for example:

- *Diffuse situations handle incidents that are not police matters.*
- *They are able to deal with people before they get into crisis. I cannot stress enough how much this helps us as police officers.*
- *They de-escalate mental health situations for us allowing us to focus on criminal/more police motivated calls. They continually check in on people and give them more of a constant support system and teach them more useful tools.*

In addition, police said the Team “communicates regularly with PD” and maintains “good relations with clients” helping people “find the appropriate services while reducing the need for police involvement.”

The Team “interacts with individuals that are showing behavior problems and assists officers with how to make solutions to the problem/people.” They are “responsive, skilled, and knowledgeable.” One police respondent said, “I’m amazed how quickly people are available.”

Merchants, service providers, and police were also asked and how the Team could “expand or improve its work to best benefit the downtown community.”

Fourteen (41%) merchants provided suggestions. These included:

- Increased presence on Church Street (n=4):
  - *Be more obvious to business owners and patrons.*
  - *There are not very many of them to do all of the work they do 24/7. They could use more staff to help them and resources.*
- Distribute written information about the Team (n=2):
  - *Provide a pamphlet of info and their services and contact info to each business to have on hand.*
- Increase publicity about the Team to the general public (n=2):
  - *It would be great if the team was more well known to shoppers/visitors they would probably feel more comfortable if they knew they could call if uncomfortable or scared.*
  - *The Team does a great job; it would be nice to have a thing to tell people where to donate, what makes Burlington a better place to need services.*
- Provide educational opportunities for increasing awareness about issues (n=2):
  - *Hold education sessions a couple of times a year for business people. Perhaps visit places the homeless live, hear from better function people who have been there, participate in sessions where line staff become educated and less afraid or overly judgmental about people who are affecting the business climate or our community.*

Three (25%) service providers provided suggestions for the Team; two others advised, “Keep doing what you are doing.” The three specific suggestions were:

- *When add people to the team, send out an email with new person's name, number and hours.*
- *Low barrier shelter with access to case management.*
- *More funding.*

Three (25%) police respondents offered specific suggestions, which including hiring more staff (n=2) and “educate business owners more about mental illness/substance abuse to create more self-reliance in judging situations rather than immediate police response.” Other comments from police respondents included:

- *They already have by adding more staff to cover more hours.*
- *They are doing great. Other police departments would like to copy this mode, So Burlington in particular.*

- *Honestly, I can't think of anything they can improve on. They do a great job in helping our department and haven't seen less than 100% effort from them so I feel I do recognize improvements right now.*

## Client Assessment of Services

Seven clients completed the “Performance Appraisal” of the Team for 2014. All seven clients said the Team was “very helpful” to them and felt Team members treated them with respect. In addition, all seven clients said that talking with Team members had helped them “do a lot better” with life’s problems.

Clients were asked what they thought was most helpful about the Team. Responses included:

- *It really helps to form the relationship and build comfort and trust.*
- *Someone to talk to that’s level headed and that helps and encourages me to regain the focus I’m trying to maintain in my life. I also think the Team does a nice job listening to me. It’s also nice to have someone to laugh with about things. It cheers me up!*
- *They have good ideas and care.*
- *The fact that they are always around and are the most caring people I know.*
- *The support and respect no matter what is going on.*

Clients were then asked how the Team could be improved. Two respondents suggested increased staff and hours. One person said that the new hires had provided “some great improvements.” One respondent suggested that some staff “need to answer their phones more and be more available like they used to be.” Another suggested that the Team “hire peer support person so people can feel that there is someone who understands.”

