FROM HUNGER TO HOPE: STARTING AND SUSTAINING YOUR LOCAL PD

TAKE IT TO THE STREETS...

SECOND EDITION
MSA GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Muslim Students Association members are guided by the following principles, which emanate from the Qur’an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, pbuh:

- **Sincerity is the foundation of our existence.**
- **Knowledge precedes our actions.**
- **Humility guides our conduct.**
- **Truthfulness is the mark of our speech.**
- **Moderation is the compass of our journey.**
- **Tolerance is the banner of our outreach.**
- **Forgiveness precedes our reconciliatory efforts.**
- **Patience is the hallmark of our planning.**
- **Gratitude binds our hearts together.**
# Table of Contents

We Welcome you as a new member of the PD Team 4

Humble Beginnings: PD Mecca 7
  - The Fizzle Factor 8
  - For Those who have a Heart... 8
  - Be Contagious 10

The Dream Takes Form: PD Medina 12
  - Human Resources 13
  - Material Resources 14
    - Food 14
    - Clothing 15
    - Toiletries 16
  - Financial Resources 16

PD Experiences from Across the Country 18
  - Miami 20
  - Tampa 22
  - East Lansing 24
  - Ft. Lauderdale 26
  - Washington DC 27
  - Poetry from the Streets 28
  - PD Team Stories 29

Feeling the Dream 30

To Do List 31
WE WELCOME YOU AS A NEW MEMBER OF THE GROWING PD TEAM!

The purpose of this manual is to offer guidance on the spiritual, human, and material resources needed to begin and grow a sustainable Project Downtown. Project Downtown is an MSA National initiative that seeks to please God by serving the homeless and needy of North America with the aim of helping them improve their situation and become self-sufficient. You have chosen to become a part of a heart changing project that is spreading to MSAs and communities across the nation. As a new member of the PD Team, realize that Project Downtown is your project, and will go as far as you can dream...

OVERVIEW

MSA National would like to congratulate you on being a Project Downtown pioneer. Because the national Project Downtown effort is still in its expansion phase, the guidance offered by this handbook represents sincere advice and ideas based on the experience of Project Downtowns that have already commenced and are thriving. Some of the suggestions given herein may be situation specific, and so application of these guidelines must take the local context into account. Furthermore, one of the objectives of the Project Downtown Launch is to use the varied local experiences of the pilot projects to further enrich this handbook.

This handbook is organized into two sections corresponding to the developmental stages that project downtowns usually undergo. The first of these is the Meccan stage in which a small number of committed individuals begin with a dream, and who use their resources, however limited they may be, to translate their dream into action. The second stage of development is the Madinan stage which focuses on issues surrounding the sustainable growth of the project, such as the institutionalization of operations and the garnering of community support. We at MSA National strongly suggest that each local project recognize the stage that they are in and focus as much as possible on the issues relevant to their stage of development. Before getting your local PD Medina to thrive, we need to focus on getting your local PD Mecca to survive.
The first homeless man the students of PD Miami met was Yusuf...Brother Yusuf. Yusuf is just one of many Muslims that are forced to live a life of homelessness. Brother Yusuf has become part of the PD Miami team, and if you come down to the Government Center at 5 pm on Friday, you won’t see anybody’s smile shine brighter than Brother Yusuf.
POWER OF PURPOSE

The first PD Mecca was given birth in March of 2006 by a couple of Muslim students. They had seen too many people in the streets who were poor, hungry, homeless, and forgotten. The students gathered the money they had and purchased supplies to make 30 meals consisting of sandwiches, bananas, cookies, and water. They drove down to the heart of downtown Miami hoping that people would accept this small gift. Within a matter of minutes the food had all been distributed. The homeless downtown asked the students who they were and why they had come to bring them food. The students reply was that of Chapter 76 verse 9 of the Quran:

"We feed you for the sake of God alone, no reward do we desire from you, nor thanks."

The students were determined to quietly continue their efforts every Friday. However, word spread quickly, not only among the homeless, but also in the community. Friends and family asked where the students go every Friday. College and high school students asked if they can help distribute. Entire neighborhoods emptied their closets. Social workers, nurses, and physicians offered their services.

Looking back, the phenomenal growth of the project can only be attributed to one thing: purity of purpose. Project Downtown is not a public relations stunt. Some Muslims in the community have viewed projects such as this as a way to effectively change the image of Muslims in the United States. Viewing Muslims in a more positive light may be a by product of projects such as this one, but the fundamental, overriding purpose has always been and remains the search for Divine acceptance. As you begin project downtown within your city, it is this purity and power of purpose that will propel you onwards in your own personal journey to the Divine.
THE FIZZLE FACTOR

How many well-intentioned Islamic projects begin with passion and the promise to change everything, only to fizzle out in a few weeks? You need to commit now to not letting your project downtown be thrown onto that scrap heap of projects. The Prophet (pbuh) has taught us that the best of deeds are those that are small, yet steady. Keep the passion, but also take an honest look at your current capabilities and a long-term perspective on making a steady contribution. Many project downtowns have a weekly distribution schedule. If that can be done easily, then great, but if not, start with a bi-weekly schedule. If bi-weekly cannot be kept steady, then go on a monthly schedule.

