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Increasing awareness of legal services and tenant rights in Watsonville

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Abstract

California Rural Legal Assistance is a non-profit that works with marginalized communities such as people who are of low income, farm workers, and those with disabilities, school children, seniors, and those are a part of the LGBT community. Marginalized people most often get taken advantage of and are afraid to ask for help. The housing crisis in the Santa Cruz County has led many to endure harsh living conditions despite this; CRLA has a stagnant rate of people going into the office for consultations. The outreach project was about conducting a survey in the community to find out how aware the community was about CRLA and the services provided. The results of this project uncovered that people in the community did not know about CRLA or the services they provide. Recommendations for the future are; doing outreach in Libraries, public bulletin boards, attending community events and the Farmer's Market at least twice a month targeting the Spanish speaking community.

Key words: *services, outreach, community, Watsonville, survey*

Agency Information and Communities Served

California Rural Legal Assistance is a nonprofit agency that provided free legal services. Its mission statement is “To fight for justice alongside of the most exploited communities of our society.” Their vision statement is “A rural California where all people are treated with dignity and respect, and are granted their fundamental rights.” CRLA has offices in 22 counties of California and serves people of low income, farm workers, kids, and people with limited English, seniors, LGBT community and people with disabilities. (CRLA.org. 2018) CRLA is primarily funded by Legal Services Corporation (LSC) Grants, LSC provides more than half of CRLA’s funding. They are also funded by State bar grants and individual donations.

LSC’s requirements to be eligible for services are that potential clients should be residents or citizens of the United States, be of low income and reside in the Santa Cruz County. If a person does not qualify for CRLA’s services, they are given as much information possible during the intake for them to be able to represent themselves or they are given a list of private attorneys that can help them with their issue. Some partners of Watsonville’s CRLA office are the Watsonville law center, self help center, lawyer referral services, Community Action Board and the Watsonville court house. Each office focuses on different services but in general CRLA helps people with public benefits, education, labor, housing, immigration and name changing. For housing CRLA helps with eviction defense, housing discrimination, unsafe housing and landlord/ tenant disputes. For public benefits they help people fill out forms or translate different documents, that have to do with Welfare, Food Stamps, MediCal, Social Security over payments, Unemployment benefits, and State Disability Insurance. Education cases are less common but still an issue CRLA addresses, such as School discipline, access to education and equality. For workers rights they take cases that have to do with unpaid wages, discrimination, and Dangerous

working conditions. The LGBT Rights program helps people change legal name and gender change, discrimination and provides information on LGBT rights. Lastly CRLA assists people with immigration on issues that have to do with U-Visa, VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) only for low wage workers and those who are victims of a workplace crime.

Most of CRLA's clients are from the Watsonville area that is predominantly Hispanic (83.17%) and only 30% of the Watsonville population has a completed high school education. 46% of the population in Watsonville is between the ages of 20-35 years old, making it a young community.

Problem Description

CRLA fights for justice for the most marginalized communities which includes housing issues affecting people with low income in the Santa Cruz County. The most prevalent housing issues faced in Santa Cruz County are; high rates of rent, and evictions. Also that many of people come to the office hold Section-8 housing vouchers or have subsidized housing which makes it harder for them to find a new place to live within the time they are given to move out. The "No Place Like Home: The Santa Cruz County Affordable Housing Crisis Report" was a study done by students and faculty from University of Santa Cruz where they surveyed 1,700 people (All renters) about their renting experience in the county. In this study 27% of people who took the survey said they experience overcrowding with more than 2 people per room. Of renters who had moved in the last 5 years, 50% of them reported that the move was involuntary and due to; eviction or rent increases. 57% said they experience at least one major problem with their rental like maintenance and overall conditions. Lastly 70% of renters surveyed said they spend 30% or more of their income on rent and utilities.

The problem the agency is facing is that there is a low number of people going to CRLA for consultations. The numbers especially drop during the non- agriculture season which runs from November to March. The agency’s main priority is casework and handling cases as best possible which leaves little time for outreach. Increasing awareness of legal services through this project indirectly helps address the housing problem because the prime objective is to tell people about CRLA and the services they provide so that in the future if they are to need the services they know where to go.

Problem Model

The following Problem Model identifies the agency’s specific problem addressed by this project and the boarder social problem associated with it, and the causes or risk factors that contribute to the housing problem in Watsonville and the consequences of not addressing it and the causes and consequences of the agency’s problem.