The survey also asks if the respondent had “enough confidence in the Team” to “refer someone that you know who needs help.” In past years all respondents agreed that they would refer others to the Team. This year all but one respondent would refer others to the Team. That person said that the “staff should be more respectful” and “have more free coffee vouchers at all times.” This person, in response to an early survey question, reported feeling respected by the people from the Team. Other responses to the question about referring others included:

- *Of course, I’ve done so already. I believe you’re all very approachable, and helpful.*
- *Yes, 100%*

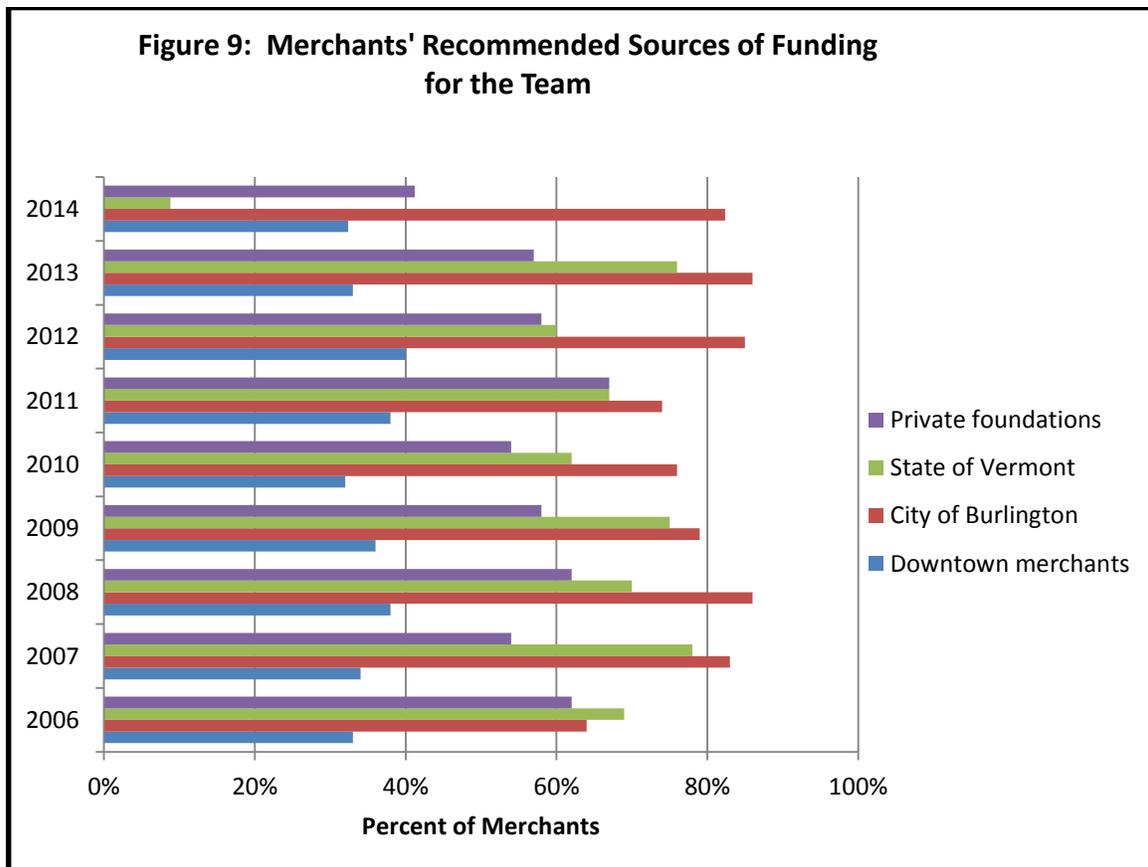
Additional comments clients added included “they are doing an excellent job,” and “MY, TB, WB, and JV should get a major raise.”

## Police Training Interests

Each year, surveys ask police if they would be interested in receiving training from the Team on mental illness, substance abuse or homelessness – levels of interest vary year to year. In 2015, 50% (n=6) of police respondents expressed interest in training on mental illness, substance abuse, and homelessness. In addition, one respondent asked for training on mental health court, and another wanted training on “how substance abuse affects people in different life stages: youth vs middle age vs elderly.”

## Funding Suggestions

Merchants were asked how they felt the Street Outreach Team should be funded. In 2014, the majority of merchants (n=28, 82%) felt the Team should be supported by the City of Burlington. About one-third of the merchants (n=11, 32%) felt that downtown merchants should contribute to funding the Team. Fourteen (41%) merchants felt private foundations should support the Team. As compared to earlier years, 2014 merchant respondents were far less likely to look to the State of Vermont for funding (see Figure 9). This could be due to the significant state budget shortfall currently leading to a number of social services funding cuts.