Secondly, do not belittle the contribution you can make. The Prophet (pbuh) mentioned "(Each one) of you should save himself from the fire by giving even half of a date (in charity). And if you do not find a half date, then (by saying) a pleasant word (to your brethren)" (Sahih Bukhari, Volume 2, Hadith 394). He (pbuh) also said, "Do not turn away a poor man...even if all you can give is half a date. If you love the poor and bring them near you...God will bring you near Him on the Day of Resurrection" (Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith 1376).

Regularity of time and place also allows one to build trust and lasting relationships with clients. People feel a special connection when, in an uncertain world, they can rely on seeing your smiling face, rain or shine. In one project downtown, the homeless will save benches for the volunteers before they arrive, and when it rains, will give them their own ponchos. In sum, keep in mind that there are no absolute ideals, but only ideals relative to your situation. If you bite off more than you can chew, you will choke.

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE A HEART...

That is the most important thing that you need to bring downtown. One PD volunteer recounts that he was talking to a homeless person when the homeless person suddenly mentioned that other people would give them food as if they were "feeding animals." He saw that the Muslims, however, would be truly concerned of their condition. If some people would rather keep to themselves, then respect their privacy, however, do not hesitate to strike up conversations. Listen to their stories. They will teach you more than all of your schooling combined.

Ask them what else they need. What they say may surprise you. One homeless person indicated that sleeping outside makes one exposed to insect bites, and thus a tube of Neosporin would provide relief that we cannot imagine. Another client indicated that, during tropical storms or hurricanes, they need someone to get them out of the elements to a shelter. You may not be able to provide everything that they request, but the mere act of asking shows your level of concern.

Lastly, ask for and remember their names. If you must, write them down after you leave. Have the volunteers test each other on the way home. You may not see those same clients again for a week or a month, but to someone who may have no one else in the world, watch their facial expression when you return and they hear someone say their favorite word with a smile.
ASK NOT WHAT YOUR COUNTRY CAN DO FOR MUSLIMS, BUT WHAT MUSLIMS CAN DO FOR THEIR COUNTRY

Charles, homeless and wheel-chair ridden, has a diabetic infection that is systematically destroying his left foot. The local hospital says that his foot may have to be amputated. His only hope is getting to a specialty hospital that is a $45 Amtrak ticket away. Someone overhearing him explain his condition says, "Why don't you ask those people that come on Fridays?" "Who are they?", asks Charles.

THE MUSLIMS ARE COMING...

A middle-aged man going home is walking down the stairs of the metro rail station and notices, out of the corner of his eye, almost 60 homeless persons gathering around benches in front of the government center, Downtown Miami. Never noticing this scene on his way home before, he wonders what is going on. He walks towards the crowd and queries an old, frail, homeless woman on the fringes, "What is everyone waiting for?" She smiles incredulously, revealing three large gaps in her teeth, and says in a skeptical tone, wondering how he has not heard yet, "The Muslims are coming..."
Do not beg for volunteers or even material and financial support. Instead, go downtown with a friend and whatever resources you have and then share your experiences from the heart with anyone that will listen. Tell them the stories of these forgotten people. Explain how this simple project has fundamentally changed your perspective on life. To get people’s time or support, they need to get the feeling that this project is not dependent on their time or their support. With or without them, this train will be leaving. If people would like to join you in your journey to seek Divine pleasure, allow them. However, if they don’t want to hop on board, realize that your ends does not require their means.

There will be some within the community that not only do not want to participate, but will actively deter you from your path. They will say that the Muslims have enough problems to take care of first before doing things like this. Tell them that one of our biggest problems is our lack of involvement in solving the problems plaguing our society. They will also tell you that you are wasting your time on "these people." Remind them that, as Dr. Sherman Jackson once mentioned, we do not know where God has placed genius. If they persist, realize that this is exactly the paradigm shift that you are trying to make, and then continue your journey.

With regards to the role of dawah, you will get advice on two extremes: one says that each sandwich be made contingent on a mandatory pamphlet and explanation of the 5 pillars and another says this project should have nothing to do with Islam. Stay the middle path. Give food and supplies freely and unconditionally. If someone has a question or requests literature, then be as helpful as you can in specifically answering their question or fulfilling their request.

