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Creating Access for Individuals with Disabilities who are Experiencing Homelessness

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Abstract

The Gilroy Compassion Center is a homeless resource center and day center for the people experiencing homelessness in Gilroy. The city of Gilroy experienced the largest increase in people experiencing homelessness with a 64% increase from 2015. With an increase in the population comes an increased need for basic services, such as restrooms and showers. To address this need Gilroy Compassion Center has fitted their day Center with restrooms and showers. Yet with limited funding available the organization was unable to make them compliant with the Americans with Disability Act. This project was developed to secure funding through a county grant to make these important accommodations. The project included writing the grant and implementing the grant once funds were secured the writing of this grant resulted in \$12,000 being secured for the bathrooms and showers to become compliant with the guidelines the Americans with disability act requires.

Keywords: *Homelessness, Disability Accommodations, Americans with Disabilities Act*

Agency Description

Gilroy Compassion Center (GCC) is a nonprofit that provides daytime respite from the streets to individuals and families experiencing homeless. Along with their day center GCC also provides food, clothing, hygiene supplies, emergency housing, case management and job help. Gilroy Compassion Centers mission is” to provide services for homeless residents of South Santa Clara County in a manner that is safe, respectful, responsible and community based” (Gilroy Compassion Center, 2018, par.1). Some of GCC’s goals are “to develop a place to stay that is safe, clean and respectful of both clients and the community” (Gilroy Compassion Center, 2018, par. 2). GCC also provides basic needs such as bathrooms , showers, laundry and food. GCC also aims to “Provide a one-stop day center with referrals and resources” (Gilroy Compassion Center, 2018, par. 1). Programs that Gilroy Compassion Center offers are the almost home camping program, Creek team clean up and has collaborated with the Morgan hill safe parking program. The almost home camping program is a creative way to provide emergency shelter and case management to families and individuals experiencing homelessness (Pearce, 2018).

Volunteers play a vital role in GCC with many clients volunteering as a way to give back to the organization. For example the creek team is a group of individuals experiencing homelessness that clean the creek area were a majority of the homeless individuals and families illegally camp at. This program allows the participants to give back to the community and teaches job skills. In addition to this program Gilroy Compassion Center also contracts with the winter armory to provide case management to those who stay at the armory. GCC not only provides many services to the homeless of south Santa Clara County but advocates extensively for the current 7,394 people experiencing homelessness all throughout Santa Clara County (Ending Homelessness, 2017).

Accommodations for Individuals with Disabilities Experiencing Homelessness

The rate of people experiencing homelessness is increasing in South Santa Clara County. Since there is such an increase in the amount of people experiencing homelessness, there is an increased need for basic hygiene services. Yet there is a lack of accessibility to these hygiene services for physical disabled homeless. According to the Federal Housing and Urban Development Department (2018) there is over 553,000 people in the United States experiencing homelessness (pg.1). With California being the state with the highest rate of homeless in the country with 129,972 people experiencing homelessness. Santa Clara County has the third largest homeless population in California with 7,364 people experiencing homelessness (The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018, pg.18). With such a large population there is an increased need for hygiene services such as showers and bathrooms. Mainly non-profits offer such services like Gilroy Compassion center, the center has had 18,306 people walk through their doors who have used the showers and bathrooms provided in the day center. Yet some homeless individuals have had limited accessibility to these services due to physical disabilities. According to the Santa Clara County Homeless Census and Survey (2017), “ 31% of the homeless population in Santa Clara County has a physical disability” (pg.30).

Risk Factors

The primary factors that contribute to lack of accessibility to hygiene services for physical disabled homeless are lack of funding, lack of education on Americans with Disabilities Act, and regulations on what is ADA compliant. As previously mentioned non-profits are the majority provider for these services. Yet federal funding is currently being cut for non-profits that assist with helping the homeless. “Across the board funding cuts have been made by President Trump for a cross section of social programs” (Foscarini ,2018, para. 14). With a lack

of funding from the government it makes it difficult for critical accommodative services like these to be provided to the population. Another factor contributing to the problem is lack of education on the Americans with Disabilities act (ADA). The Americans with Disabilities act was created “ in 1990 that makes a commitment to accommodate those with disabilities. The act prevents disability discrimination in employment and public services”(Pack, 2019, para.3). Yet even now in 2019 many people do not understand how to interpret this act and what accommodation for people with disabilities are required by law. Thus making there a lack of understandings on the regulations on what is ADA compliant. The Department of Justice has a section of its department that “ enforces, certificates , regulates, coordinates and provides technical assistance activities required by the ADA” (Baker, 2011, para. 7). This department is who enforces these regulations required by law. Even with this department there is not a lot of information on what is ADA regulatory. This is why a lot of business and public places don’t know what accommodations to make to restrooms and bathrooms until they are reported to the Department of Justice.