## Summary

Results from the 2014 survey once again demonstrate that the Street Outreach Team provides a valued and effective service to downtown Burlington. As in past years, merchants, service providers, and police officers were generally aware of the Team, the services it provides, and how to contact Team members. Clients receiving Team services reported high levels of satisfaction with the Team's quality of service.

The Team was credited with excellent communication, and was in regular contact with police and service providers to share information and coordinate services.

The Team's work continues to impact the number of incidents involving persons with mental illness in the downtown area. While the number of incidents due to mental illness has decreased over the years, the number due to substance abuse has grown; the 2014 survey found that merchants experienced an average of 5.2 incidents monthly due to mental illness, and 8.0 incidents monthly due to substance abuse. The Team recorded an average of 63 incidents monthly, notably more incidents than individual merchants experienced. Still, merchants experienced more than two incidents each week, most often due to substance abuse.

Merchants believed these incidents impact the business atmosphere and continued to credit the Team with keeping the rate of incidents down. Merchants' reported feeling slightly more safe downtown that last year. Merchants consistently report that without the Team's presence they would feel significantly less safe and secure.

Merchants preferred calling upon the Team rather than the police when there were concerns that did not involve criminal behavior. The Team was credited with extensive knowledge and quick compassionate responses that diffused situations. Police officers agreed; without the Team, police believed there would be significant increases in incidents and calls from merchants.

Seven clients completing the survey reported satisfaction with the Team's services. They rated the Team as helpful and respectful, and felt confident enough to recommend the Team to others who might need assistance.

While in past years merchants demonstrated an understanding of mental illness and did not hold negative or uninformed attitudes about persons with mental illness, beginning with the 2010 results, and continuing into 2014, there was a drift toward less confidence among merchants in non-stereotyped beliefs. Nevertheless, the primary issues of concern to downtown merchants were not incidents caused by persons with mental illness. Rather, merchants were more concerned with panhandling and loitering along with substance abuse. Merchants felt the factor most responsible for unwelcome incidents downtown was reduced social services due to decreased funding.

The 2014 survey results, especially in relation to perceptions of safety closely correspond with data collected by Street Outreach. The Team's data also suggests that most of these incidents involved a small cross-section of the community. Further, while the number of

incidents has been significantly reduced over the past 10 years, the FY 14 incidents were more visible to the public and the majority of the disorder was related to substance abuse, Serious Functional Impairment (SFI), and poverty.

The 2014 survey results again suggest that the Team continue its shift of focus to behaviors that have become intractable in the downtown area while still being ready to respond quickly to issues related to mental health symptoms and behavior. Continued emphasis should be added to the quality of interactions with all groups represented in the downtown, with particular attention paid to substance abuse, anti-social activity, youth and unemployed at-risk individuals.

Collaborative efforts with many populations and partners committed to a safe and healthy downtown can help to create strategies that will ultimately relieve pressures on downtown. The Team can play a role in these efforts which can range from incentives and job development to social/legal consequences.

Overall, merchants, providers, police, and clients continue to be very satisfied with the Team's services, and report that the Team effectively addressed the needs of all constituencies. High levels of satisfaction with the Team were noted in several comments, for example:

- *The Team are incredibly skilled dedicated individuals that make the street a better place for everybody! I own a retail store in MA and always wish we had the Team there, they are uniquely qualified to handle difficult, sensitive issues.* (merchant)
- *Thanks to all on the Team -- a critical service for those in need.* (merchant)
- *I greatly appreciate the resource of the Street Outreach Team.* (merchant)
- *I love everything they do. They are amazing people that do an extraordinary job.* (police)
- *(The Team) has been extremely valuable asset to us here at BPD. They have saved tax payers an enormous amount of money by handling incidents that would have taken up police, fire/EMS and UVM med center resources.* (police)
- *Bravo to you all!!!* (service provider)