In choosing a location to conduct your distributions, make sure that it is a safe, open, and public place. Avoid side streets, and avoid going alone. Also be sure that the place is as accessible as possible to the homeless, such as a hub of public transit. Some of the best locations in which PD’s have been successful have been centrally located, busy places where both CEO’s and homeless are equally likely to be found. In smaller cities, the homeless may be more scattered and thus your PD may require more mobility. Many PD’s have gone to the homeless shelters on a weekly basis, especially in areas in the country where there weather may be extremely cold, requiring the homeless to take shelter inside. Just because they are in a homeless shelter, doesn’t mean they are not in need of food and friendship.

If you have made it this far, then you have the power of a pure purpose, you have a sustainable plan of action, you know how to interpersonally interact with clients, and you know how to gain more volunteers and support. Do you know what else you need to get started? Nothing. Congratulations, you have officially run out of excuses.
TIMELINE

- 3/2006: A few Muslim students go downtown to offer some food and drink to the homeless
- 3/2006: Project Downtown in Miami is established
- 5/2006: PD Miami hits 1,000 mark for # of meals distributed
- 6/2006: PD website is launched
- 6/2006: PD spreads to Tampa
- 8/2006: PD Miami Awarded for Community Service by UHI
- 8/2006: PD Miami featured in Miami Herald
- 8/2006: PD and MSA Ntl Unite to spread the Project across the Nation
- 9/2006: PD team presents at ISNA/MSA Ntl Convention in Chicago, IL
- 10/2006: Cities across the country respond to the call and launch their own pilot PD
- 11/2006: PD featured on local radio stations, newspapers, and websites such as IslamOnline.
- 1/2007: PD reaches Ft. Lauderdale, Durham, Wisconsin and even Washington DC.
- 1/2007: The satellite station ART America features the efforts of Project Downtown
- 2/2007: PD celebrates its third success, helping another couple get off the streets and move into an apartment.
- 3/2007: CAIR S Florida awards PD at their annual banquet. PD featured in Islamic Horizons.
THE DREAM TAKES FORM

It is important to start with PD Mecca to gain the requisite spiritual resources needed to continue your journey. However, to preserve and grow from your work thus far, you cannot stay in the PD Meccan stage indefinitely. You must make the hijrah to PD Medina. In this section, we will discuss the human and material resources needed to make the PD dream a reality.
HUMAN RESOURCES

As you get more and more volunteers to come with you, coordination of efforts becomes an increasingly difficult issue, and it would therefore be wise to take a more organizational structure. The most important part of defining this structure, however, is not assigning fancy sounding titles, but having clear, undeniable roles for all the positions defined. Some of the positions that some PDs have found useful include the following:

- **Director:** General oversight, works on strategic planning
- **Assistant Director:** Makes sure action items delegated are completed
- **Outreach Coordinator:** Reaches out to local organizations and government. Helps with fundraising.
- **Service Coordinator I:** Food preparation (acquiring from sources and organization)
- **Service Coordinator II:** Clothes and Toiletry preparation (acquiring from sources and organization)
- **Treasurer**
- **Social worker:** Designing program to help find jobs for clients by identifying their strengths and talents and matching them with employers. Also, working out any problems clients may have: government paperwork etc...
- **Volunteer coordinator**
- **Legal advisor**

As the organizational structure is being defined, it would not be unreasonable to begin thinking about a succession plan. Far too often in non-profit projects, much of the productivity is dependent on a few "stars," and once they leave, so does the project. Rather than only focusing on output, however, leaders need to also focus on imbuing the organization with capacity to continue being productive in their absence. People with leadership potential should "shadow" current leaders be gradually given more and more supervised responsibility associated with the position being shadowed.

In addition to having clearly defined roles, there must also be clearly defined, regular action items that are associated with those roles. For example, the service coordinator role would be in charge of making sure the food is prepared properly, transported to the location of distribution, distributed fairly and efficiently, etc. The service coordinator himself does not have to complete all these tasks, but the ultimate responsibility of having these tasks done by him or herself or through delegation would fall onto the service coordinator. One of the things some PDs have found useful in assigning and keeping track of action items is the use of project management web applications. Once a local PD requires this level of coordination, MSA National will assist in the procurement and use of such a system.
To be sustainable, food acquired for PD needs to be efficient. That is, it needs to cost the least amount of money and take the shortest amount of time to prepare. At the same time, it must also be of high quality.

One of the ways in which this is done is through something called food recovery. In the United States, there are billions of dollars in food that are wasted each year, and yet millions go hungry. This ironic situation calls for a middle "person" that can take the healthy, wholesome food that is surplus in one area and give it to the area of deficiency. Many food chains and bakeries throw away enormous amounts of food at the end of the day. Some PDs have made contacts with local bakeries that throw away an average of 200 bagels a day. Just before food distribution, the most wholesome bagels are picked up from the bakery and then filled with cream cheese, tuna, or peanut butter and jelly. This is just one example of using existing resources that cost little to no money.

