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Senior Capstone Project final research report : recommendation for success

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Senior Capstone Project Final Research Report
Recommendation for Success

Keywords: Salvation Army Transitional Housing Program
Transitional Housing
Homeless
Public Policy
Monterey County
Emergency Shelter
Low income

Abstract: This project was conducted at The Salvation Army Transitional Housing Program in order to evaluate the clients understanding of the policies for the program. The clients took a pretest to determine their level of knowledge of the policies. A manual was made for the clients in order to have a better understanding of all the policies. In the manual I also included tips which will help the client become a successful resident. This capstone projects was done to help the clients at The Salvation Army Transitional Housing Program become successful residents in the program and achieve the goal of breaking the cycle of homelessness.

Executive Summary

I did my capstone project at The Salvation Army Transitional Housing Program. The agency is located in Monterey County in the city of Seaside. They are dedicated to helping those less fortunate in our community. Half of the population served by The Salvation Army is homeless. The Transitional Housing Program focuses on helping people break the cycle of homelessness in order to transition into stable housing by providing clients the necessary resources to help themselves.

While at my internship, I was able to point out the problem of an increasing number of clients being terminated from the program. Clients were not following the policies which were given to them at the beginning of their stay in the program. During the three step interview process, clients are expected to read and understand the policies for the programs before they move in. This problem is becoming more apparent because out of the five terminated cases in 2006, three were terminated because they continually disregarded basic policies.

For my Capstone project I decided to address this problem by using a multi- step process. I first conducted a pre-test on the client's knowledge of the policies. I formulated the test using topics that were of concern to the staff. I also included basic questions about the agency. I analyzed the clients' answers in order to know which topics were most unclear to the clients. I created a binder I called Recommendation for Success which included the program agreements, tips for being successful resident, and

resources such as extra forms such as Authorization Visitor sheets and budget sheets. I presented the binder to clients. I left a Recommendations for Success binder in each of the homes. After I had finished presenting the binder to the clients, in an individual bases I have the clients a couple of minutes to look over the binder before giving them the post-test.

With the results from the pre-test and post-tests I was able to see that the clients understood the policies better. By keeping a copy of Recommendations for Success binder in each housing units, clients will be able to use it as a reference. Some of the clients told me it was a good idea to have the binder in the residence because it will not only be used as a reference but it will also help be the clients stay organized. If someone else were to continue my Capstone project, I recommend getting the clients involved with putting the Recommendations for Success binder together. The clients will then feel they have contributed to the process. This will also get the clients working together to help one another. I would also recommend setting aside more time for the program. If I had started this project sooner I might have seen more of the outcome of the binder.

Description of the agency:

The Salvation Army Transitional Housing Program is a non-profit organization under the 501(c) 3 status. (Sperry, 2007) The Salvation Army began in 1865 by William Booth, a London minister. He wanted to help those less fortunate. He took his message of helping people to the streets where the he would reach the poor, homeless, hungry and destitute. Over

time, The Salvation Army became stronger and more powerful. Currently, The Salvation Army can be found in 110 nations around the world. The Salvation Army offers different services which range from helping homeless to after-school programs. Their mission is to "... preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination." (Sperry, 2007)

In Monterey County, The Salvation Army offers child care, after-school programs, homeless facilities and transitional housing. I did my internship and Capstone project at The Salvation Army Transitional Housing Program in Seaside. The Transitional Housing Program provide services to families who are in transition from being homeless to permanent housing. This program includes two-sub programs. The first program is short-term housing. This is a 90- day program in where families are placed in hotel. The clients are given resources to find a better job or referrals to counseling services. The other sub-program is called Casa de Las Palmas. This is long-term housing program with a maximum stay of two years. The first participants moved in on October 25, 2002. Since then, the program has continued to foster families with various services and resources. The majority of clients come from domestic violence backgrounds. All the current clients are single mothers who have between two and four children living with them. Families live in an apartment complex which is fairly new and all furnished apartments are located in Seaside. Casa de Las Palmas was developed to give people the proper tools and skills to be able to

transition from being homeless to a stable living environment. Casa de Las Palmas "...strives to instill a positive work ethic and necessary lifestyle changes to break the cycle of homelessness. The purpose of Casa de Las Palmas is to help families become self-sufficient by being a co-participant in the steps necessary to improve the family."(The Salvation Army, 2007)

