



## India Pungarcher

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### **Practicum Site:**

Open Table  
Nashville, TN

### **Practicum Site Supervisors:**

Linda Bailey  
MaryBeth Shinn, Ph.D.

## **Direct Outreach, Resource Coordination, and Mortality Surveillance for those Experiencing Homelessness: Advocating For and With Our Friends on the Streets of Nashville, TN During COVID-19**

**Background:** The mission of Open Table Nashville (OTN) is to “disrupt cycles of poverty, journey with the marginalized, and provide education around issues of homelessness.” This practicum allowed for opportunities to provide direct outreach for those experiencing homelessness in Nashville, administer rent and mortgage assistance, and monitor OTN’s database of deaths on the streets. To complement the primary practicum, OTN’s initial homeless mortality surveillance efforts were expanded upon and obituaries were written under guidance of Vanderbilt Cornelius Professor, Dr. MaryBeth Shinn.

**Structure & Outcomes:** As OTN’s Resource Coordinator, phone and email resource lines were answered to assist individuals in navigating the complicated systems that comprise the country’s food, housing, and healthcare resources that were 1.) constantly changing in lieu of the COVID-19 pandemic and 2.) often inaccessible to marginalized populations. OTN’s Winter Canvassing Plan was developed for the 2020-2021 winter season and \$30,000 in rent and mortgage assistance was administered for Nashvillians facing eviction. Food, water, and medical and camping supplies were delivered to friends living under bridges, in cars, on the streets, and in the woods.

A community-based approach was used to collect cause of death and demographic information of those experiencing homelessness in Nashville and will be used for future analysis and policy recommendations. Obituaries were written for those who passed on the streets of Nashville or had a known history of homelessness in 2020 for multiple forms of print format and in conjunction with OTN’s 2020 Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day Service. Findings and experiences were disseminated via National Health Care for the Homeless Council’s Mortality Surveillance Toolkit that was published in December 2020.

**Conclusions:** The practicum experience validated the desperate need for more affordable housing in Nashville, the notion of housing as healthcare, and the importance of humanizing those who experience homelessness in order to dispel misconceptions and gain political saliency around solutions to homelessness.