Outcomes

If these services do not become accessible to individuals with physical disabilities there will be an increase in health issues amongst those that are experiencing homelessness and the larger community. If showers and restrooms are not available to as many people experiencing homelessness as possible that increase the chance of infectious diseases. According to Badiaga, Raoult, and Brouqui (2008) “the primary health concern for this population are infections such scabies and body louse infection caused by lack of bathing and unclean clothes ”(para. 10). It also has been proven that the best way to preventing infections is access to showers. According to Badiaga et al. (2008) ,“controlling such infections as scabies from spreading rely on classic

therapeutic interventions such as bathing , followed by application over the entire skin of tropical scabidcies”(para.12). In addition to showers being provided to the population providing restrooms is also important. Also Hepatitis A has increased in California in recent years, partial due to lack of restrooms being accessible to the homeless population (Gorman 2018). If showers and bathrooms are not accessible to those with physical disabilities that is a large portion of the population who is unable to access hygiene services. Which in turn can contribute to the increase in infectious disease and cause a larger health issue.

Project Description

The capstone project consisted of writing grant to make the agency’s showers and bathrooms accommodable to clients with physical disabilities. Included in appendix b is a detailed problem model developed for this project. This grant secured funding through the service related capital grant offered through Santa Clara County. On February 2016 the Santa Clara Board of Supervisors approved a one-time allocation of \$800,000 to establish a reserve to provide one time funding to community based organizations. The board of supervisors approved the funds to only be used for technology and service related capital needs. Once funds were reserved, funding request were sent to numerous organizations throughout Santa Clara County on September 2018. Organizations had till October 2018 to write a grant and request funding. Once the deadline closed grant proposals were then given to a Evaluation Committee who then approved a select number of organizations to provided funding to. The County of Santa Clara viewed this funding opportunity as a way to learn and consider the needs of community based organizations infrastructure, according to a memo released to the Board of Supervisors from the Chief Operating officer.

Gilroy Compassion Centers grant was chosen to be funded. The grant will allow the agency to renovate the bathrooms and showers to be equipped with grab bars, ramps and non-slip mats. The project comprised of writing the grant and implementing the grant terms once funds were secured. GCC has till July 2019 to execute all terms of the grant. The first phase of renovation has begun which is ordering all supplies and securing a construction company that can do the renovation. As the project has begun it is believed that no additional funds will be needed. The amount of \$12,000 requested is expected to be adequate enough to renovate the bathrooms and showers.

Project Justification

The primary purpose of this project is to provide hygiene services to as many clients as possible. To decrease the potential spread of infectious diseases and health issues amongst the population. Currently not all of the clients are able to utilize these services, by this project being implemented the agency expects to provide these services to all clients that need them. According to Gorman (2019), there has been a recent increase in the spread of infectious diseases such as hepatitis A amongst California's homeless. Hepatitis A is primarily spread through feces and spreads quickly amongst the homeless population due to human feces around homeless encampments and limited access to health care (para. 10). Showers being accessible will also decrease the amount of health issues experienced by homeless individuals. As previous mentioned showering can prevent body lice and other infections. By GCC providing essential services such as restrooms and showers to the homeless population it decreases the spread of infectious diseases and health issues.

By providing these services in a manner that is compliment to ADA regulations would also eliminate legal repercussions that could happen if the bathrooms and showers were not up to

ADA standards. According to the Americans with Disabilities Standards of Accessible Designs (2010), “ all establishments that offer social services that provide common use to bathing facilities shall provide at least one shower with a seat that is compliant to (ADA) code” (pg. 15). If these terms are not met the Department of Justice can “ impose civil penalties up to \$55,000 for the first violation and up to \$110,00 for subsequent violations” (Americans Disabilities Act and Accessibility, 2009, para. 7).

This project would solve the issue of clients with physical disabilities not being able to use the showers and bathrooms in a way that is safe and dignified. As well as legal repercussions being inflicted on the organization. In addition to addressing the spread infectious diseases amongst the population.