The problem/challenge/issue to be addressed

The two Transitional Housing programs have specific requirements for their clients. The majority of the Transitional Housing Program is funded by the Housing and Urban Development organization (HUD). In order to be funded by the government, there are requirements that the agency as well as the clients have to follow. One requirement which cannot be made exempt is that only families who have children qualify for the programs. Therefore, people who do not have children are referrals to other local agencies. The other important requirement is that the head of the household has to be employed. Clients are required to be working 30 hours or more per week. Clients will need to turn in a copy of their pay stubs to verify their employment each month. The case worker will keep track of their progress during their weekly meetings. This is a time where the case worker has the opportunity to talk to clients about their progress.

The Transitional Housing Program has policies such as workshop or case management which are given to the clients during the three-step interview process. During this process they are expected to read and

understand the policies for the program. When a potential client is being interviewed they are informed that The Salvation Army Transitional Housing is a program, therefore there are specific requirements they have to follow in order to stay in the program, such as attend workshops and case meetings. The problem is that clients are not following the policies for the program and as a result they are being terminated before finishing the program successfully. This problem is becoming more apparent, as there were five families terminated from the program in the year 2006; three of these were terminated because they continually disregarded basic policies. Clients push the boundaries to see how far they can get away with not fulfilling the program's requirements. If one family is allowed to get away with not meeting the requirements, then other families may follow their example. Since Casa de Las Palmas opened their doors in the year 2002 there have been a total of 30 families. Out of 30 families, 10 have been terminated from the program. This means that one out of every three clients have been terminated from the program. This termination rate has become a concern to The Salvation Army.

This problem does not only pertain to The Salvation Army but has also been identified by other local agencies. I sent a survey to five local transitional housing agencies asking questions about their transition and termination rate. I only received responses from two out of the five agencies. One of the agencies I surveyed was The Salvation Army in Watsonville. They provide services similar to those of the Monterey

transitional housing but they offer their services to a larger population. For the year 2006, The Salvation Army in Watsonville had an estimate of 35 families who entered the program. In the same year 20 families transitioned out of the program. In 2006 they had four families who were terminated from the program. For the transition process it does not necessarily mean that they were successful in the program, it could mean that they have completed their time or it could also mean that decided to leave the program. Termination is based on the clients being asked to leave with or without an official eviction process. Watsonville's population is larger and their program different policies and time periods to The Salvation Army in Monterey.

The other agency I surveyed was Homeward Bound. This agency has 54 units. It is also located in Seaside. I was able to find out that 26 families entered the program for 2006. During this year there were 17 families who transitioned from their program and 10 families who were terminated from the program.

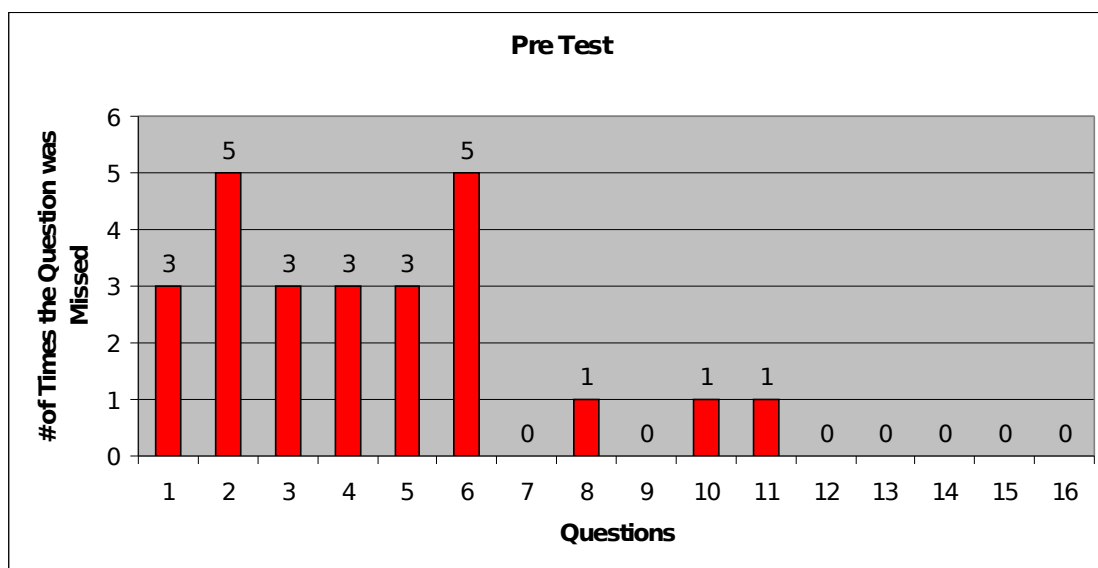
I compared the results these two agencies to The Salvation Army Transitional Housing Program of Monterey County. For the year of 2006, there were seven families that entered the program. During this year two families transitioned from the program to their own housing. There were five families who were terminated from the program. The Salvation Army Transitional Housing Program of Monterey County is different to the other two agencies in that they have work with a smaller population. This could

affect their termination or transitional rate because there might be more attention given to the residents. Having shelter is one of the basics rights of life. In Monterey County, keeping a home is becoming struggle for families because the cost of living is too expensive. Based on the 2005 Monterey County census of the homeless population there were 1,570 homeless persons observed on the street, in emergency shelters, and transitional housing locations during the point-in-time census on January 27, 2005. "The street homeless comprised 68% of the homeless population, while the sheltered homeless accounted for 32% of the homeless population. There were 1,264 homeless individuals (80%), and 306 persons in 94 families (20%). This equates to an annualized estimate of homelessness of between 5,574 to 7,274 people."(Senger, 2006) Due to the increased cost of housing there are more people are becoming homeless. The average rental cost for a multi-family unit has increased 32% from \$ 792 in 1993 to \$1,044 in 2002. This threatens to be a big problem in Monterey County since the two leading industries are agriculture and tourism. These jobs are among the lowest paying jobs. According to the state and federal definition, households are overpaying for housing if they are spending more than 30% of their annual income on housing cost. Based on data for the Monterey County "75% of all households with incomes of \$19,999 or less spend more than 30% of their income on housing." (Senger, 2006)What this represents for the clients of Casa de Las Palmas or for anyone in transitional housing is that they fall under the statistics of how

the high cost of rent in the Monterey County is leaving them homeless. They fall under the low income level because they were unable to pay rent since their income was below what a family of two should earn instead of a family of five.

Project Description

After reviewing the problem and the different methods I could use to help the clients fulfill the Casa de Las Palmas mission statement, I decided to do a program evaluation through a professional point of view but also I wanted to do a program evaluation through the eyes of the clients. I developed a process which allowed me to get information from all the clients. I started by giving the clients a pre-test. This would test the clients on their knowledge of the policies of Casa de Las Palmas. I included information that they were given during their interview process, case management, workshops, and basic information. The pre-test consisted of multiple choice, true and false, fill in the blank and one short answer questions. The chart below shows the results of the pre-test.