Project Title: Increasing Awareness of legal services and tenant rights in Watsonville		
Problem Statement: People are not aware of CRLA’s services or their rights as tenants.		
CAUSES TO AGENCY PROBLEM	AGENCY-SPECIFIC “MICRO-LEVEL” PROBLEM ADDRESSED BY PROJECT	CONSEQUENCES TO AGENCY
-Lack of outreach	-Watsonville residents do not know about CRLA -Watsonville residents are not aware of their tenant rights	-People do not go in for consultation -Cut funding
CAUSES TO BROADER HEALTH PROBLEM	BROADER “MACRO-LEVEL” HEALTH/SOCIAL PROBLEM	CONSEQUENCES TO SOCIETY
-Rent increase -Eviction -unsafe housing	-Lack of affordable housing in Watsonville area.	-People move further out of Watsonville - Traffic because people have to commute - People are left to endure harsh living conditions

Project description and implementation Process

This project was an outreach strategy to find out how much the community knew about CRLA. The purpose of this project was to promote CRLA in the community and increase awareness of legal services and tenant rights in Watsonville. A survey was developed and distributed into the community to find out how much people actually knew about CRLA and its services. The focus was housing issues, tenant rights and why people are not seeking help from CRLA, as well as doing outreach and promoting the agency so that more people seek its services.

The survey was developed in Spanish and English to be able to reach the most people possible. Outreach was done by setting up at the Watsonville Farmers Market on Fridays for a month and a half with brochures on the different issues CRLA addresses. Additionally people have been surveyed at local grocery stores (La Princesa, both locations and Safeway) as they walk in. The surveys were conducted on Tuesday mornings for a span of 3 months. The survey consisted of 3 questions; have they heard of CRLA, have they ever been to the office, if so for what reason, and what would be a challenge preventing them from seeking our services. A goal was set of 30 completed surveys at every outreach occasion. Notes were made of any questions asked during the survey and what specific interest if any, that person had.

Project participants were the two CHHS interns, and mentors in the CRLA office. CHHS interns developed the survey, translated the survey, conducted the surveys and kept data on Google sheets of the responses. Mentors reviewed and approved the survey and helped fill out the necessary forms for tabling events at the Farmer's Market. The resources needed were flyers with general information about the agency and brochures on the different topics that CRLA addresses.

Challenges faced while implementing this project were trying to find enough stores willing to participate, since some were not willing to cooperate. Another challenge was attracting people at the tabling events especially when people were in a hurry because of the winter. Lastly, not being able to reach out to people while they are shopping at the Farmers Market because, soliciting is not allowed. This was a challenge because although the colorful brochures attracted some people, we could not approach people to engage them in the survey.

Scope of work

The following is a table that describes the activities and deliverables completed as part of the project that was implemented, beginning in Oct 2018 through May 2019. The activities included creating and distributing a survey in the community at tabling events and analyzing its results.

Scope of Work			
Title: Increasing awareness of legal services and tenant rights in Watsonville.			
Project description: Outreach project for CRLA focusing on housing.			
Goal: Increase the number of people going to CRLA for consultations			
Primary objective of the project: Increase knowledge among Watsonville residents about the organization and the services it provides			
Activities		Deliverables	Timeline
1	Discuss project idea with mentors	Get project approved by mentors	October 2018
2	Develop survey questions in English	Submit questions to mentors for review and	November

		approval	2018
3	Translate survey to Spanish	Submit Spanish survey questions to mentors for review and approval	January 2019
4	Develop a list of possible stores to contact for permission to do outreach	Submit the list to mentors for review, confirm permission from locations to conduct survey	February 2019
5	Doing outreach at stores and tabling at the Farmer's Market	Data on the surveys conducted on a Google Sheet	February-March 2019
6	Analyze findings	Submit preliminary results to mentors for approval	April
7	Complete reporting requirements	Final agency and capstone reports	May 3, 2019
8	Prepare capstone presentation in selected format	Present at Dress Rehearsal for grading	May 2019
9	Final preparation for Capstone Festival	Final presentation at Capstone Festival!!	May 2019

Project assessment process

The expected outcomes for this project were to increase the number of people in Watsonville who are knowledgeable about CRLA and the services it provides. The agency's goal is to increase the number of housing related consultations especially during the non agricultural season which runs from November through late March, while creating awareness of tenant rights.

To measure the success of this project, the number of people who answered the survey were counted and their responses were tracked. The survey asked what type of obstacles people face that could prevent them from seeking CRLA's services. This was key in the project because even if people are aware of CRLA and its services they will not go in for a consultation if they are faced with a challenge like; transportation, office location, times that CRLA is open for

consultations and people's work schedules. The information collected through the survey includes; the language spoken by the person answering the survey, if they are interested in any particular issue that CRLA addresses and the locations of where the survey was being conducted were also tallied.