One of the potential concerns of food recovery donors is liability. That is, what if someone gets sick because the donated food was not handled properly after leaving their retail store or food service establishment? To allay these fears, Project Downtown workers approaching these establishments should be familiar with the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act of 1996. This legislation, along with relevant State statutes, effectively limits the liability of donors to “gross negligence or intentional misconduct.” That is, food donations that are given in good faith and are “apparently fit” are not subject to civil or criminal liability.

If time is an important factor to consider, some PDs choose to buy from local food chains (e.g., bean burritos from taco bell). Although no preparation is required, this option does tend to be more expensive than the above. Another option is to assign families in the community to take care of one PD outing per year or per semester. If doing this, it will be important to inform the assigned family of a few rules regarding clean preparation of food. This option empowers the community and minimizes the amount of time required by students to prepare the food during the busy times of the semester. However, the feeling that comes from distributing food that you have personally prepared is quite special and should be done at least once in a while.

One PD has even employed one of their clients to help in food preparation. This not only helps reduce preparation time, but it also works toward Project Downtown’s ultimate mission of helping their clients become self-sufficient. Whatever food option you decide upon, quality and cleanliness are of the highest importance. Always use gloves in food preparation, and make sure it not only tastes good, but is also presentable (e.g., wrapped in cellophane, given with a napkin, etc.). If needed, MSA National can provide specific food preparation instructions. In addition to food, many PDs also make large jugs of cold lemonade. After distribution of food, lemonade, and/or supplies, some people may forget to throw away their wrappers or cups. PD workers should pick up all litter that was created as a direct or indirect result of their presence. In sum, develop a sustainable plan so that you will have something every time you go out.
MATERIAL RESOURCES: CLOTHING

Clothing is another great service to add to your PD. In the past, PDs have distributed anything from shoes, socks, shirts, and pants, to more formal attire for job interviews. One of the benefits of adding this service is that collecting of clothes is very simple. Many of us have closets full of clothes that we never use. Even if you just asked family and friends, you will likely get more clothes than you can pass out. If more clothes can still be passed out, establish drop off donation boxes in your local mosques, and be sure to make an announcement after Friday prayers. Be prepared to have a storage place for the clothes. They can be temporarily placed in volunteers house or in local mosque, however as inflow increases, you may need to acquire a commercial storage facility.

Another source of clothes is dry cleaners. If customers leave clothes at dry cleaners for a specified amount of time, then the dry cleaner management is entitled to dispose of those clothes however they please. Make contacts with local dry cleaners and express your interest in donating these clothes to the homeless. This source also tends to bring in higher quality name brand clothes that your clients will appreciate.

Have an organized distribution of the clothes. You do not want a free for all in which people are surrounding the distributor. If you have only one type of clothing, for example shirts, then one line for distribution will be fine. However, if you have many different types of items, such as shirts, pants, shoes, etc, this method tends to be messier. It helps to separate out the different types of clothes beforehand. In this case, it would be more optimal to have multiple lines depending on the type of item and size. Remember, many of the homeless face multiple stressors during their day, so keep things running smoothly and efficiently to avoid problems. Not only will you find comfort in seeing them wearing new clothes, but your heart will shine seeing the smile you have put on their face.
MATERIAL RESOURCES: TOILETRIES
Approach dollar stores and tell them that you are interested in buying in bulk and distributing to the homeless. Many stores will offer a substantial discount if they know your noble intentions. Also, many companies will offer large quantities of supplies for free if they know you are a non-profit (MSA National) providing these services. The most important items to look for are: soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, deodorant, and possibly some Neosporin for cuts/insect bites. Always be sure to regularly ask your clients of their needs, and even if they cannot be acquired right away, add them to a list of possible future items to acquire and distribute.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES
As you may have noticed from the above discussion, much of the PD work requires little to no financial resources. However, as your PD continues to grow, additional costs may be incurred. The traditional way in which PDs fund these costs are weekly or bi-weekly announcements at Friday prayer. These announcements include telling the attendees the purpose, progress, and future plans of the project and should be made with enthusiasm and hope. If you are excited, so will potential donors. Other avenues include fundraising dinners and government grants.

What is crucial about funding is that you do not just draw up elaborate plans and ask people to fund the proposed plan. People want to see action. If you want people to trust you with resources, you need to show your resourcefulness with what you already have. If you maximize the use of what you have, no matter how little it is, you will begin to grow organically as action will lead to more funding and funding will lead to more action.

To demonstrate your resourcefulness, you need to get into the habit of documenting and communicating your progress, and one of the best ways to do this is to make sure your website is updated. All local PD’s will be receiving a website, as well as a non-technical means for keeping the website updated. The most important update will be the services provided on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly basis.

Keep in mind that you do not have to keep the exact same website format of existing PDs. Be as creative as you can, and add sections that you feel will lead to greater volunteer participation or community support. Examples of this include posting the various stories that your clients tell you or volunteer testimonials of how this project has changed their life. Any experiences related may have to change the names of true persons involved to protect privacy.

