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Conozca sus Derechos Como Rentero

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Conozca sus Derechos Como Rentero
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This paper, Capstone #4, was produced for Adrienne Saxton and the Collaborative Health and Human Services 496B Course. Correspondences concerning this article should be addressed to Maria Melgoza-Gaytan at mgaytanramirez@csumb.edu.

Title: Conozca sus derechos como rentero.

Abstract

Building Healthy Communities- East Salinas is funded by The California Endowment, which is a statewide nonprofit foundation. The BHC's main goal is to work alongside residents and community-based organizations to work on community participation and leadership to create a healthier community for the residents of East Salinas. Currently, East Salinas tenants are victims of illegal rental practices. Conozca sus derechos como rentero booklet created, an educational booklet and flyer highlighting tenants' rights. Factors that contribute to the victimization of the residents include the language barrier, lack of knowledge on laws and their legal status. The goal is to educate tenants on their rights and awareness of housing agencies within the community. During this project, 15 booklets, 49 Spanish and 49 English flyers were distributed to the community. Recommendations for the agency would be to create a forum to discuss the issue at a higher level to reach a larger audience and to distribute more booklets. This issue around community members falling victims to malpractices when it comes to renting can also be taken to the city so that the issue could be addressed by city council.

Keywords: *East Salinas, rental practices, tenants, victimization, residents*

Building Healthy Communities- East Salinas

Building Healthy Communities- East Salinas (BHC) is funded by The California Endowment, which is a non-profit statewide foundation (The California Endowment, 2018(b)). Even though the BHC is funded by The California Endowment it is over looked by Action Council of Monterey County, Inc. The California Endowment's "idea was to select a handful of low-income California communities that were experiencing significant health disparities, which started with 200 and then whittled down to 14" (Building Healthy Communities, 2017). Luckily, East Salinas was one of the 14 cities that were chosen in 2010 to have this 10-year initiative. The California Endowment chose these cities with the idea that the communities "resources are not being optimized" and the goal is to figure how the community can begin to utilize the resources that can then lead to community resilience.

The BHC's main goal is to work alongside residents and community-based organizations to work on community participation and leadership to create a healthier community for the residents of East Salinas (Alisal). The community, "Despite the many challenges East Salinas faces, there is a strong desire from residents, private organizations, and public agencies to improve the social and economic conditions in the neighborhood" (Building Healthy Communities, 2017). The opportunity to create change in the community is possible only if organizations, community partners and residents work together towards solving the issues faced by Alisal residents. BHC works on various social issues that affect the residents of East Alisal. Some of the work they are doing revolves around education justice, justice systems, land use and equality when it comes to the distribution of funds by the city (The California Endowment, 2018(a)). The main issue that BHC is trying to combat is the negative cognition that is associated with the Alisal community. They want to work hard to change this view that outside individuals

have and revitalized the community and help residents become empowered and be able to create a voice for themselves.

Alisal Vibrancy Plan

The current big project that BHC is working on is the Alisal Vibrancy Plan (AVP). The community and the City of Salinas are joining together to create a plan, “The Alisal Vibrancy Plan is an opportunity to improve the quality of life for East Salinas families by creating a more vibrant, equitable and healthy community in a way that builds upon the social and cultural wealth of the Alisal (Alisal Vibrancy Plan, (n.d.) a). BHC is contributing in this project by getting residents to participate in the planning and voicing their opinions on changes they want to see in the community. The AVP is changing the way the City of Salinas interacts with the Alisal residents by involving them with the planning of this new change that is coming to the community and engaging with them face to face. Residents are now being part of this new projects from the beginning and helping built up to the extended possibilities of change that will occur.

One of the things that the BHC is trying to help with in this process is to, “Conduct outreach and share information in a manner that provides transparency in the outreach events and discussions” (Alisal Vibrancy Plan, (n.d.) b). By providing transparency between the city and residents both sides will be knowledgeable of the changes that are taking place and being discussed. With the transparency, residents will also feel more welcomed in the process and will be encouraged to participate more in these current and future projects. Another community engagement strategy that is being utilized during this project is to “Reach consensus on the recommendations to ensure they align with community expectations and provide greater certainty to the development community” (Alisal Vibrancy Plan, (n.d.) b). This is to ensure that

the final outlook of the AVP turns out to be close or exactly what the community is asking for. This can tie back to being transparent with the community. This gives the community more validation that their participation and collaboration with the AVP was not just a waste of time and that the city is taking their needs into consideration.

