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Housing First in Monterey County

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Author Note

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Title

The title of the project is "Housing First in Monterey County."

Abstract

The mission of The Coalition of Homeless Services Providers is to eliminate homelessness in Monterey and San Benito Counties by promoting interagency coordination to develop and sustain a comprehensive system of housing. The Housing Management Information System is the department where the project is implemented. Monterey County has an increasing number of chronically homeless who are suffering from a mental illness and need help. Drug use and lack of specialized services at agencies in Monterey County have contributed to the issue. Local agencies in Monterey County are unequipped to help this rising number of chronically homeless who suffer from a mental illness. The purpose of the project is to research best practices and models from across the country to provide recommendations to the agency to best implement appropriate policies to help this population.

 Keywords

The Agency

The name of the agency is The Coalition of Homeless Services Providers. The division that the project is implemented in is called the Housing Management Information System. The Housing Management Information System (HMIS) is a system that was developed to meet needs as it relates to intaking, assessing, and holding client data for Monterey County. The mission of the Coalition of Homeless Services Providers is "to eliminate homelessness in Monterey and San Benito Counties by promoting interagency coordination to develop and sustain a comprehensive system of housing and support services designed to maximize the self-sufficiency of individuals and families" (The Coalition of Homeless Services Providers, 2018). Its purpose is to be a group of non-profit and public organizations to collaborate in unison to solve the intricate web of homelessness. There are housing opportunities for all homeless persons in Monterey and San Benito County. The agency specializes in assessing clients for their level of need, maintaining the County's master list of homeless people for Monterey County, and also referring clients to County programs for appropriate housing. The Coalition of Homeless Services Providers provides County wide training to partnering agencies to also be able to assess, communicate, and refer clients to The Coalition and the appropriate channels if the agencies themselves cannot provide the services to the clients. The Coalition of Homeless Services Providers serves low-income and homeless individuals and families and who may suffer from a range of "debilitating conditions including mental illness, substance abuse problems, HIV/AIDS. Subpopulations include the chronically homeless, veterans, victims of domestic violence, and unaccompanied youth. (The Coalition of Homeless Services Providers, 2018).
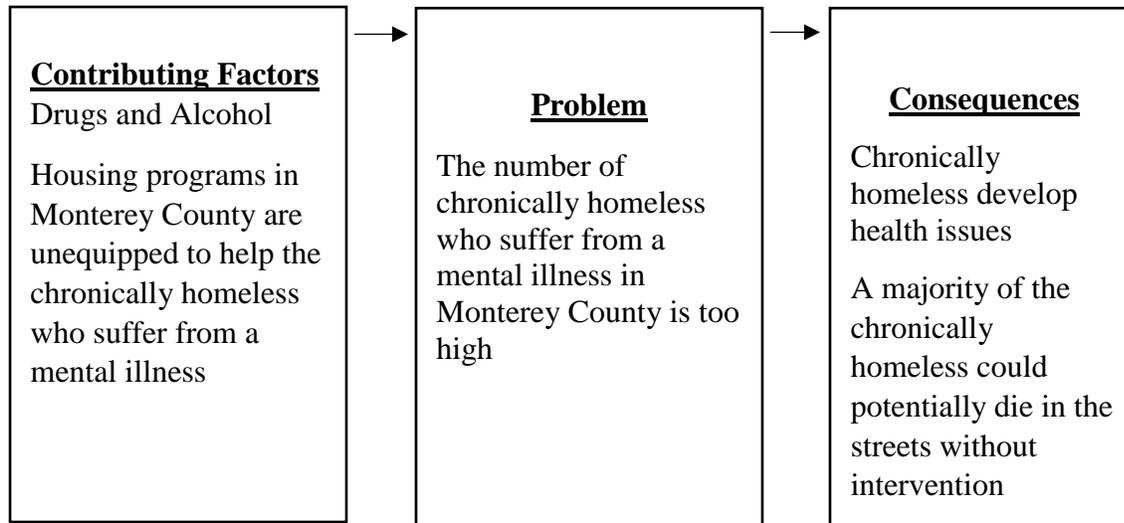
The Problem

