



## San Francisco State University

### Zen Den- Safe Sleep Program

#### Pilot Program Report

Fall 2019- Spring 2020

*“[Zen Den] gave me a safe place to sleep,  
and not have fear of being hurt.”*  
-SF State Student

### Program Summary

Quality sleep is essential for academic success and overall wellbeing. For students experiencing housing instability e.g. sleeping in a vehicle, couch surfing or staying in a shelter, and for those commuting extreme distances, adequate rest can be unobtainable. In 2018, 18% of SF State students surveyed reported experiencing homelessness (Crutchfield & McGuire 2018). In 2019, the [SF State Basic Needs Initiatives](#), in partnership with Student Health Services (SHS) and The Mashouf Wellness Center (MWC), launched [Zen Den](#) as a part of the Food+Shelter+Success Hubs and Lounges project. This project, funded by the Morris Stulsaft Foundation and SB-74 Grant dollars, identified, enhanced and promoted existing campus infrastructure to better support student basic needs. Zen Den established a safe sleep program on campus that offered morning and afternoon rest zones equipped with sleep stations and an environment conducive to rest. On select days, Zen Dens were hosted at the MWC from 6am-8am and at SHS from 2pm-4pm. Rest zones were managed by student leaders who set up and monitored the space to ensure student safety, and security of belongings, a challenge of sleeping in unregulated places on campus. Though all SF State students were welcome to use Zen Den, the program was specifically marketed to students navigating housing insecurity and extreme commutes.

*“The Zen Den is a life saver because I'm more alert in class and I don't have to embarrass myself [snoring in class] anymore. On top of that, I am always scared about sleeping on the grass between breaks because I don't want anyone to steal my stuff.”*  
-SF State Student

## Program Outcomes

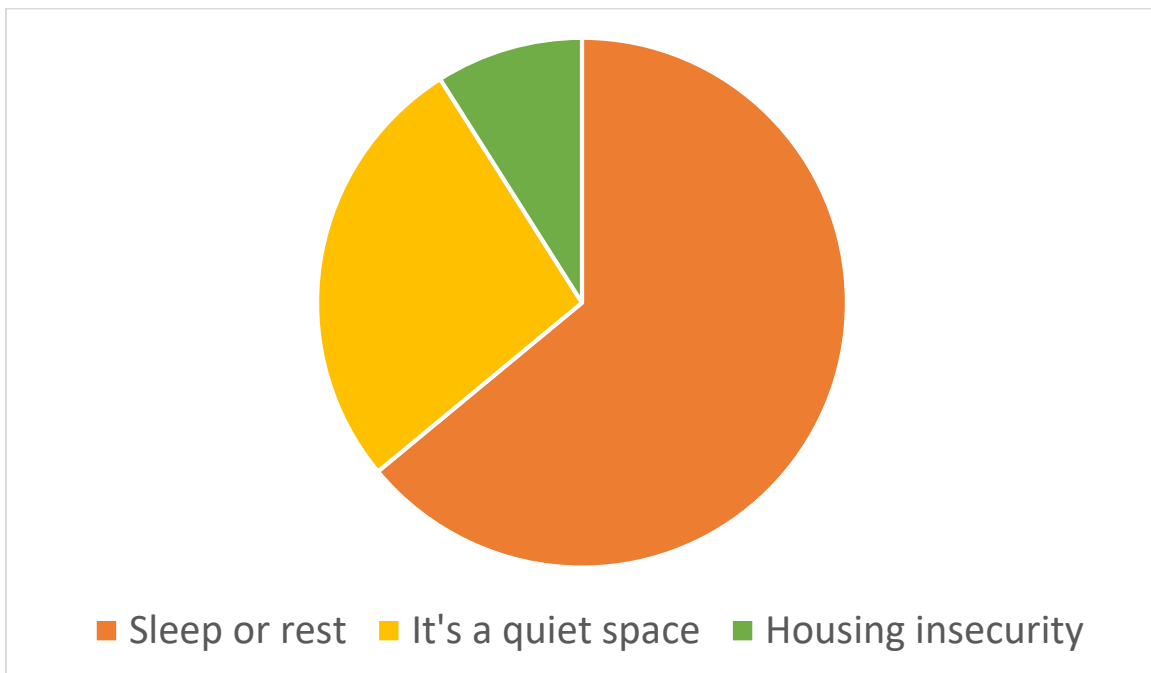
During the 2019-2020 Zen Den pilot, **thirty-seven rest zones were implemented, serving 74 students in total**. Fourteen students accessed early morning Zen Dens (6am-8am) while 60 students accessed afternoon Zen Dens at SHS (2-4pm). The number of students who accessed afternoon Zen Dens nearly doubled in the spring 2020, despite the early closure of the program due to COVID-19. Fifteen students used Zen Den two to four times within a semester indicating they began to rely on this space for rest. Seventy percent of users lived outside of San Francisco. Of participants surveyed who used Zen Den in spring 2020 (N=10), 64% reported the primary reason they used Zen Den was to sleep or rest. Twenty-seven percent used Zen Den because it is a quiet space, while 9% used Zen Den due to housing insecurity. Eighty-eight percent of respondents reported that they would be extremely likely to use Zen Den again and 100% of respondents reported they would recommend Zen Den to other students. **One hundred percent of respondents agreed that Zen Den helped them do better in school**. One participant revealed Zen Den “reduced stress” while another said after a 4am commute time and 9:45pm departure time from SFSU, Zen Den provided “a safe, quiet place to take a nap and helped stay alert for late afternoon/night classes.”