Alisal Corridor Plan

Alongside working with the AVP, BHC is also working on the Alisal Corridor Plan (ACP), which is the sub project under the AVP. The ACP is being planned the same way the AVP is by obtaining resident involvement, but this project is specifically targeted towards the Alisal Street itself. This means that the focus for this sub-project is only Alisal Street and not the Alisal community as a whole. The ultimate goal is to create “A ‘complete street’[, which] is a street that is safe, comfortable and convenient for all users, young and old, able or disabled, that walk, bicycle, take transit or drive along the corridor” (Alisal Vibrancy Plan, (n.d.) c). The city is working on revitalizing the look of Alisal Street to make it more user friendly.

Problem, Issue or Need

East Salinas tenants are victims of illegal rental practices.

Problem Definition

As the agency was tabling at community events due to the AVP: ACP they were interacting with the community and discussing issues that affect the East Alisal residents. The Land Use Coordinator, Monica, oversaw and assisted with the coordination of the tabling events and focus groups, where BHC noticed the community was facing an issue. During the community tabling events, community members discussed items such as lack of lighting, lack of maintenance from the city, lack of housing leading to overcrowdings and problems they faced

when it came to their leases. Of course, most of these issues were addressing what the AVP: ACP would be covering and changing with the project. On the other hand, the issue of tenant's right is not going to be taken care of with the current projects happening in East Alisal and because of that, BHC decided to take some action.

The concerns that were the most impactful were the fact that they were only receiving the last page of the lease contract where they were just expected to sign the contract. These concerns did not just come up at community events but also when focus groups were formed to discuss how the grant money for the AVP:ACP should be distributed. As Monica noticed the fact that the lack of knowledge on tenant rights was a huge issue she decided to inform the intern, Maria, so she could create a project to fulfill her capstone and create something for the Alisal residents they serve.

Contributing Factors

Residents shared how they were obtaining leases they were not able to read due to the language barrier, or their literacy capabilities. A contributing factor to this issue is the language barrier that the residents face. Salinas residents speak English, but it was reported that 35 percent spoke it less than very well while 55 percent of the population speaks Spanish (Census, 2010). One can conclude that since more than half of the population speak Spanish and those who speak English don't feel confident speaking English, this would be another way the tenants are being victimized. By having a population that doesn't understand what they are reading or what they are being told they tend to fall victims of leasing malpractices.

The reason why more than half of the residents speak Spanish is due to 35 percent of them being foreign born and 88 percent are migrating from Latin America (Census, 2010). Since

a good portion of the community is coming from a different country with different laws and customs, it plays a role on why individuals become victims. Residents mentioned how they were not familiar with the laws around housing or leasing. Residents noted that they did not have to face the renting issue in their country of origin because they own their land.

An additional factor that plays a role in this issue is the immigration status of the individuals experiencing the problem. It is estimated that 18 percent of Salinas residents are in this country without authorization (Marcelli, E. and Pastor, M., n.d.). By having almost, a 1/5th of the community undocumented can be an added factor to the issue around improper housing leases. Undocumented individuals are a vulnerable population who continually live in fear so speaking out about problems they face can be hard. Being in fear that if they speak up against the injustices they deal with they could somehow face deportation as a retaliation from their landlords. Alisal families have a reason to fear this since about 40 percent of children who are U.S. Citizens have at least one parent who is undocumented (Marcelli, E. and Pastor, M., n.d.). Undocumented individuals don't only fear being displaced from their home but also being separated from their loved ones.