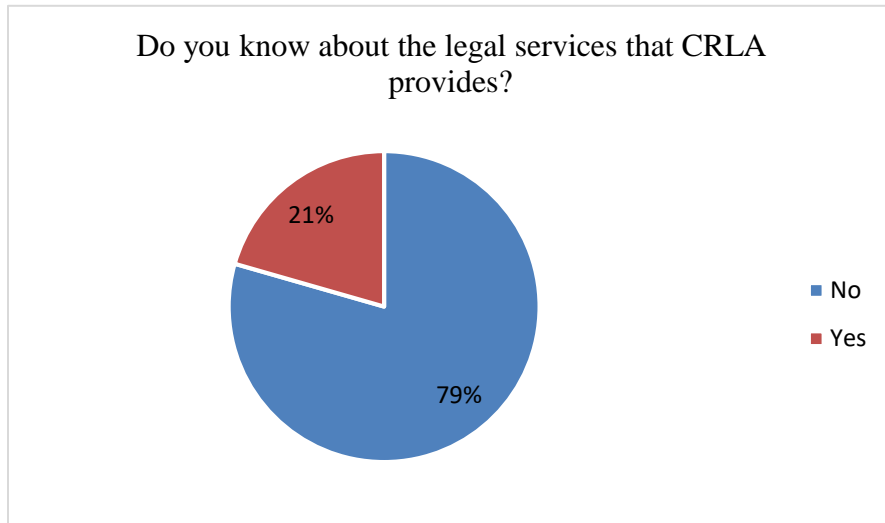
The primary measure of the projects success is by the number of people who say they have not heard of CRLA before the information is shared and after they receive information about CRLA. The events were an opportunity to provide information to participants and also receive information from them. The data was presented to the mentors and recommendations were made for future interns to continue doing outreach in the community.

Findings and results

There were 180 people surveyed in this project in the community of Watsonville. The surveys were done in a span of 3 months which consisted of 8 outings to local grocery stores and 5 outings to the Watsonville Famer's Market. The following graphs and charts contain the responses for the questions asked.

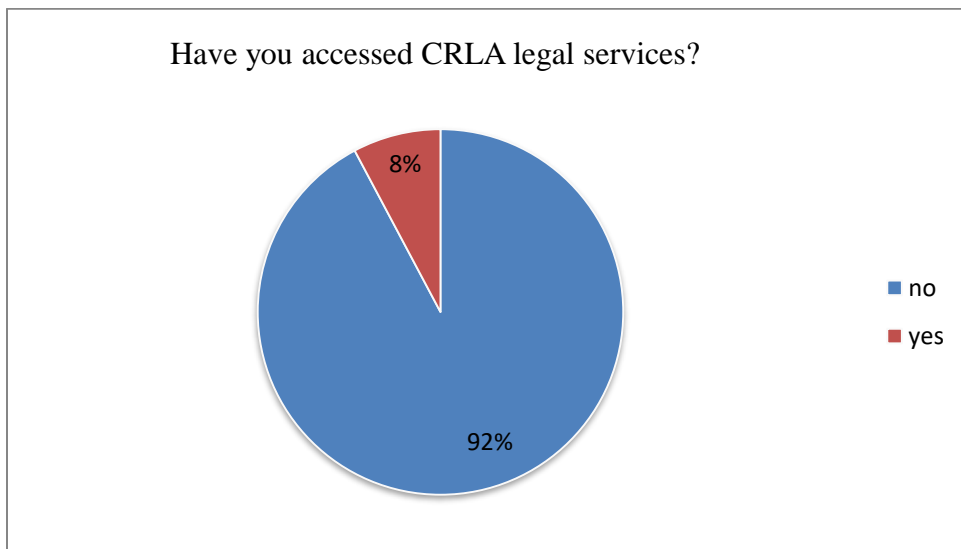
The first graph shows the amount of responses for the first question asked on the survey. This indicates that there is little knowledge in the community of CRLA and the types of services they provide. Of the 180 people surveyed 143 responded that they had not heard of CRLA and 37 said they had from going to the office in the past, at their work place, at their living complex or from a family member or friend.