The problem is that the number of chronically homeless who suffer from a mental illness in Monterey County is too high. In the United States, attention has shifted towards housing the chronically homeless, a substantial number of which have a mental illness (Carol L. Pearson, et al., 2007). According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2018), on a given night in the United States, "there were 86,962 homeless individuals who were considered chronically homeless." According to a State of California Senate fact sheet (2016), "thirty-nine percent of the nation's chronically homeless population was located in California (29,802). California also had the second highest rate of unsheltered chronically homeless, at 86.9% (25,892 were unsheltered)." An increase in the number of chronically homeless in Monterey County in 2017 from 2015 is contrast to the state of California, which has seen a decrease (Applied Survey Research , 2017). The chronically homeless in Monterey County are some of the most vulnerable "on the street," according to the 2017 Monterey County Homeless Point-In-Time Census & Survey (Applied Survey Research , 2017). Chronically homeless living in the streets face many challenges that people who have been homeless only once do not. Recently, a Hepatitis A infection spread among the homeless in Monterey County due to poor conditions—conditions no one should experience (Ponce, 2018). The chronically homelessness death rate is much higher than other homeless populations--"four to nine times higher than the general population" (Applied Survey Research , 2017).

Contributing Factors

One of the causes of this problem is that homeless are susceptible to using drugs and alcohol. Many people who are assessed for need on the street are using some form of substance or another. Substance abuse makes it difficult for clients to live responsible lives. Out of all the chronically homeless who were surveyed in the 2017 Monterey County Point-In Time Census and Survey, 58% of respondents reported that they were homeless due to alcohol, and increase from 2015 (Applied Survey Research, 2017). Another contributing factor is housing programs in Monterey County are unequipped to help the chronically homeless who suffer from a mental illness. Out of all the agencies The Coalition works with, only three provide assistance for people who are chronically homeless suffering from mental illness (The Coalition of Homeless Services Providers, 2018). This lack of programs equipped to help the chronically homeless who suffer from a mental illness leaves this population underserved.

Consequences

As a result, one of the consequences is people who live in these conditions are susceptible to diseases. Further outbreaks in diseases can do more damage to people who are consistently homeless, both physically and mentally. Another consequence is that, if left untreated, chronically homeless suffering from mental illness and substance abuse could potentially die on the streets. Without intervention, the chronically homeless will continue to get worse and their conditions may prove fatal.

| **Contributing Factors**
Drugs and Alcohol

Housing programs in Monterey County are unequipped to help the chronically homeless who suffer from a mental illness | → | **Problem**

The number of chronically homeless who suffer from a mental illness in Monterey County is too high | → | **Consequences**
Chronically homeless develop health issues

A majority of the chronically homeless could potentially die in the streets without intervention |

Capstone project description and justification

The title of the project is "Housing First in Monterey County." It involved data collection of Housing First programs from across the country to understand the various aspects of housing the chronically homeless. According to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (2017) "Housing First is a proven approach in which people experiencing homelessness are offered permanent housing with few to no treatment preconditions, behavioral contingencies, or barriers. It is based on overwhelming evidence that all people experiencing homelessness can achieve stability in permanent housing if provided with the appropriate levels of services. Examples of Housing First at other agencies in other states show that Housing First yields higher housing retention rates, reduces the use of crisis services and institutions, and improves people's health and social outcomes." Housing First programs help the chronically homeless to pursue supporting themselves in the long term and are encouraged to manage their substance abuse to a normal level. Housing First programs see substance abuse as a part of the homeless' lives, noting that substance abuse in and of itself does not impede their success.

Project Implementation

  The project involved analyzing policy requirements from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for implementing Housing First and other Housing First model; distributing a questionnaire to the homeless housing programs in Monterey County to discover their level of readiness to implement Housing First policies; and determine recommendations to the agency to advocate and effectively implement Housing First policies in Monterey County. The overall purpose was to provide recommendations to the agency to effectively implement, regulate, and track Housing First best practices and to ensure housing agencies in Monterey County can properly help the chronically homeless who suffer from a mental illness.

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline	Estimated Completion Dates
A. Researched Housing First best practices.	A. Project research	A. 02/27/18- 03/15/18	A. 03/15/18
B. Created questionnaire for agencies.	B. Assessment tool	B. 09/17/18- 09/24/18	B. 09/24/18
C. Disseminated questionnaire to agencies.	C. Agency engagement	C. 09/27/18- 10/4/18	C. 10/4/18
D. Analyzed results.	D. Data analysis	D. 11/7/18- 11/14/18	D. 11/14/18
E. Provided recommendations.	E. Findings	E. 11/14/18	E. 11/14/18

Obstacles

An obstacle that presented itself came with participants were not responding to the questionnaire. The intended timeline for the questionnaire to be completed was one week. The actual timeline to allow for enough responses to the questionnaire was one month.