Each website will come with a picture slideshow that you will be able to update. Taking many pictures of distribution and interaction with clients and uploading them to the website gives donors a more concrete feeling of the impact your PD is having on the community. If possible, you are also encouraged to take video footage distributions and interactions. MSA National is producing a promotional video and this footage will be crucial in encouraging further community support. This footage will also be important in the future for documentaries examining how the Muslims took on homelessness in North America.
This project has become the highlight of my week. Every Friday I come from Project Downtown feeling like a renewed and better person. Today I had a man in a wheelchair coming to the end of his life tell me that I reminded him of his youth. How can one walk away from that unchanged?

--Rafael Alejandro Jara, Miami, FL

The culmination of your organization’s mighty charitable and most bold efforts may just result in a revolutionary uprising at par with not only an urban renaissance but an innovatively gyrated Great Awakening as well. This project, gifted to be very iridescent, will without a shadow of a doubt continue to ripen. You sincere people deserve nothing but the utmost accolades. I applaud all your efforts and wish for only the best in both your individual endeavors and the future of Project Downtown. Good Luck!

--Nauman Chaudhry, Miami, FL

This is an amazing effort! You are doing a great human service with the right spiritual motivation. I only wish I was down in Miami to be a part of it. ...

--Arif Ishmael, Tallahassee, FL, USA
PD EXPERIENCES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Project Downtown started as a vision but has become a reality lived and experienced by MSAs and communities across the country. Since its humble beginnings, Project Downtown has spread to different cities, each with their own unique dynamics. As you’ve been going through this manual, you have begun to realize that there is no one specific way to set up your PD. Project Downtown is not a set of rules or regulations, it is a call to action. Project Downtown is realizing that our deen is not complete until we serve others. PD is a realization that no act is too small, as even the tiniest act of kindness can reach infinite proportions if the intention is for Allah, the Infinite. The best way to start your PD is to simply take it to the streets. From that point on you will find out what it is your city needs most, and how the Muslim community can provide it.

PDs across the country have taken on many different shapes and sizes. Take a look through some of the experiences from the different PD Teams across the country to learn how best you can serve those in your city...
PD MIAMI

CONSISTENCY
PD Miami has been successful for two simple reasons. Consistency and community outreach. The MSA at the University of Miami goes downtown to the Government Metro Rail station every Friday at 5pm. It only started with a couple students who went downtown with a few sandwiches and bottles of waters, and asked the homeless downtown where the best place would be to find others who were in need. Since then, the MSA members have been going to the Government Center on a weekly basis. They are able to do so because the University is conveniently situated right in front of one of the Metro Rail stations. So students can either drive downtown or hop on the Metro Rail. The Government Center has been a very successful place to connect with those in need because there is much traffic in and out. As a result, others who may not be in need are invited to have a drink, a sandwich, participate, or just stop and chat with the PD team. The PD Miami team has found it easy to go downtown every week, and in doing so, they have found that those in need downtown await their arrival. You can see it for yourself at 5 pm at the Government station, there will be lines waiting for the Muslims to arrive.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH
Through advertising the Project in the community, local organizations, and local mosques, PD Miami has been able to grow exponentially. Donations come from students on campus, as PD announcements are made at the University Jumuah prayers, other organizations, and private donors in the community. Donation boxes for clothes are left at local mosques. Recently, the PD Miami team was not only recognized by the University of Miami for their efforts, but also by the Universal Heritage Institute, and even by CAIR South Florida at their annual banquet. Getting the word out in the community not only empowers the Muslim community to take part, but will bring in more resources.

SERVICES
The Miami team has been able to help our friends downtown with more than just food and clothes. The Miami team began to assess people’s individual needs. For example, many of the homeless need bus passes to get to work, visit a family member, or go to the hospital. Phone cards also go a long way. Some may even need certain items to help them get a job. Since many of our friends downtown need documentation for wok, but have no address to have papers or letters from family sent, the Miami team is looking into renting a PO Box that can serve as a mailing address for those downtown. The Miami team have also begun visiting new locations to reach out to more people. The greatest success has been helping provide an apartment for two of our friends downtown, helping them get back on their feet and off the streets. The key, however, has been consistency.
PD TAMPA

PD TAMPA KNOWS THE STREETS
PD Tampa has a flavor of its own. If you go to downtown Tampa at night, you’ll see Muslims all around the city, finding those they can serve. PD Tampa realized early that they could not replicate the model Miami had set up, where the volunteers could simply all meet at one location. In Tampa, the homeless are spread out all across the city. What the PD Tampa team decided to do was divide their efforts. As a result the Tampa team meets downtown at the Ashley park at 7 pm (the later time was also found to be better in Tampa, since during the day the weather is too hot and the homeless take shelter from the sun). At the park awaits many of the homeless, who have come to expect the Tampa team. From there, a group then deploys to a nearby Salvation Army Shelter, where usually close to a hundred of our friends await as well. Lastly, the PD Team all meet up again at the Sacred Heart Church, which has become a safe haven for the homeless to sleep in front of without getting arrested. No one knows the streets of Tampa better than the PD Tampa Team.