**Table:** Zen Den Service October 2019-March 2020

	MWC Fall 2019 Morning	SHS Fall 2019 Afternoon	MWC Spring* 2020 Morning	SHS Spring* 2020 Afternoon	Total
<b>Zen Dens implemented</b>	9	11	5	12	<b>37</b>
<b>Students served (unduplicated)</b>	8	21	6	39	<b>74</b>
<b>Students who returned</b>	2 (3x each)	2 (2x each)	1 (3 x each )	6 (2 x each ) 4 (4 x each )	<b>15</b>

\*Zen Den closed on March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020 due to COVID-19 precautions

**Chart:** Primary reason for using Zen Den- Spring 2020



*"[Zen Den] helped me get rest and respite."  
-SF State Student*

## Best Practices and Recommendations

**Establish an environment conducive to rest-** Zen Dens were temporarily constructed in existing spaces e.g. a classroom or conference room for the duration of daily programming. Measures were taken during rest zone times to promote relaxation. Dimmed lights, tranquil, soft music, ear plugs and eye masks were provided and "quiet" signs were posted outside the door.

**Establish clear community expectations-** Regulations such as no technology use in Zen Den, respect your neighbor and a notice of a five minute wakeup call were clearly posted for students to read when entering the space.

**Provide ways to secure belongings-** Students have reported feeling unsafe sleeping in unmonitored areas on campus due to the risk of theft. When using Zen Den, students could rest easier knowing their belongings were secure. At the MWC, students could lock their belongings in day-use lockers and a SHS student staff monitored the space.

**Develop as a student managed program-** Student staff at MWC, and HPW interns and volunteers, set up, regulated, promoted and provided feedback about Zen Den operations.

**Outreach is essential-** HPW and the MWC actively promoted Zen Den each semester. Forty-six percent of participants heard about Zen Den via social media or a flyer while others heard about the program through outreach tabling. Additionally, Zen Den was promoted through basic need access points such as the Dean-on-Call program.

**Ask for Feedback-** A feedback survey QR code was posted at each Zen Den and was emailed at the end of each semester, providing platforms for students to voice their experience. Feedback was used to make program adjustments and improvements.

## Challenges

**Storage-** Zen Den was launched at SHS with no dedicated storage space for supplies. Materials had to be carted from one space to another which was clunky and inefficient. Dedicated storage space was later secured, easing assembly, reducing set-up time and increasing rest time.

**Scheduling of space-** In the launch semester, multiple accounts of reservation conflicts occurred at our SHS site resulting in the cancelation of three Zen Dens. Once student leaders communicated these issues, scheduling conflicts were resolved.

**Waking students up-** Students were provided a five minute wake up warning. Though student leaders turned on the lights and provided an audio alert, sometimes students did not wake up. Conversations were had about the best way to wake up students without startling them or providing physical touch without warning. A wake up protocol was established that included telling all incoming students there would be a five minute warning and asking them if it was okay to lightly touch their shoulder if they did not wake up.

**Data tracking-** Collecting accurate data across Zen Dens was challenging. While SHS had a student leader welcoming students and signing them in to provide extra security of belongings. MWC was self-regulated as students were able to store their belongings in lockers. A paper sign-in sheet was devised but at the MWC but it is unclear if students actually signed in. Additionally, it is unclear if MWC student staff put out the sign-in each time. The MWC and Basic Needs partners are working together to re-evaluate the best way for students to sign in given a self-regulated model.

## Looking Forward

Zen Den was a successful pilot that received immensely positive feedback and support from the campus community. Exponential growth in use indicates rest zones are needed and valued by students. A handful of students indicated they utilized Zen Den to alleviate challenges of extreme commutes and housing insecurity. In future semesters, we hope to improve outcome-tracking processes, continue to improve Zen Dens environments, increase the use by housing insecure students and increase our promotion of this program.



## Appendix

**Table:** Student Health Service Zen Den Data 2019-2020

<b>Student Health Service Zen Den</b>			
<b>Fall 2019</b> Monday/Wednesdays		<b>Spring 2020</b> Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday	
<b>Zen Dens implemented</b>	11	<b>Zen Dens implemented</b>	12 *24 cancelled due to COVID-19
<b>Total Visits</b>	23	<b>Total Visits</b>	47
<b>Individual students served</b>	21	<b>Individual students served</b>	39
<b>Students who returned</b>	2 (2 times each)	<b>Students who returned</b>	6 (2+ times) 4 (4+ times)
<b>Lowest # of participants in one day</b>	1	<b>Lowest # of participants in one day</b>	1
<b>Highest # of participants in one day</b>	4	<b>Highest # of participants in one day</b>	7
<b>Monday programming</b>	13 total visits	<b>Tuesday programming</b>	25 total visits <i>Ambassador tabling occurred on Tuesdays</i>
<b>Wednesday programming</b>	10 total visits	<b>Wednesday programming</b>	8 total visits
		<b>Thursday programming</b>	13 total visits
<b>Sleep kits distributed</b>	10	<b>Sleep kits distributed</b>	18
<b>Blankets distributed</b>	6	<b>Blankets distributed</b>	23
<b>Pillows distributed</b>	11	<b>Pillows distributed</b>	34

**Table:** Mashouf Wellness Center Zen Den Data 2019-2020

<b>Mashouf Wellness Center Zen Den</b>			
<b>Fall 2019</b> Tuesday/Thursday		<b>Spring 2020</b> Tuesday/Thursday	
<b>Zen Dens implemented</b>	9	<b>Zen Dens implemented</b>	5 * 18 cancelled due to COVID-19
<b>Total Visits</b>	13	<b>Total Visits</b>	8
<b>Individual students served</b>	8	<b>Individual students served</b>	6
<b>Students who returned</b>	2 (3+ times each)	<b>Students who returned</b>	1 (3 times)
<b>Lowest # of participants in one day</b>	1	<b>Lowest # of participants in one day</b>	1
<b>Highest # of participants in one day</b>	2	<b>Highest # of participants in one day</b>	3
<b>Tuesday programming</b>	6 total visits	<b>Tuesday programming</b>	3 total visits <i>Ambassador tabling occurred on Tuesdays</i>
<b>Thursday programming</b>	7 total visits	<b>Thursday programming</b>	5 total visits

## References

Crutchfield, R., & McGuire, J. (2018, January). Study of Student Basic Needs. California State University.



*For more information, email [basicneeds.sfsu.edu](mailto:basicneeds.sfsu.edu)*