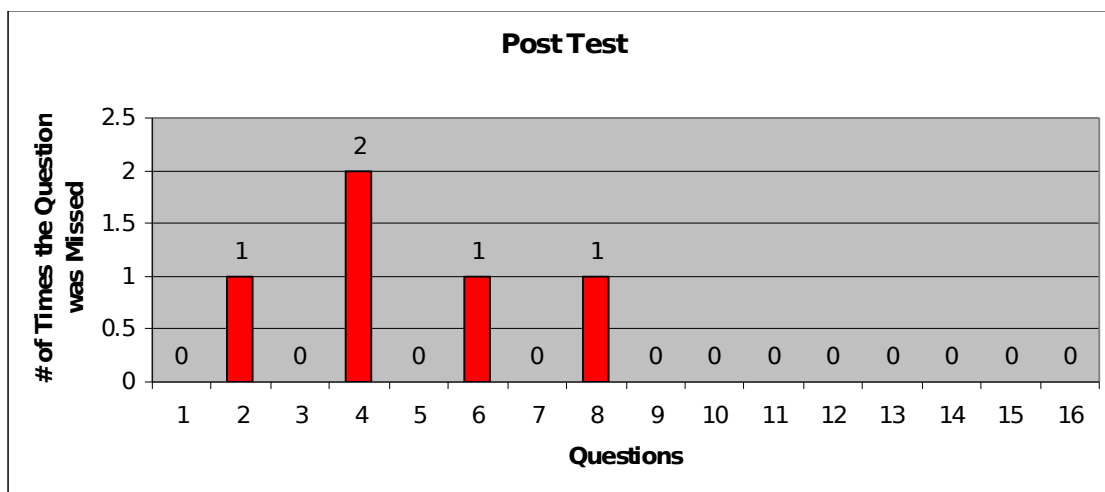


While analyzing the pre-test I detected that there seemed to be an area in which most clients answered incorrectly. This told me what type of information I should focus on for the next step of the project. I wanted to give the clients the information they need in order to fully understand all the agreements and policies from the program.

The next step of the project was to develop a binder for each of the clients. I called it Recommendations for Success. In the binder I included The Salvation Army Program Agreement, Residential Program Agreement, Policies, and tips for becoming a successful resident. Everything was put together in a half-inch binder. All the sections were divided and organized according to level of importance. After the binder was completed, I presented it to each of the residents individually. I explained to each client why each piece was included, why it was important and encouraged to include the signed agreements which they received when they moved in. I went through the whole binder explaining to them the highlighted sections and explained again that they were the topics I included in the pre-test. I also told them to them the last section which was called Becoming a Successful Resident. In this section I included tips of to how avoid getting written warnings. For example I included information such as what the Resident Manager looked for when she does cleaning inspections. I also included some tips on how to be organized and prepared when there were

meetings so I included a calendar. The last section included forms such as authorization visitor forms and budget sheets. This section was intended for the clients to have as a resource. If clients were to ever need an extra copy of a form, they would be able to have them at hand.

The last step for the clients was to do a post-test. The post-test had the same questions from the pre-test except that it included questions regarding how useful the binder was for their success. The post-test measured if the clients were able to get any clarification about the policies of the program. The graph below shows the results from the post-test.



The post-test shows that the clients were able to understand the policies better. Clients only got a total of five questions wrong compared to getting twenty-five wrong when from the pre-test. These results demonstrated that the binder’s purpose was fulfilled because clients were able to review the policies before taking the pos- test.

By giving the clients different types of resources, it will help the clients become successful residents in order to complete the housing

program. Clients will have all the tools necessary to become independent. Although they still have to follow all the Casa de Las Palmas policies, they will not be as dependent on the case manager for simple questions or forms. Clients will also be able to have all the agreements and policies at their disposal. They will be able to use their binder as reference or as an organizational tool when they receive forms from the case manager or resident manager.

Academic requirements

My capstone consisted of a few different Major Learning Outcomes (MLO) from the Collaborative Health and Human Services major. (CHHS, 2006) The majority of this capstone focused on Public Policy Analysis. I had to analyze the effectiveness of the Salvation Army Transitional Housing Program policies as well as analyzing existing policies from other agencies. I also had to find ways of helping clients fully understand Casa de Las Palmas policies. I was able to do this not only by meeting with the clients but also by presenting the policies in a binder and giving them examples of how it is not impossible to follow the rules.