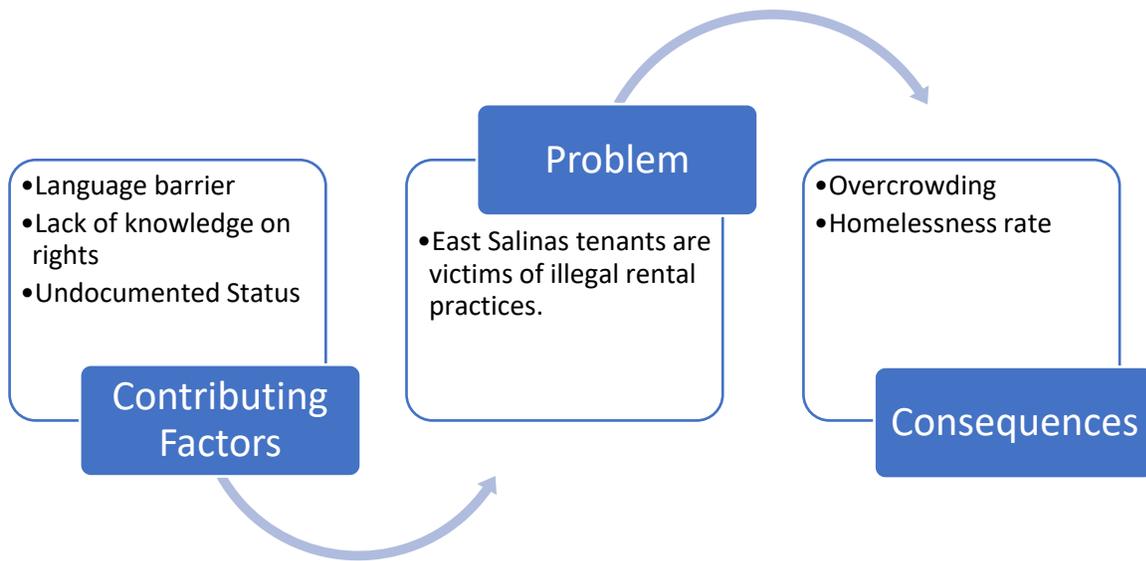
Consequences

More than 17 percent of Salinas residents are living in overcrowded housing conditions (Census, 2010). Residents are reporting out the harsh conditions in which they are living in due to the housing crisis. By having multiple individuals or families in a single household can be a consequence of tenants being taken advantage of. A simple drive around the city is a great way to notice the congestion that is impacting Salinas at a high rate. In Salinas, "Where housing stand alone, the number of vehicles overflowing from the street, parked on lawns, indicate these aren't single-family homes" (Morehouse, 2016, November 5). Again, it is noticeable that housing units

around town are being occupied by multiple individuals and sometimes families. The number of cars that belong to a house is a perfect indicator of the excesses people living there. Cars in town are lined up one after another on both sides of the streets

Another issue that can result from the victimization of residents when it comes to housing can be a rise in homelessness. Salinas had an increase of 57 percent in homelessness rate from 2015 compared to 2017 (Wu, A. June 23, 2017). This rate can continue increase due to improper housing agreements and unjust evictions. By having an increasing homelessness rate, it causes another problem that the City must tackle and also a concern with in the community.

Figure 1: Problem Model



Purpose

For this capstone project, a booklet was created and distributed in reader friendly Spanish that can be used by resident to understand their rights as tenants. Tenants fall victims of improper rental agreements due to their lack of knowledge of laws, language barriers and immigration status. For the agency this project will provide a stronger relationship with the community. The community will benefit because a tangible item can be taken home and refer to when needed. By educating the residents on their rights, the process of breaking the cycle of abuse from landlords can begin. By having a community that is educated, residents will be able to stand up for themselves and know where to look for when it comes to resources they need in their own community. The problem at hand deals with a vulnerable population who is being victimized primarily due to their lack of knowledge and language barrier. The biggest benefit this project will be providing is a tighter community, with residents who feel safe to reach out to community organizations when needed.

This project was important to the intern since residents were sharing very heartfelt personal stories they faced when it came to housing in the community. The agency knew about the housing issue that the community faced but hearing these stories make the problem be more real. The fact that the community is a vulnerable one who faces this problem and have nowhere to turn due to their lack of knowledge made them the perfect group to assist.