ORGANIZATION
PD Tampa has also taken a different approach to setting up their organization. While other PDs were organized as a committee in the MSA, MSA members in Tampa decided it would be better to set PD up as its own student organization, still being affiliated with MSA. In such a way, PD Tampa has its own e-board, and can receive funds from the University for its events for raising awareness about homelessness on campus. Additionally, to help facilitate getting donations from the community, PD Tampa registered as a non profit organization, and has been able to open their own bank account. Remember, before getting bogged down with how to set up your PD, first establish your PD through regular visits to those in need. Since the PD Tampa team now serves close to 300 meals weekly, they may split into two teams that alternate every week to give the volunteers and off week.

UNITING OUR COMMUNITIES
Like other PDs, the Tampa team has been providing food, drink, and clothes on a regular basis. Some other important things your PD can provide include toiletries, wrist watches, blankets, bus passes, phone cards, and so on. PD Tampa has built a close relationship with the ISTABA Community Mosque, which has supported the Project. At their recent open house, the mosque provided a bus to pick up our friends from downtown so they could take part in the open house, lectures, food, and even free health screenings. At the open house, religious leaders from California had flown in and also came downtown with the PD Team! By the Grace of Allah, the PD Tampa team has also helped 3 people get an apartment and get off the streets,
PD EAST LANSING

COLD STREETS OF LANSING

In October of 2006, the Muslims of Lansing, Michigan determined that there was no better time to begin serving the hungry and homeless of their city than the month of Ramadan, a time of fasting and empathy for those who are less fortunate.

Although many Project Downtown chapters provide services on a weekly basis, PD Lansing decided to operate on a bi-weekly basis to ensure the sustainability of the project. Also, rather than start a separate organization, PD Lansing works under the auspices of the Community Service Committee of the Muslim Student’s Association at Michigan State University, as well as in conjunction with the Islamic Center of East Lansing.

Starting PD Lansing in Ramadan of 2006 that year also meant starting the project at the beginning of the winter season. Because of the excessively cold temperatures, many of the homeless in Lansing seek out the warmth of area shelters, and thus PD volunteers also went to area shelters as well to provide their services as well as the warmth of their friendship. Remember PD is different from other organizations. While other groups may come by the shelters, drop off clothes and leave, PD knows that the most important thing to do is spend time with our friends. So even when visiting shelters, take the time to stay for a while. Know the dynamics of your city. Remember that certain areas are preferred by those in need than others. Ask them. And remember, you will always find people in need at the shelters. Being at a shelter doesn't mean one does not need food, clothing, or most of all sincere love and concern.

Remember, your PD team can take a break from meals and serve in other ways as well. On one of their off weeks, the PD Lansing Team decided to make cards for a local orphanage. Just as PD Lansing has found, you too will realize that there are always opportunities to serve those in need.
DEDICATION PAYS OFF

Here is the story of how PD Ft. Lauderdale began....

“To begin with, 3 students headed out October 9th with 30 turkey sandwiches and 30 bottles of water. Though we were ready to embark on our mission, it was not meant to be. After driving through downtown and neighboring areas for literally 6 hours we decided to hit up the Salvation Army. They directed us to a soup kitchen. At this soup kitchen we received valuable information about the battle between the city and the homeless. It was shocking to know that the soup kitchen was an illegal business until just recently even though adult book stores and liquor shops were getting permits left and right. We found out it was illegal to feed the homeless, but that people were still doing it. In fact one charity was almost bankrupted in lawsuits against the city. It was then that our eyes were opened.

As we went back to downtown Ft. Lauderdale we noticed large signs that stated No Loitering and Do not feed. Do not feed? It was as if the homeless are some wild animals at a state park. October 17th was a new day. 4 Muslim brothers rode out and we were armed with 30 new turkey sandwiches and 30 bottles of water. We ran into 2 homeless men selling newspapers and gave them some sandwiches and water. We got to really talk to these guys and in our conversation they plugged us in. They told us to come to the beach at Wednesday. So we arrived at the beach to see a big line of people getting food, while the police were over seeing in the distance. It just so happened when we arrived that they ran out of food and drink. That’s when we unloaded the rest of our 30 sandwiches and bottles of water. The 4 brothers talked with the people serving and the homeless to figure out the logistics of how we can serve. We found out what days they are provided food and at what locations. One person told us that more Muslims have helped him in his life then any other faith. The people were very receptive and I truly saw the humanness in them. We went to their movie night and will go again to the beach on Wednesday to announce that we will be in downtown every Friday at 5. We plan on feeding 100 people on Friday the 17th. Once we see how many people will show up we will try and make sure that no one goes hungry. What better month than the month of Ramadaan to start feeding the hungry. It was a unique experience watching people satiate their hunger, while we were fasting.

