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Game Night at The Shelter

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Abstract

The problem is that too many children and families are homeless. The contributing factors of homelessness are high levels of poverty, unemployment and mental illness. The consequences of it are that children have a risk for poor educational outcomes, risk for health problems and distress in children and families. Game Night at the shelter was focused on alleviating the distress in children. Six different games were available for the children to use. The children were surveyed to assess the outcomes of them having fun and for other possible Game Nights. The volunteers were also surveyed to see what went well, any improvements and if they would like to volunteer again. Eleven children participated and there were seven volunteers. Four of the eleven children rated a four to how much fun they had while the rest of them said five. All eleven children said yes to having another game night. While, six volunteers said yes to volunteering again and one said maybe. This event gave the children a chance to forget about their living situation temporarily and to let the kids be kids. The survey results showed that the Game Night did meet the expected outcomes of the children having fun and of a possibility of having another Game Night. The results recommend another Game Night at the shelter.

Keywords: Homelessness, Game Night, Shelter

Agency & Communities Served

The Family Resource Center (FRC) of Salinas City Elementary School District has two locations: the East location at Sherwood Elementary, 110 South Wood Street and the North location at Kammann Elementary, 521 Rochex Avenue. The mission of the school district is “Students are the focus of our work” (Salinas City Elementary School District, n.d.). The Family Resource Center’s mission is “Lending families a hand through information, referrals and programs” (Family Resource Center, n.d.). The FRC is funded through Title I which is state funding, LCFF (Local Control Funding Formula), grants and donations. The services the FRC provides include parenting education and support services, access and referrals to dental care, counseling and health care services, assistance with health insurance enrollment and renewal, family information support and referral, assistance with housing, legal aid, emergency shelter, food and school supplies, adult literacy services, provide equal access and educational services, intervention, outreach, staff and community professional development, seek additional resources, advocacy, technology support for parents, service learning opportunities and collaborative activities and events with other service providers.

The population that the Family Resource Center serves are homeless and foster families, at risk and high risk adults, and other youth and children in the community. “Last school year, 2018-19, the staff identified 3,566 homeless students which translates to over 40% of the district. What this conceptually means is that in a class of twenty students, eight are homeless. The data for some previous years is as follows: 17/18= 3,318, 16/17= 3,235, 2,042, 11/12= 1,461, 08/09 = 308, 07/08 = 261. (Family Resource Center, n.d.). This shows that the number of homeless students is increasing each year.

The organization that the capstone project served was the Community Homeless Solutions, specifically the Salinas Warming Shelter. Community Homeless Solutions is Monterey County's largest provider of transitional housing and emergency shelter beds for those who are homeless or are fleeing domestic violence. With a mission of "helping people transition to a better tomorrow," Community Homeless Solutions is dedicated to helping local residents with ending their homelessness and cycle of domestic violence. The organization provides a total of 168 emergency and shelter beds through the following four programs: Marina Emergency Shelter, Salinas Emergency Shelter, Salinas Warming Shelter and San Benito H.O.M.E Resource Center. The Salinas Warming Shelter is located in downtown Salinas and provides nightly shelter for 70 women, men and families. At the point in time of the capstone project homeless families were the only clients due to the overwhelmingly increase of homeless families. Meals are provided through the support of local faith based organizations, businesses and other community groups. Shelter services will be expanded to include case management, mental health and other social services (Community Homeless Solutions, "Programs At A Glance", n.d.). This organization collaborates with the FRC by the shelter referring clients to the FRC and vice versa.

Problem Description

The problem is that too many children and families are homeless. About one in ten students are homeless in Monterey County and the county's student homeless population exceeded both San Francisco and Alameda counties' homeless student populations combined. Twelve schools in Monterey County have student bodies that are 20% homeless or more. Also, 64% of the county is homeless compared to 33% of California excluding Monterey (Cuevas, 2019). In 2018, more than 180,000 people in families with children were experiencing homelessness, and most of them were staying in sheltered locations (The U.S. Department of

Housing and Urban Development Office of Community Planning and Development, 2018). This shows that homelessness is an ever increasing problem in Monterey County.

Contributing Factors

The three contributing factors found from research that can lead to being homeless are high levels of poverty, unemployment and mental health.

Some examples that contribute to the high levels of poverty are lack of affordable housing and decline in public assistance. First, the lack of affordable housing is a major issue in California. According to a study from the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, about 29 percent of California renters spend more than half their income on rent which makes it hard to afford basics like food, clothing, transportation and health care (Hill, 2018). In California, to afford a one bedroom rental home at minimum wage a person needs to have 2.3 full time jobs and for a two bedroom rental home three full time jobs are needed (National Low Income Housing Coalition: Out of reach 2018, n.d.). Also, poverty contributes to being homeless because everything is getting expensive and the level of income doesn't match the bills needed to be paid.

Unemployment contributes to homelessness because there is not enough income for the housing payment and other basic survival needs. This can lead to eviction or foreclosure from their home. Forty four percent of the homeless population has a part time or full time employment. Less than 30% of them that are eligible for low income housing receive it because of the lack of nationwide affordable housing or assisted housing program (Poster Homelessness, 2019). Some employment barriers that the homeless population may have to face are low educational attainment levels, limited or no work experience, mental health or substance abuse problems, chronic health problems or disability and criminal histories (National Coalition for the

Homeless, n.d.). With this barriers their job search is limited. Over 311,900 California children and families have recently lost their homes to foreclosure. About two million children will be directly impacted by the mortgage crisis over the next few years (Poster Homelessness, 2019).

Lastly, the person's overall mental health can lead to being homeless. "The symptoms of severe mental illness, such as paranoia, lack of focus, low levels of energy, delusional thinking, and hallucinations, can make it difficult or impossible to perform the activities that most of us take for granted, such as working, developing relationships, or maintaining a home"(Sunrise House, n.d.). A way that people can cope with their mental illness is through the use of drugs or alcohol which can lead them to being addicted.

Consequences

The consequences of being homeless are the children have a risk for poor educational outcomes, risk for health problems and distress in children and families.

Children experiencing homelessness have a risk for poor educational outcomes because they fall behind in school. Homeless students are two times as likely to repeat a grade compared to students who have a stable home. Also, the students lose four months of academic experience with every move of residency. It takes the students four to six months to recover academically after changing schools. The students are 1.5 times more likely to perform below grade level in reading and writing. While in math the students are 2.5 times more likely to perform below grade level in math (Poster Homelessness, 2019). "This creates frustration in the children, the feeling of inadequacy, truancy, anger, and a downhill slope in self-esteem and school grades. Students attending school fully equipped experience a huge boost in morale overall. Homeless children are then less self-conscious and can focus their energy on learning" (Family Resource Center, n.d.).

Some health problems that homeless adults might face are communicable diseases and injuries. Homelessness can create new health problems and exacerbates existing ones such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and asthma. Recovering and healing from surgery and illness is hard without a proper housing that provides privacy and safety. Those that experience homelessness are three to four times more likely to die prematurely than their housed counterparts, and experience an average life expectancy as low as 41 years (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2011). Children experiencing homelessness are sick four times more often than other children. They have four times as many respiratory infections; four times more likely to have asthma; twice as many ear infections and five times more gastrointestinal problems (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2010).

Lastly, being homeless can cause distress in children and families. “Young children, infants, and newborns that experience homelessness face a combination of barriers to healthy development and educational performance”, such as experiencing high levels of stress that is “enough to trigger harmful biochemical impacts on developing children - also known as “toxic stress” responses”. Some stressors that may result in toxic stress response in children are “residential and school mobility, crowding, and hunger” (Administration for Children and Families, 2014).

Capstone Project

The capstone project was an event between the Family Resource Center and the Salinas Warming Shelter. Game Night at the Shelter engaged the homeless children living at the shelter to build relationships with other children, shelter, FRC staff and community volunteers. This event also helped to develop and improve children’s social skills. The event took place on October 22, 2019 at 6:30 p.m. The Game Night at the Shelter goal was to help alleviate the

distress of the children and families. Surveys were appropriately developed and used to get feedback from the participants and volunteers.

Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Unemployment	Too many homeless children and families	Distress in children and families
Mental health and addiction		Poor educational outcomes
High levels of poverty		Health problems

Capstone Project Description and Justification

Project Purpose

The project addressed one of the consequences of being homeless which is distress in children and families. The goal of the project was for the participants to have fun and enjoy the games with friends, family members and volunteers.

Project Justification

A game night has many benefits for the children and their families. First of all, having time set aside for children to play will help with their cognitive, physical, social and emotional well-being. Also, play has been shown to help children adjust to the school setting and even to enhance children’s learning readiness, learning behaviors and problem solving skills. (Ginsburg, 2007). A game night has many benefits for the children such as increased happiness, helps them to cope with stress, builds self-confidence and helps them to be more sociable. “It is through play that children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them. Play helps children develop new competencies that lead to enhanced confidence and the resiliency they will need to face future challenges. Undirected play allows children to learn how to work in groups,

to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy skills” (Ginsburg, 2007). The benefit for the family is that game night could become a ritual or tradition in their lives to promote resilience, positive relationships and togetherness with the members of the family.

Project Implementation

The materials that were developed were a timeline of the event, a survey for the children and a volunteer survey. The resources needed to implement the project were a location within the shelter, the games to be used, the Family Resource Center staff and volunteers’ time.

The Family Resource Center staff, children, volunteers and the intern were the people who participated in the project. The Family Resource Center staff’s role in the project was to approve the games and support the intern on the day of the event. The FRC staff collaborated with the shelter staff for permission and confirmation of the event, the location, the date and time. The volunteers and FRC staff helped to monitor the game stations. The children of the shelter were the ones who enjoyed the games the most.

The activities that were done throughout the process of developing, implementing and assessing the game night event were approval of capstone, deciding what games to use for the event, the game night plan and implement and assess the event. For more details see the appendix.

Assessment Plan

The plan to measure the effectiveness of Game Night was to survey the children individually and to get feedback from the volunteers. The surveys were in English. Three volunteers were assigned to assist with the survey of the children one on one. The rest of the volunteers help with the clean-up. Five questions were asked of the children. The survey asked for their age, gender, how much fun they had, if they would like for the event to happen again

and what games they enjoyed. The survey had a scale from one to five to rate how much fun they had. A one was “a tiny bit of fun” and a five was “gigantic fun”. A list of the available games was included in the question for the children to choose from what games they like.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes for the event were for the children and families to have fun. Another outcome was another future Game Night at the Warming Shelter.

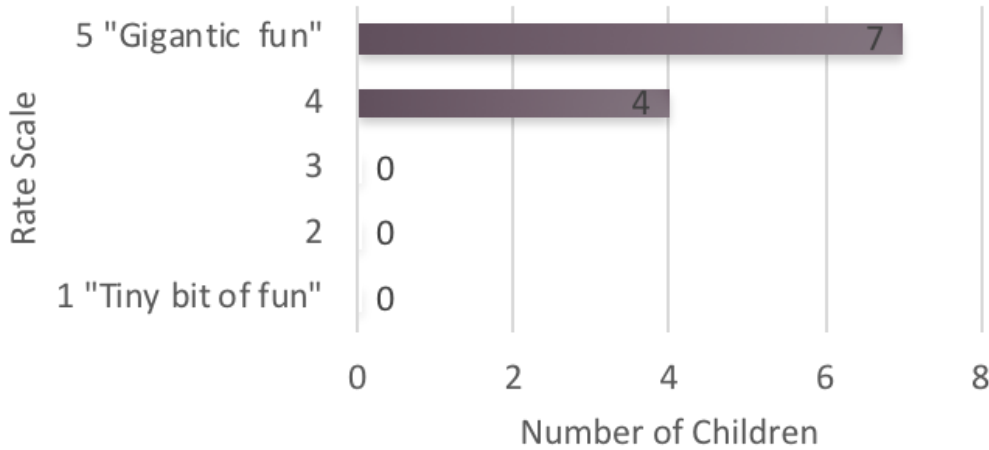
Project Results

The program activities that were actually conducted were choosing the games used, development of both surveys, implementation of Game Night and post event survey for children and volunteers.

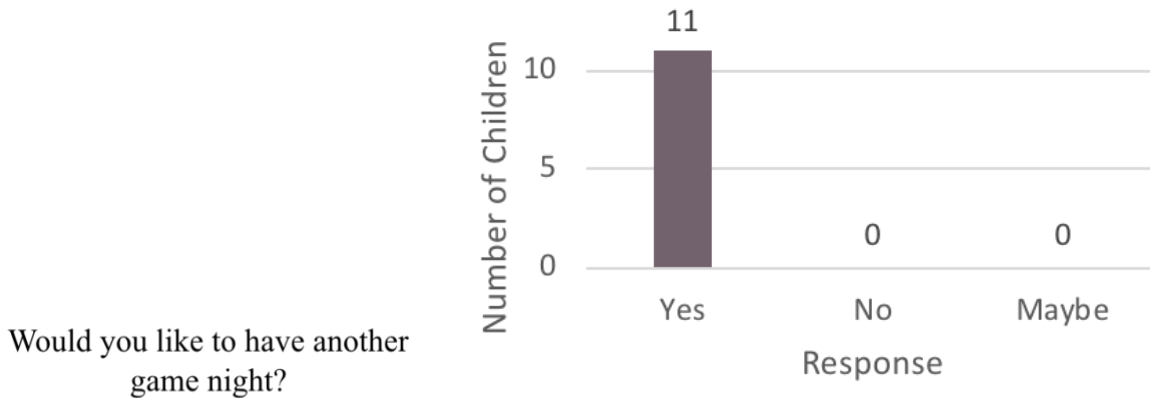
The data collection method used to gather evidence to measure the project outcomes was a survey for the children and volunteers. The survey for children had five questions and the survey for the volunteers had three questions. The questions for the children’s survey was how old are you, gender, on a scale of one to five: how much fun did you have today, would you like to have another game night and what games did you like. The games used were hula hoops, play dough, puzzles, kaleidoscopes and stick horses. The questions for the volunteer survey were what went well, suggestions and if you would like to volunteer again.

The Game Night at the Shelter did meet its expected outcomes of children having fun and the possibility of having another game night. We had a total of eleven children who participated. The children's age range was from two to thirteen. Four children answered four on the question; On a scale from one to five: How much fun did you have today? For reference, one was a “tiny bit of fun” and five was a “gigantic fun”. The remaining seven children’s answered was a five.

All eleven children answered yes to; Would you like to have another game night?. Also, six of the seven volunteers answered yes to wanting to volunteer again.



On a scale of one to five: How much fun did you have today?



Conclusion

The intern’s conclusion based on the results is that it was a huge success because both the children and volunteers had fun, built relationships and would like another Game Night. The things that could be done differently to improve the project are to make and post a flyer at the shelter to promote the event, the intern could go around and ask the kids again to join the event twenty minutes after the event started and lastly, to recruit more volunteers because some of the

stations needed additional volunteers. Other suggestions are to have more activities for older children and give volunteers more advance notice by recruiting earlier.

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Appendix A

Scope of Work

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Approval of Capstone	Have Capstone	May 13	Cheryl Camany
Chose Games	Materials are ready for event	October 21	Cheryl Camany
Develop Surveys	Assessment plan done	October 21	Cheryl Camany
Create Game Night Plan	Final approval of plan	October 21	Cheryl Camany
Implement Game Night	Capstone project completed	October 22	FRC Staff, Volunteers
Assessment and Reporting	Capstone report	October 23- November 24	Cheryl Camany

Timeline for Game Night at the Shelter

October 22, 2019

1. 5:30- 6:15 Set up for Game Night.
2. 6:15- 6:30 Promote the event.
3. 6:30- 6:35 Introduction. Give directions of each station. There will be a prize if child stays to the end and completes the survey.
4. 6:35 - 7:15 Visit each station.
 1. Station One: Bowling
 2. Station Two: Hula hoops
 3. Station Three: Stick horses
 4. Station Four: Puzzles
 5. Station Five: Play dough
 6. Station Six: Kaleidoscope

- 5. 7:15- 7:30 Have some of the volunteers at one table to survey the children. The children will be in lines. Give prize after the child has completed the survey. The rest of the volunteers will clean up.
- 6. 7:30 Volunteers fill out the Post Event Volunteer Survey.

Game Night at the Shelter

Post Event Survey

October 22, 2019



- 1. **How old are you?** _____
- 2. **Gender: (Circle one)** Female Male Non-Binary
- 3. **On a scale from one to five: How much fun did you have today? EXPLAIN: One is a “tiny bit of fun” and five is “gigantic fun.”**

(Circle one)

1	2	3	4	5
“tiny bit of fun”				“gigantic fun”

- 4. **Would you like to have another game night? (Circle one)**

Yes	No	Maybe
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- 5. **What games did you like? (Circle answers)**

Hula hoops	Puzzles
Play dough	Kaleidoscope
Stick horse races	Bowling

Game Night at the Shelter

Post Event Volunteer Survey

October 22, 2019

1. What went well:

2. Suggestions:

3. Would you like to volunteer again? (Circle one)

Yes No Maybe