Implementation

An education intervention and resources where made available to the residents via flyers and booklets (Appendix a & b). This means that the intern had to create the flier and booklet as well as find ways to distribute the information. During this project the intern was able to network

with housing agencies, residents and the city. Networking was a huge way that this project was able to be completed.

After having a clear picture of what the project was going to be, the intern decided to go ahead with what she knew was going to be the hardest thing, the research. The research took too much time and effort to complete. The intern wanted the booklet to have the most updated information, especially local information. Finding this was hard because the City of Salinas does not have any current housing nor landlord/tenant laws. This means that the information obtained came from the state and federal level.

Scope of Work

As mentioned before work for this project began when Monica and the intern debrief on the tabling events last semester. Towards the end of the Fall'17 semester the intern started working with Monica and being involved in the whole AVP: ACP. It was here that she started to learn more about the real problems that the residents are facing. In Table 2 interns activities relating to the Conozca sus Derechos Como Rentero Booklet capstone are listed.

Table 1: Activities for Conozca sus Derechos Como Rentero Booklet

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline	Estimated completion dates
Understanding and attending AVP: ACP meetings	AVP: ACP Grant & Resident Comments Meeting Notes and Meeting Packets	November 2017	December 2017
Verbal agreement on capstone	Set Capstone	Feb. 2018	March 2018
Research on tenant rights	Google Docs	Early April 2018	September 2018
Set contract on Capstone	Signed paperwork for Capstone	Late April 2018	May 2018
Translating information	Google Docs	May 2018	September 2018

Contact and approval from ECHO Housing	Emails and Partnership on project Corrected booklet by ECHO Housing	June 2018	August 2018
Changing information into book form	Booklet	October 2018	November 2018
Creating lease and housing resources flyer for Ciclovía	50 English & 50 Spanish hard copies of flyers	October 2018	November 2018
Distribution of flyers	2 copies of flyers left	October 2018	November 2018
Printing Booklets	15 Hard copies of booklet	October 2018	November 2018
Distribution of booklets	0 copies of booklet left	October 2018	November 2018
Researched Just Cause Evictions	Google Docs	October 2018	November 2018

Barriers

The first barrier came towards the end of the first semester in the internship. During this time, Maria, the intern, was in the process of obtaining a new mentor which meant she had to develop ideas for a new capstone. It was mid-October 2017 when she became the intern for the Land Use Coordinator and not the Youth Coordinator. The intern did not think that getting adjusted to a new mentor was much of a problem because Monica was also new in the office, she was still getting adjusted herself. The tough part was getting ideas for a new project with only 6 weeks of school left. Maria still had to get adjusted and comfortable working in the new section of the agency and understand my new role as the intern for the Land Use Coordinator. Luckily, Monica had already gotten familiar with the residents they would be working with and she had ideas for the capstone. Early in the Spring 2018 semester, Maria started getting fully involved with the project Monica had going on and she quickly noticed the huge concern around lease agreements during the housing meetings and tabling events. With all the concerns she was hearing it made it easy for her to come to the appropriate project for the internship. With all the

personal stories the residents would share, Maria would use them as motivation towards completing all the work for her project.

Another barrier that had to be overcome was the translation process of the booklet. All the information that was being obtained was in English but after deliberating with the mentor it was concluded that the booklet needed to be in Spanish. Not only did the booklet have to be in Spanish but it had to be made reader friendly as a consideration for the population that was being served. For the intern this process was difficult because she was translating legal terms into Spanish and then into what she called “street” Spanish. Making sure that the right terms were used, that would be understood by our population was difficult because they all have different levels of Spanish spoken. At the end Maria obtained confirmation from her mentor and the housing agency about the language she was using.

Project Outcomes

What BHC and the intern hoped to accomplish from this project was to educate the residents of East Salinas on tenant rights. Also, stopping the victimization of residents when it comes to housing leases. With the creation of the tenant rights booklet and the fliers of what should be included in a lease alongside housing resources, both the organization and intern hope to increase knowledge within the community.

Results

For this project, 50 English and 50 Spanish flyers with information on what a proper lease should obtain and housing resources were created by the intern and distributed by the housing group while tabling during the Ciclovía event on October 7th, 2018. Also, 15 copies of the Tenant Rights Booklet were created, printed, and handed to the Housing Committee

members during their monthly meeting on October 17th, 2018. This booklet was also sent to ECHO Housing for approval on the information. Two different individuals at this agency looked at the booklet and approved the information. ECHO Housing’s feedback was taken into consideration when it came to final version of the booklet.

Finding the results for this project came down to a number count. The way the agency and intern measured the effectiveness of the project was by how many copies of the booklet and flyers were distributed. For the flyers the intern was left with 49 Spanish flyers. She also was able to distribute 49 English flyers. A total of 15 booklets were printed and distributed. An electronic version of the booklet was also shared with Monica, who will be making the information available to the staff at BHC.

Table 2: Flyer and Booklet Distribution Count

Conozca sus Derechos Como Rentero Booklet	15 Booklets printed & distributed
Lease and Housing Resources Spanish Flyer	50 Flyers printed; 49 Flyers distributed
Lease and Housing Resources English Flyer	50 Flyers printed, 49 Flyers distributed

Successes

The fact that the intern was able to network and obtain help from a housing agency might have been the biggest success of this project. By having a housing agency to review the booklet before it was handed out to the community members was highly important. It meant that the information that would be handed to the community was reliable and updated to the most recent information available.

Another fact that made this project successful was that Monica had been working with the Housing Committee and had established a good relationship with the members. This relationship helped the intern when it came time to distribute booklets and flyers. In addition, the fact that housing concerns were being talked about in the community at a higher rate due to the measures that related to housing in the voters' ballot helped with discussing the topic of victimization of tenants' rights with the community.

Challenges

Some of the challenges that came with obtaining better results with the project was that not enough flyers were printed. The Ciclovía event is a one of the biggest events to take place on the Alisal community. The intern did not take into consideration the number of anticipated attendees for this event and only made 100 available. The individuals tabling were able to keep one flyer in each language as a hard copy to refer to when individuals would stop by the table. In addition, the time constrained during the month of October made it impossible to hold a focus group to obtain feedback from a small group of residents where a pre and post survey would be used to analyze the increase in knowledge due to the booklet.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The project did achieve the expected outcome of educating and informing residents on their rights as tenants. Through the tabling event a larger and wider audience was achieved, than through the distribution of the booklet. At the end, the intern was able to inform 115 residents that they do have rights as tenants and that the community had available resources to help them when their rights are violated.

This project should defiantly continue. The agency should in fact maintain the established partnership with ECHO Housing. Maintaining this partnership can help especially because they offer free services and the population that is served is economically disadvantage. The intern also proposes to have more flyers printed than needed for other tabling events and to even have some around the office. The recommendation the intern proposes is that the project should not just stop at a booklet but go beyond that. The intern recommends that this project be made into a forum where a larger audience could be reached. At this forum housing agency in the community should be made available incase residents have questions. Also, the intern is recommending that this issue along with the residents' personal stories on being tenants be taken to city hall and be heard by the city council.

Personal Reflection

The biggest challenge that for the project was timing and all the changes taking place in the agency. Monica was taking on more responsibilities in the office and was assigned different resident groups so picking one to work with and present the booklet to was difficult. I was trying to get accomplish all capstone activities by October making me be in a time crunch to complete and distribute both the booklet and flyers. One of the biggest challenges that took place was the fact that the intern could not participate in the tabling event. During the tabling event the group members were discussing propositions that would be on the ballot and as a member of BHC, I could not participate. So, instead I handed the flyers to the individuals in charge of tabling that day and explained the information to them.

This project taught me that the housing issue is such a massive issue that can not be tackled by a single person nor agency and that it will take a long time to dismantle. I learned that there are various issues that all together contribute the housing issue that is not only faced in

Alisal but all over the state. Through the planning of the capstone the intern learned that in the nonprofit world meetings and assignment are not always set in stone and one needs to adapt to change. As a result of this project the community members involved with the Housing Committee realized that the agency is defiantly helping them achieve their short-term goal of tenant rights and just cause evictions.

My project relates to the bigger and broader issue of housing. The way my project relates to the issue is by protecting individuals who are tenants from being victims of malpractices when it comes to their leases, increased rents and of evictions. Monica and I came to the agreement that the housing problem can not the addresses until we fist focus on the protection of tenants, since most of the population that is serve falls in this category. The decision to focus on tenant right was made as a precaution to avoid retaliation against those who participated in the housing movement in the community.

Now that there are more members and that individuals are willing to share the difficulties they have experienced as tenants in the community this issue should be taken to the city council. Another thing that I liked that the group did was establishing short, medium- and long-term goal to achieve. I believe that the creation of this plan is a great starting point for this group that is tackling a massive problem that can be overwhelming. The creation of a forum would also be a good way to inform the community of the ideas and steps to combat and alleviate the housing issue in the area.

Advice for future capstone student working at BHC would be to learn to be flexible. The ladies here work on so many different projects and are partners with different organizations that they have so many in town meeting and out of town training to attend. So, having a flexible schedule to work around is highly encouraged. Also, one should be able to work at a high pace,

be a leader, take initiative and be able to work with minimal training or instructions. Advice for individuals working on a similar capstone would be to do a lot of research. Its important to make sure that the information obtained is the most recent and that it is correct. Being able to get a second pair of eyes from someone who is an expert in that matter is also encouraged.

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Appendix

Appendix a: Lease Requirements and Housing Resources Flyer

Que incluye un contrato de arrendamiento

Como dice el libro de Derechos de Inquilinos del Estado de California (California Department of Consumer Affairs, 2012), hay cierta información que debe de estar incluida en un contrato de arrendamiento. Aquí está una lista de la información importante:

- Nombre de dueño y alquilino
- Dirección de la casa/apartamento/local
- ¿Cuánto tiempo va a estar viviendo el inquilino en la propiedad y el contrato vigente?
- ¿Cuánto va a hacer la renta?
- ¿Cuándo se paga la renta, a quien se le paga y donde se va a hacer el pago?
- ¿Cuánto sería el pago de depósito y que es el propósito que se usará?
- ¿Qué pasaría en caso de pagos atrasados o cheques regresados por el banco?
- Si se permiten animales?
- ¿Cuántas personas pueden estar viviendo en la vivienda?
- ¿Quién pagará los cobros de los útiles (gas, electricidad y agua)?
- ¿Si el dueño hará reparos a la propiedad y en cuánto tiempo?
- ¿Si tienen el derecho como rentero de alquilar la propiedad o parte de la propiedad a otro inquilino?
- Las condiciones en cual el dueño puede inspeccionar la propiedad

What is included in a lease/ rental agreement?

Like it states in the booklet based in California Tenants' Rights (California Department of Consumer Affairs, 2012), there is certain information that are required in a lease or rental agreement. Here is a list of important information that should be included:

- Name of landlord and tenant
- Address of house/apartment or unit
- How long will the tenant be living in the unit and maintain an updated contract?
- How much will rent be?
- When will rent be paid, who it will be paid to and where?
- How much would security deposit be and what will it be used for?
- What would happen in case of late payments or returned checks?
- Are animals permitted in the property?
- How many people can live in the property?
- Who will pay for utilities? (gas, electricity and water)
- If landlord will be doing repairs when needed to the unit and within what time.
- If the tenant has the right to rent the property or part of the property to another tenant.
- The conditions under which the landlord can inspect the property.

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Recursos Legales y de Viviendas: (County of Monterey, n.d.)

- **The Housing Authority of the County of Monterey**
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288 Pearl St. Monterey, CA 93940
Phone: (831) 649-2969 Fax: (831) 647-6224
- **Center for Community Advocacy /Centro de Abogacía de la Comunidad**
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- **CHISPA, Inc.**
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- **California Rural Legal Assistance**
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Appendix b: Conozca sus Derechos Como Rentero Booklet



Conozca sus Derechos Como Rentero

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