Benefits

This project will greatly benefit the clients of GCC. By providing hygiene services to all clients regardless of physical ability. According to the Santa Clara County Homeless Census and Survey (2017) , “ 31% of the homeless population in Santa Clara County has a physical disability which is a 1% increase from 2015” (pg. 30). It will also benefit Gilroy Compassion Centers mission of providing services to the homeless population in a way that is safe and dignified. Without the renovations of the bathroom and showers the agency would not be fulfilling this part of the mission. It will also decrease animosity between the homeless population and residents of Santa Clara County. Since all clients regardless of physical ability would have access to bathrooms and showers. This will decrease the potential that clients would use the restroom around businesses and homes. It was also decrease the spread of diseases such as hepatitis A. As previously mentioned it is contract through bodily fluids that are often found around homeless encampments. According to the Center for Disease Control (2017), “ people

experiencing unstable housing or homelessness are at high risk for acquiring the disease". By providing restrooms this would decrease the amount of homeless people contracting the disease.

Participants

The following participated in making this project successful such as GCC's director of programs and the grant writer. The grant writer identified the grant, brought it to the board for approval, established a budget for the project and wrote and submitted the grant. The grant writers main role was to write an adequate grant to obtain funding. Also GCC's director of programs assisted in writing the grant. The director of programs collaborated with the grant writer to help establish what was needed to make the showers and bathrooms abide by the Americans with Disabilities act building requirements.

Resources

Resources were also needed to properly implement and develop this project. For example agency personnel's time. The board members time was needed to give the grant writer permission to write the grant. Their time was also needed to look over the grant terms to make sure the agency is able to abide by them. The director of programs time was also needed to help the grant writer establish what was needed for the bathrooms and showers. Overall the resource used throughout this project was the time of the board and staff.

Potential Challenges

With any new project there is assumed to be some challenges that may require making adjustments to the intended implementation plan. The challenge that came up during this project had to do with the terms of the grant. Such as the timeline the county puts on the agency if funding is given. Santa Clara county requires that agencies that were approved for funding spend all funds on the intended project by July 10, 2019. The board was hesitant at first on accepting

the funds since they were unsure if they were going to be able to complete the renovation by July 10, 2019. Yet after deliberation the board was able to decide they were able to meet the timeline. If the board did not agree with the terms this may have resulted in limiting the scope of the grant.

Scope of Work and Implementation

The goal of this project is to increase accessibility to the showers and bathrooms in the day center. The objective was to accomplish this goal through the Santa Clara County capital related services grant. See Appendix A for a timeline and the scope of work for this project.

Assessment

In result of this project being implemented the organization expects more clients to have access to the hygiene services offered. It is also expected that there will be more accessibility to these services for physical disabled clients. By implementing this project the agency will fully fulfill its mission of providing basic needs to the homeless in a way that is safe and dignified. The expected outcomes are considered achieved if the grant contributed to the renovation of the bathrooms and restrooms. The assessment method used to collect evidence of the program's success was a one on one interview with the director of programs. During the interview the program director was asked if the grant contributed to the funding of the project. In addition to being asked if this renovation will make showers and bathrooms more accessible to those with physical disabilities.

Findings and Results of Assessment Process

After completing the assessment portion of this project the expected outcomes were found to be achieved. During the interview process the program director of GCC explained that the \$12,000 dollars obtained through the grant is enough money to complete the project. She also

described that the construction company made a bid for \$10,000 for the renovation which means there is a \$2,000 surplus if additional funds are needed. This project also will increase accessibility to these services for individuals with physical disabilities once completed. Since the contractor is familiarly with making spaces compliant to ADA regulations. This project also helped build a better relationship between GCC and the County of Santa Clara. Once the county sees that GCC can provide these services in an efficient manner and use funds accordingly, this will improve their relationship and potentially provide more contracts and funds being given to GCC.

Recommendations

The success of the project has shown the agency that if they put time into applying for grants they can obtain more funding and provide more services. It also has shown the agency that they qualify for various grants that they originally didn't apply for because they thought they didn't meet the requirements. If they continue to apply for grants they will not only fulfill their mission but they will also better address the health issues individuals experiencing homelessness face. Providing more restrooms and showers to the homeless community in Santa Clara County will decrease the spread of Hepatitis A and prevent body lice and scabies.

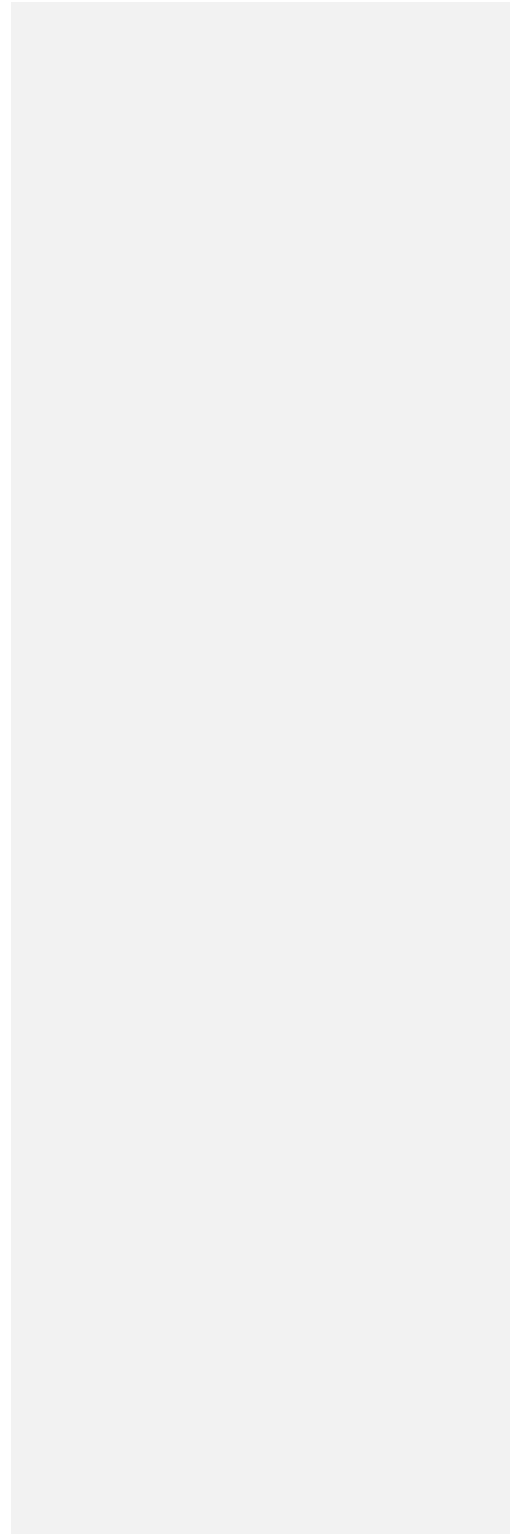
Conclusion

After completing this project I have gained professional and personal growth. I have learned to take initiative and collaborate effectively with my mentors and the County of Santa Clara. I have also built relationships and gained extensive knowledge on the grant writing process through this project. What contributed the most to my learning goals was the challenge I faced. I had to go to the board of GCC and ask them to trust me in writing this grant and show that I was capable in executing this project and understood the terms of the grant fully. I had to

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have confidence in myself and prove to them and myself that I could do this. This project has helped me develop leadership and confidence in my abilities' as a health and human services worker. If I could give advice to future seniors in the Collaborative Health and Human Services major I would tell them to take initiative, be confident in your abilities and don't be afraid.



Appendix A

Task	Start Date	End date	Duration
Identified Grant	22-Jan-19	28-Jan-19	6
Developed and submitted funding proposal	23-Jan-19	6-Feb-19	14
Accepted grant terms	14-Feb-19	19-Feb-19	5
Ordered items for remodel	4-Mar-19	8-Mar-19	4
Remodel begins	18-Mar-19	29-Mar-19	11
Assessment	1-Apr-19	12-Apr-19	11

Appendix B

PROBLEM MODEL

Project Title: Accommodations for Individuals with Disabilities Experiencing Homelessness		
Problem Statement: There are too few restrooms and showers that are accessible to people experiencing homelessness.		
CAUSES/RISK FACTORS TO BROADER HEALTH PROBLEM	AGENCY-SPECIFIC “MICRO-LEVEL” PROBLEM ADDRESSED BY PROJECT	CONSEQUENCES TO SOCIETY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of agencies and organizations providing hygiene services • Limited funding to provide these services 	There are too few showers and restrooms that are accessible to physical disabled individuals experiencing homelessness in South Santa Clara County.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread of infectious disease • Higher healthcare costs
CAUSES TO AGENCY PROBLEM	BROADER “MACRO-LEVEL” HEALTH/SOCIAL PROBLEM	CONSEQUENCES TO AGENCY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of funding • Lack of education on Americans with disabilities act • Regulations on what is ADA compliant 	There is a lack of accessibility to restrooms and showers for individuals experiencing homelessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency mission is not being fulfilled • Legal consequences for the agency

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