We ask Allah for success and we ask that Allah make us lanterns of light so that Islam can shine on the streets of America. May Allah reward the PD "staff" for their hard work for His sake. “

Since then, the PD Ft. Lauderdale team has been regularly serving the homeless every week.
UNITED EFFORT

MSAs from around the DC area came together for the first time in January of 2007 to serve the homeless in downtown DC. While it is very unfortunate that our nation’s capital suffers from some of the worst homelessness in the country, the MSAs of the DC area saw it as an opportunity to serve. They have chosen to go about this endeavor wisely. Rather than go every week and burn out, they have agreed to come together initially every month to prepare meals and open their hearts to those downtown. As in all of the cities across the country, the PD Washington team came across numerous friends downtown who were Muslim, yet forgotten by the Muslim society. PD is dedicated to serving all those in need out of true love and concern, but it really hits home when one of the homeless is one of your own...
COLD HARD STREETS
Ain’t no riches, there ain’t no fame  
No sun to shine on your good name  
No love and laughter to fill your eyes  
You build your hopes and dreams  
Then you watch ‘em die

Life on the streets ain’t no fun and games  
So hard to accept when no one’s left to blame  
You can’t figure out how it got this bad  
Fading memories of everything that you had

Cold Hard City Streets  
Vacant eyes and bloody feet  
Takin’ it slowly, day by day  
As the city eats your soul away

You’re lookin’ for a way out of this deep dark hole,  
Hopin’ and prayin’ for someone to save your soul  
They make it seem so easy from the other side  
Don’t you ever wonder just who is livin’ a lie

No potion for the pain and it’s drivin’ you insane  
No shelter at all from the pourin’ rain  
You gotta make it on your own where nothin’ is free  
C’mon people won’t you listen to me

Cold Hard City Streets  
Angel eyes we’ll never meet  
We survive as best we can  
Gambling with a losing hand

-Sam Wilson, Tampa, FL

TO THOSE THAT GIVE
Some give us what we want  
Some give us what we need  
Like the clothes we are wearing  
Or the shoes on our feet.  
Some give us a hot meal  
So we don’t eat food that’s too old  
Some give us blankets  
When the weather is cold  
Some might take us to church  
Cause they have that type of heart  
Some might give us a job  
So we can have a new start.  
Some might give us their phone number  
So we don’t feel alone  
Some might get us a bus ticket  
So we can get back home.  
I’m not thinking about what you drive  
Or where you might even live  
I just want to say thank you  
To those that give.

HE GIVES ME HAPPINESS
He gives me happiness  
When no one else can  
He gives me happiness  
Cause He’s able to understand.  
He gives me happiness  
From the joy He brings  
He gives me happiness  
By the gift of writing and the smiles it brings.  
He gives me happiness  
Like a mom notices her child well kept room.  
He gives me happiness  
Like a Bride with her Groom.  
He gives me happiness  
Like a wild horse on the go  
He gives me happiness  
Like the age of three playing in the first snow.  
He gives me happiness  
When I have hard times and I make it through  
He gives me happiness  
To be able to share this poem with you.

-Michael Holloway, Miami, FL
NEW EXPERIENCE
An Experience unlike any other. With the gathering of my fellow brothers and sisters in downtown Miami, I couldn't have been more impressed. With a total of about 40 some odd youths (some not too young) my experience was both delightful and heart warming. I've never seen a gathering like the one I went to in ages. Getting to see my close friends and family again felt great.

Feeding and giving clothes to those in need was even better than I expected. I had the opportunity to take a good look at the people we were helping. If everyone is able to just stop and take a look around, we'd realize that there are others out there in need of desperate assistance. That I did. I found those people, alongside my Muslim brothers and sisters, and let them know that help was out there. Jamal Michel

BEAUTIFUL
Of course, every PD experience is life-changing, poignant, and heart-warming. One experience that comes to mind, that is definitely unforgettable, was when we were in DT Miami on a Friday in October. With sandwiches, lemonade, cheese nips, and smiles going around, one particular older African American women came up to me and asked me “this is all free?!? Why are you doing this?” and I explained to her it is our Muslim duty to help the community wherever and whenever help is needed. She gave me a huge hug and told me 4 words that touched my heart. She said to me "You Muslims are beautiful." Salma Howeedy Miami, FL