Project Outcomes

The project outcome included a majority of the participants in the project responding to the questionnaire. Detailed information from each of the respondents was collected to be able to analyze to see if they are adhering or embodying a Housing First model. Through this, housing agencies in Monterey County will gain the knowledge and skills to provide services to those who are chronically homeless and suffer from a mental illness. Housing agencies in Monterey County will know the best practices needed to adhere to impending Housing First regulations. And the agency will understand the policies of Housing and Urban Development regulatory requirements to run an effective Housing First initiative in Monterey County with future requirements.

To assess the success of the project, the agencies will be evaluated based on their adherence to a Housing First checklist provided to the agency. The agencies will be evaluated annually as part of their financing process to receive funding to continue running their programs and Housing First at the same time. The recommendations will help assess agency policies to improve organizational capacity. The agency, to monitor the progress of the transition to a community of Housing First, will update their master list to ensure all clients are being accepted based on the principles of Housing First as laid out in the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. Finally, the agencies will demonstrate commitment and execution as proof that they are following laws and mandates of a Housing First philosophy by taking a large number of

chronically homeless from Monterey County into their housing programs and minimizing barriers.

Results

Overall, the project achieved its expected outcome. As a result of the project, a majority of the agencies who were asked to respond to the questionnaire did so. Seven agencies were reached out to and four responded. Information was obtained to inform the agency of housing agencies in Monterey County who are showing best practices and following Housing First requirements. Because a majority of respondents responded to the questionnaire and thoroughly answered the questions, the valuable information needed to provide recommendations to the agency was gathered.

Strengths

The project was successful primarily because the agency has great relationships with the housing agencies in Monterey County. It has relationships with about a dozen housing agencies in Monterey County. Through these partnerships, there was an abundance of information about how the housing agencies work with the agency and their responsibilities to the agency. It made it easier to determine the role the housing agencies played in serving the chronically homeless who suffer from a mental illness and see where they can improve.

Challenges

A challenge that presented itself was during the questionnaire phase. It was difficult getting responses to the questionnaire. Because respondents were located so separately, getting in contact with them was difficult. However, repeated reminders were able to get respondents to reply to the questionnaire.

Personal Reflection

The implications of the project for the agency will be a better understanding of the services that the housing agencies in Monterey County are giving to their clients and information for the agency on how the housing agencies in Monterey County can improve their services to help the chronically homeless who are suffering from a mental illness. The recommendations provided to the agency should be followed through to ensure the target population is being served well and all parties involved are following housing regulations. It will provide insight on how to implement the appropriate housing model—Housing First. The recommendations provide best practices placed in other Housing First models across the country and helps the agency mirror those best practices. To improve the transition, the agency should research funding streams to effortlessly implement Housing First best practices.

Throughout the duration of the project, I learned the numerous services that are provided to the chronically homeless who suffer from a mental illness and the homeless population in general. There are different methods to help the chronically homeless who suffer from a mental illness, but some models result in clients recidivating back into homeless in great numbers. People who are chronically homeless and suffer from a mental illness are more susceptible to issues in the streets as a result of their condition. If left untreated, this population can die. Disease is more common among people who have been chronically homeless, having a higher death rate than people who have been homeless only once. This population has difficulties staying housed because housing owners do not know how to deal with someone who has a mental illness and the person with the mental illness does not know how to manage themselves in most cases. The chronically homeless who suffer from a mental illness can develop a

substance abuse problem, adding to their chances of being evicted from housing that they are placed in.

The broader social problem is homelessness, especially the difficult to house homeless. The project will help the agency better serve this population. It will lay the foundation for the best practices that will help the homeless who suffer from a mental illness receive the specialized care they need when moving into housing. The suggested model will help the agency transition towards a housing delivery system that puts extra attention on this population. To better address the broader social problem, more can be done to look for professionals in the field of social work to work with this population. Another thing that can be done is look for funding streams that will help the agency's transition and deliver resources to the housing agencies in Monterey County who will be delivering the services to the clients.

For future students who wish to work at The Coalition of Homeless Services Providers, be prepared to work a lot with data collection, interpretation, and sorting. Data is what drives the work at the agency. Data is collected everyday by not just The Coalition, but by many services providers in the Monterey County. Good office skills will be beneficial to anyone who wishes to intern here. They focus on collaboration with other agencies in the Monterey County.

For future students who would like to work on a research project, it is essential to research good data. A research project is almost entirely dependent on having good data as a basis for recommendations or creating a program of your own. And make sure your findings and recommendations/results are pulled directly from your research. It is important to communicate with your supervisor to ensure you are on the right track and to make sure that if there is any information that seems inaccurate, it gets cleared up by your supervisor.

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