



# Assessing the Need and Desirability of a Syringe Exchange Program in Southwest Baltimore, A Study by Damain Teat



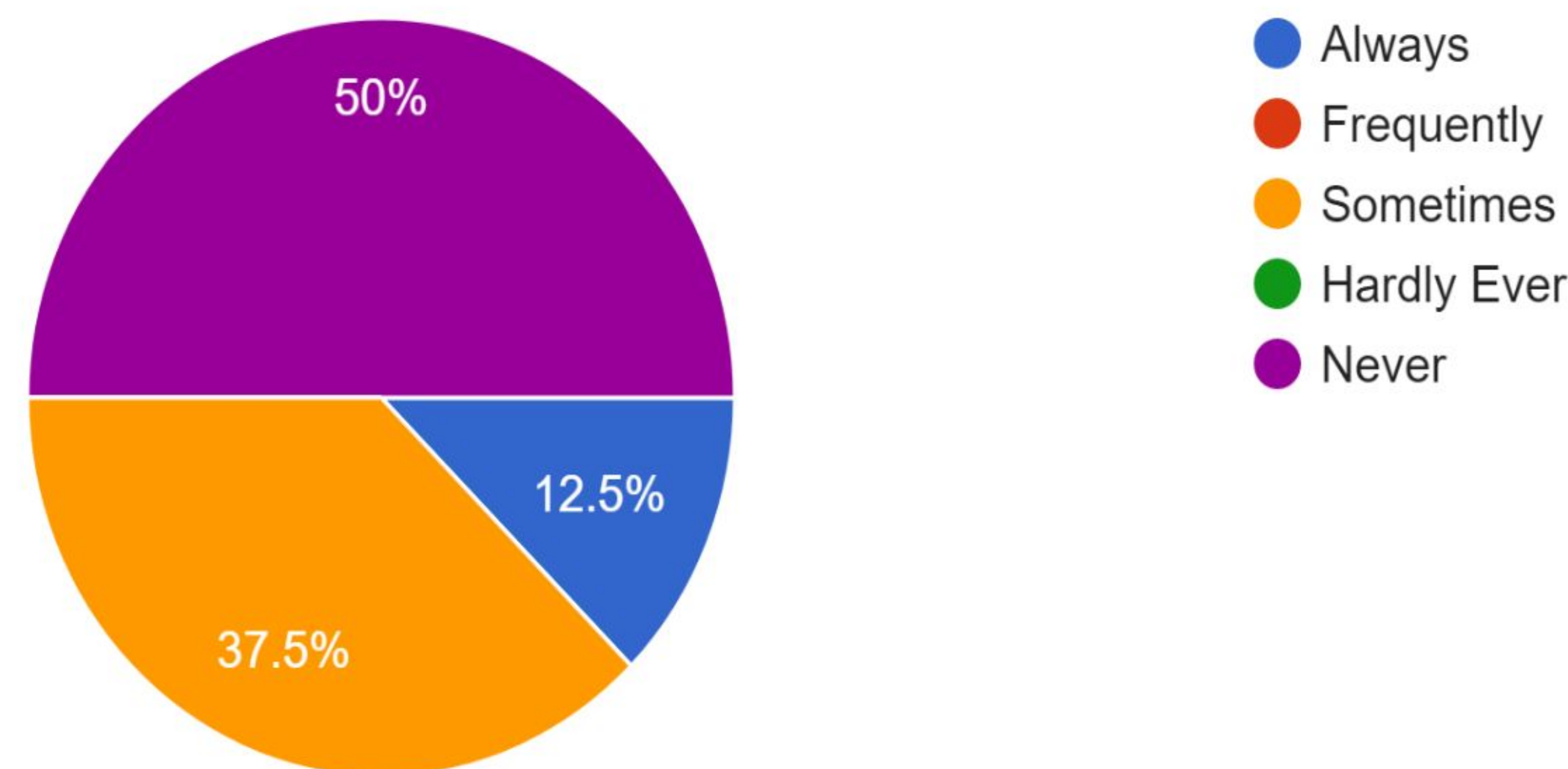
**Introduction:** This research project looks at the need and desirability of a syringe exchange program (SEP) in the Southwest Baltimore, Maryland community. This possible service would take place as part of Paul's Place's outreach efforts. Paul's Place is a community outreach resource center for people experiencing homelessness or on the verge of homelessness. The population that we serve has some drug using habits that are very unsafe. Through this research project, we are doing a needs assessment survey to see if a SEP is needed and assess whether it would be utilized and beneficial if we had one.

## There is a great need and high desire for a clean Syringe Exchange Program in Southwest Baltimore

**Results:** Results show that participants were having difficulty obtaining clean syringes, with 50% reporting they were never able to get them, and 37.5% stating they could get them sometimes. Sharing needles was very common, with 87.5% reporting injecting with syringes already used by someone they know. Used syringes from a stranger or off the ground was less common, with three of eight reporting this practice. Data shows that using habits are unsafe and that blood borne disease could be easily acquired. One main barrier for accessing existing syringe exchange programs was, "the times and days they do the exchange. I can't figure it out, because I don't have a watch or an alarm clock." Participants are left to do whatever they must so that they can use drugs, even if it is injecting with used and unsafe syringes.

**Methods:** In a given week, our agency sees about 20 to 25 people as part of our outreach efforts. Our targeted sample size was 15-20, however our final sample was eight. The study design was to administer a quantitative survey. Survey administration took place during our regular outreach routes. The quantitative data collected focused on using habits, like the sharing of needles and other materials, as well as methods of obtaining syringes such as getting them from other PWUD or from strangers. We also collected data on how often these behaviors occurred, knowing that people who do these things frequently are at greater risk as opposed to those who never do it. In the course of quantitative data collection, participants were making important statements related to the research question, so these comments were also noted as qualitative data. In this way, the project evolved to become a mixed methods study.

9. Are you able to get clean syringe supplies when you need them?  
8 responses



12. If Paul's Place provided a Syringe Exchange program would you access them?  
8 responses



**Discussion:** Bringing clean syringes directly to participants as part of outreach would lower barriers to safe injecting. This could lower hospital visits, blood borne disease spreading, and could further engagement with peer connections to health and wellness resources. Next steps are to do more surveying, as a small sample size was a study limitation, with many participants indoors for colder months. Paul's Place will consider partnering with another agency to do an SEP or do it on our own. A key rationale is that I see participants who choose to use drugs as human beings, fully deserving of whatever help they need. It is up to us to give support needed and when they are ready to pursue recovery, their process is their process. If they choose to use drugs, they should still be able to do it in a safe and dignified manner.