The other MLO I used was Collaboration. In order to prove the point that The Salvation Army Transitional Housing Program was not the only agency who was experiencing problems with their termination rate, I was able to collaborate with other agencies to get information from them. I was also able to collaborate with other of The Salvation Army Transitional Housing staff members in order to get all the information necessary to

include in the binders. Collaboration was a key point in my capstone because I was able to work with my mentors and staff to develop a list of recommendations that the clients would easily be able to follow.

The last MLO I used was the Statistics and Research Method. I was able to use this MLO when it came time to do all the research for my capstone. I had to develop a survey for other transitional housing programs. I also developed a survey for the clients at Casa de Las Palmas. This survey was difficult to create because I had to make sure all the questions asked were topics that had been discussed. Another way I was able to incorporate this MLO was to find statistics about the Monterey County. I found information which showed why having transitional housing programs are essential for the county.

My capstone related to the California State University Monterey Bay vision statement because the main focus of my capstone is to help the community. (CSUMB, 1994) One of the main points of the vision statement is that "The campus will be distinctive in serving the diverse people of California, especially the working class and historically undereducated and *low-income populations*."(CSUMB, 1994)The Salvation Army Transitional Housing Program population largely consists of homeless and low-income people. The mission of the Transitional Housing Program is to break the cycle of homelessness. This program is a tool to help clients be able to transition into permanent and stable environment so that they do not fall back into the homeless cycle. Another way my capstone reflects the CSUMB

vision statement is that CSUMB is focused on collaboration with other agencies. "The university will be a collaborative, intellectual community distinguished by *partnerships with existing institutions both public and private, cooperative agreements* which enable students, faculty, and staff to cross institutional boundaries for innovative instruction, broadly defined scholarly and creative activity, and coordinated community service."

(CSUMB, 1994) During my capstone I had to work with other agencies in order to find out that the housing termination rate was a problem with other agencies too. "The curriculum of CSUMB will be student and society centered and of sufficient breadth and depth to meet statewide and regional needs, specifically those involving both inner-city and isolated rural populations, and *needs relevant to communities in the immediate Tri-County region* (Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito)." (CSUMB, 1994) I fulfilled the regional requirements because I did my internship at The Salvation Army Transitional Housing in Seaside. I was able to find information on transitional housing around Monterey County and Santa Cruz County.

Conclusion

By doing this capstone project I was able to learn about working with people trying to transition out of being homeless. I was able to see that clients would at times be willing to do or say anything to get into a program without fully understanding it. When this happens there is a higher of termination rate from the program because client will realize that is not

what they signed up for. The current clients at Casa de Las Palmas have received an important tool to be able to complete the program. People will benefit from my project because they now have a better understanding of the policies of the agency. Some of the comments I received from clients were that “This will be a great tool to keep organized”, “Now if I have a question I could look it up” and “I am glad I will have a copy of all the information in my own home.” I also received some comments from staff members such as, “Clients will be able to become more independent” and “This binder is great because residents will have everything at their disposal”.

If I was to do this capstone again, or if someone else was going to do a similar project, I would change a few things during the process. One of the biggest things would be to start earlier. Then there would be enough time to evaluate the project and show how the clients would react to the binder over time. I would have measured if there was a decrease or increase in the number of times a client got written up. The next recommendation would be to give the binder to each client when they first enter the program. The clients that I gave the binder to had been in the program for a couple of months before receiving it. My last recommendation would be to get the clients involved when putting the binder together. By getting clients involved the clients would feel that they were able to contribute during the process. Clients would be able to include their point of view and be able to suggest different topics to include in the binder. Overall I think that my

capstone project was a success. Clients were excited to be able to have something to help them become a successful resident.

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