SELFLESSNESS
It was a darker day than normal at project downtown and it had just started to rain. None of the project downtown volunteers had thought to bring an umbrella since we were all rushing to be on time. We didn't want to keep those who had come to depend on us waiting for the food that many had come to enjoy. I remember standing there handing out lemonade when one of the homeless men that we lovingly refer to as regulars extended to me a small red plastic package that had bank of America on it. Since the person who gave it to me did not speak English very well I was a bit confused at first but accepted it anyway. Imagine my surprise when it turned out to be a poncho. Those who we thought we were serving showed an act of selflessness and gave when they had something to give. Needless to say this made the afternoon much better and I was left with the thought that charity is sometimes a two way street. This is just one of the bright points that we experienced in those first few months when the process was still new to us. It helped give rise to a saying among the volunteers that there is always a bright, surprising and inspiring moment every time we participate in project downtown. That moment is just one of the reasons that I return back week after week, just one of the reasons I look forward to project downtown. Mikal, Miami, FL

FRIENDSHIP
The best feeling of being part of Project Downtown is that with little time and effort, you gain so much. When I first walked into the shelter, I truly felt like I was part of a greater Lansing community. The individuals in the shelter expect nothing of you except your sincerity. I look forward to Project Downtown on Fridays because I know that the people in the shelter just can't wait for me to be there. When I walked into the shelter for the first time, I felt that everyone in the shelter was happy to see us and truly cared about what the members of Project Downtown and I was studying in school and where we were from. For those in the shelter, it was more than just the food; for them, the company of other people who can listen and appreciate each of their stories and hardships took priority. Moreover, their belief that each new day was a fresh beginning and may open the door for a better life was something that anyone can benefit from. After all, from a few visits to the shelter I had built great friendships along with valuable knowledge that I would retain forever. Jowhara Zindani, Michigan State University, East Lansing
Project Downtown has created much excitement in the Muslim community at local, national, and international levels. Many in the community have realized the potential vision that the project can become. At the same time, true appreciation of its potential cannot be gained without being in the trenches. PD workers refer to this as "feeling the dream." At a certain point in your work, you will come realize that what you are doing is not just giving someone a sandwich. What you will see is a vision of Muslims across North America, roaming the streets every week, feeding the hungry, quenching the thirst of the thirsty, clothing the destitute, healing the sick, and remembering the forgotten. You will be creating a paradigm shift in which Muslims see their vertical connection to God Almighty as dependent on their horizontal connection to their fellow human beings. So, at the outset, do not get too bogged down by the logistical details, infrastructure building, and institutionalization. Just allow yourself to enjoy the bliss of giving an unconditional gift and a smile. Feel the dream, because when you do, you'll know exactly what this handbook is trying to say but cannot express.
START WITH THE POWER OF PURPOSE

Find a core group who believe in the Dream and understand the purpose. Remember that it is only through the Power of Purpose will your PD be successful. It is not about numbers: when seeking the pleasure of Allah, your PD will be just as powerful feeding one person as it would feeding one hundred people.

IDENTIFY A LOCATION DOWNTOWN

Find a location downtown where there are people in need. Start with even just a few bottles of water. Tell the homeless you want to help them weekly. Ask them where is a good spot to find the homeless. Remember, optimally, the location you choose should be safe, accessible to volunteers, a familiar place to the homeless, and an area where many others who may not be in need may pass by.

LAUNCH A PILOT PD

Before spreading the word out, make sure you have solidified a safe location where the homeless can meet you every week/month. Assemble your core team, and gather whatever resources you may have: nothing is too little. It may be as simple as bottles of water. Once the core team has been out a few times and established a location and relationship with the homeless, spread the word.

SPREAD THE WORD

Now it’s time to gather the troops. Inspire students on and off campus to join you downtown. Give them the vision, the purpose, “the dream.” Little by little, divide up some of the tasks. You will find people beginning take ownership of the Project.

ORGANIZE

Begin to establish meetings with volunteers and coordinators. Assign tasks to different groups. Begin to give your local PD structure. Also, remember to keep records of how much you spent, where the money came from, and how many items were distributed each time. Start working on your website, upload your pictures, and feature your local PD nationally.

UTILIZE TALENTS AND RESOURCES

As volunteers take ownership of the Project, they will begin to bring their own strengths and talents to the table. Once they “feel the dream,” let them run with it. There is no limit to what your PD can or cannot do. It all depends on you purpose and diversity of skills of your PD Team. Remember to utilize your own food recovery program.

UNCLES AND AUNTIES: PD AND THE COMMUNITY

The powerful thing about PD is that it goes far beyond the local MSA. Word spreads to the community. Actively seek assistance and volunteers from the community. They will serve to provide many material and monetary resources. Advertise at the mosque, community centers, organizations, and individuals you meet.

THINK BIG

The potential is endless. Dream big. Your PD could be the model to follow nationwide. Social services, health screenings, employment assistance, street cleanup, family assistance. You name it, it’s possible. But it all starts with Purpose.
The best expression in Islam “is to feed the hungry and give the greeting of peace both to those you know and those you do not know.”

Prophet Muhammad, pbuh