Graph 1



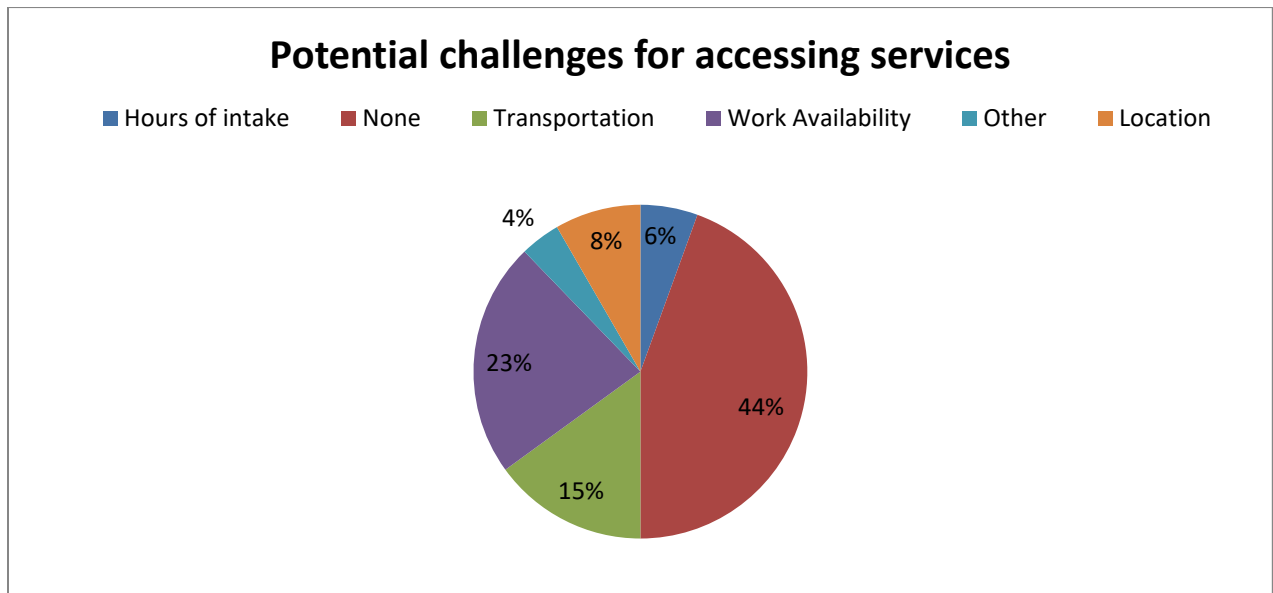
The second graph demonstrates the breakdown of the second question in percentages. People were asked if they had ever used CRLA’s services and 166 of the respondents answered that they had never used CRLA’s services. 14 people responded that they had accessed the services for different reasons like; housing, employment or education issues. Some people had gone into the office for general questions on legal issues as well.

Graph 2



The final question asked on the survey asked the participant if they were ever to need CRLA's services what would be an obstacle for them 80 people answered having no obstacle from accessing services. The second common answer was work availability to which 41 people answered would prevent them from seeking CLRA's services. 27 people answered that transportation was a potential issue and 15 answered that location and lastly the least amount of responses were other. This included a variety of responses from the participants like; not being low income, not needing the services, not being from the area, among others.

Graph 3



The language spoken by the participants of the survey was something that was tracked by the surveyors not an actual question on the survey. The majority of the people surveyed spoke only Spanish. Out of the 180 surveyed 121 only spoke Spanish and 59 spoke English. This correlates with the demographics of Watsonville being more than 80% Hispanic.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this project the recommendations for the agency are to do more community outreach. Having the interns involved in the community outreach gives them an opportunity to interact with the community and potential clients. Different ways to get the information out about the agency are through bulletin boards in places like laundry mats, bus stops, grocery stores, restaurants, libraries and churches. Posting the agency's general flyer and consultation hours and location at these bulletins and going back at least once a month to update and maintain the flyers. Additionally, attending the Watsonville Famer's Market at least twice a month with general flyers and brochures for the public to take with them creates direct contact with the community. Going to community festivals and events and setting up a table with brochures and flyers for the public is also another strategy to reach people. Furthermore making Public Service announcements at radio stations and local TV channels would also be a way to reach people while they are working or at home.

Conclusions and personal reflection

In conclusion, the project turned out as planned. We noticed interesting patterns in our surveys depending on where we surveyed the people. We ran into some challenges that pushed our project back but we managed to overcome with the support of everyone at the agency. In order to end the project in a timely manner we set a goal of how many people we want to survey and an end date to the survey. Overall the results of the survey served to backup the theory that people in the community people are not aware of CRLA and its services.

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Appendix

Survey Questions

- 1) Do you know about the legal services that the California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) provides? **Say no skip question # 2**
- 2) Have you ever access CRLA legal services?, If so, when and what was your experience?
- 3) What are some challenges that would prevent you from accessing CRLA legal services?

Options

Work availability, Location/hours of intake, Transportation, Immigration status, Afraid to speak out, Other reasons:

Spanish Version

- 1) ¿Sabe qué servicios provee la oficina Asistencia legal o conocido como legal Aid?
si dicen no omitir la pregunta # 2
- 2) ¿Alguna vez ha recibido ayuda de Asistencia Rural Legal de California? ¿Si es así, cuándo y como fue su experiencia?
- 3) ¿Que impide que usted pida ayuda legal de Asistencia Rural Legal de California?

Opciones

Disponibilidad de trabajo, Horas de consulta/ ubicación de oficina, Falta de transporte, Estado de, inmigración, Miedo, Otra razon: