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Helping Families: One Step at a Time

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Abstract

Watsonville NETworX is a non-profit organization that strives to help low-income families become self-sufficient and develop personal goals. The problem that NETworX had was that the majority of participants did not continue with the program after the first part. The contributing factors are that participants are not engaged in activities, literacy level of participants, and program logistics are not designed around participant needs (Meeting times, childcare, transportation, dinner, etc). The possible consequences are long term health effects, increased exposure to violence and the intergenerational cycle of poverty continues. The capstone project for Watsonville NETworX was to compare the current program curriculum with the new curriculum that was provided by National NETworX. The purpose of this was to find more relevant activities and modules to engage participants. The findings were that participants were more engaged when activities were added to the curriculum. It is recommended that NETworX continues to include activities for each module of the curriculum. In the long run it is recommended for NETworX to reconsider the use of the curriculum to only certain topics and include guest speakers that provide services to participants.

Keywords: Poverty, Spanish speakers, participation, resources

Agency & Communities Served

Watsonville NETworX is a non-profit organization that is part of a national movement to measurably reduce poverty by using strategies. Strategies are based on building well-being together, rather than well-doing for others. NETworX offers an opportunity for people to develop a personal life plan by attending a training program for 12 to 16 weeks. In this program, participants evaluate their own strengths and resources (financial, educational, spiritual, emotional, relational, physical, social, etc.) and identify the areas they wish to improve. The mission is to “elevate people out of poverty, by intentionally creating relationships across class lines, and empowering people in poverty to chart their own course towards self-sufficiency” (Watsonville NETworX, 2019). The need for a NETworX program in Watsonville was determined, as many low-income individuals were unable to access resources because many offices only operate from 8am to 5pm.

NETworX has served approximately 60 individuals, the majority of them being females. Ages range from 18 to 83 years old. The majority of these individuals are married with kids or are single parents. The majority are of Mexican origin, however there have been Caucasians and Portuguese individuals. Watsonville NETworX is one of the first locations to offer the curriculum in Spanish, as the community is mainly composed of Spanish speakers. The primary focus for NETworX is to help low-income families to become self-sufficient and to develop goals that will help them succeed along the way.

The first phase of the program is based on a 12 to 16 week curriculum. The topics in the curriculum include:

- Budgeting

- Class stereotypes
- Privilege
- Traumas
- SMART goals, among others.

One of the activities that participants participate in is the “Privilege Walk,” which consists of having participants realize that privilege can mean more than having money and power. This activity also shows participants how many of them have similar experiences in life and for them to start developing goals in which they wish to work on.

Problem Description

80% of participants do not complete the NETworX program. After the first phase of the programs a drastic amount of participants do not show up for the second part. NETworX was designed to provide tools to individuals to become self-sufficient. For participants to succeed in the program, it is recommended that participants commit to two years; this will ensure that participants receive support from program coordinators who will direct them to resources and services. When participants do not complete the program it does not properly prepare them to implement their goals and bring them a step closer out of poverty. Finch’s (2019) article mentions that, “[California’s] poverty rate in 2018 was about 5 percentage points higher than the national average of 13.2 percent.” NETworX providing the resources and tools to become self-sufficient can possibly help decrease California’s poverty rate.

Contributing Factors

Participants are not engaged in activities. In primary education, individuals are taught to respond when a teacher asks a question. Questions asked by teachers are likely to have an answer already. This does not give students the opportunity to think or analyze other perspectives (Davis, 2013). In a teacher student setting students do not question teachers as students believe teachers will give an answer. This essentially takes motivation away from students to participate in activities as it has been taught that at the end a solution will be given by the teacher without putting in the effort. Most of the time, participants are unwilling to participate and the facilitators will have to answer their own questions. The problem with this is that sometimes the topic shifts from something related to NETworX to something personal. When this happens participants do not pay much attention to what is being said as they are expecting for the facilitator to provide an answer to the questions that are asked.

Most of NETworX participants have stated that they have an education lower than high school. Coming from Mexico means that English is a new language for most of the participants, however “Without a strong command of English, immigrant families will struggle to succeed in the mainstream of American life” (Richwine, 2017). If Watsonville NETworX does not accommodate to participant needs, it is more probable that participants will drop the program before completing the first phase. The curriculum is translated to Spanish but some of the translation does not make sense to participants. The level of Spanish used in the translation is higher for many participants to understand. Having to read words that they do not know what it means can be challenging to understand. There have also been a few participants who are illiterate, there are some worksheets that participants have to fill out or read by themselves, this

creates a challenge for them because they are unable to complete the worksheets.

One of the contributing factors is that program logistics are not designed around participant needs. The program was initially set for Wednesday evenings but participants recommended that Friday evenings would work best. These changes have not been assessed with new participants. At some point, transportation was provided to participants, this important factor has not been discussed with new classes as well. For some participants transportation has been an issue, when they don't have transportation, they miss the class session and have to make up the session at a later time throughout the week. This causes a conflict as many participants have busy schedules that can only allow them to do so much in a day.

Consequences

Remaining in poverty can cause long term health effects. The risk of developing a chronic illness is more likely to develop in individuals in poverty. These chronic illnesses can be caused by stress, in which many families in poverty are in constant stress. Unfortunately, this also affects children, children in poverty have a difficult time learning, solving problems and following rules (Boghani, 2017). Health effects affect the whole family, and families in poverty are most likely to die faster, as their living conditions are not the best. Providing families with some financial relief can be beneficial for the health of the whole family.

When individuals think of poverty, they are also thinking about crime. Being in poverty increases the exposure to crime. One of the most common form of crime is property crime, The U.S. poverty rate stands at 14.6%. Concentrated poverty is defined as neighborhoods with poverty rates of 40% or more. Individuals living on poverty level income in concentrated poverty neighborhoods face not only the personal effects of poverty, but also broader, communal effects.

These often include higher crime rates, underperforming schools, and limited economic opportunity (Stebbins, 2019). Taking everything into account, finding support groups or services to overcome poverty is important as the consequence of crime can drastically change a person's life.

If participants do not continue with the program the intergenerational cycle of poverty may continue. Is a never ending cycle of poverty, that can lead future generations to continue in poverty. Not having the necessary tools to set their own life goals might interfere with managing money, which will result in debt. The cycle of poverty continues which can affect generations throughout generations. It will be difficult, but it is a long awaiting process.

Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Participants are not engaged in activities	Participants do not complete the program	Long term health effects
Literacy level of participants		Increased exposure to violence
Program logistics are not designed around participant needs (Meeting times, childcare, transportation, dinner, etc)		Intergenerational cycle of poverty continues

Capstone Project Description and Justification

Capstone Project

The capstone project for Watsonville NETworX was to compare the current and new program curriculum. The purpose being finding more relevant activities and modules to engage participants. Initially the other part of the project was to provide guest speakers that met participants' needs. However, this changed as the time did not allow to schedule speakers ahead of time. During the intake process, participants were going to be asked what services and resources they were interested in but interviews took place at a time in which these questions were unable to be asked. The goal was to provide relevant information to participants in order for them to continue and complete the program. The first step was to provide participants with topics related to their needs and activities that accommodate to the participants in order for all of them to participate.

Project Purpose

The purpose of the project was to improve the existing curriculum to address participants' needs in order for the participants to continue and complete the program. The program starts with the intake process and then the participants are required to attend sessions once a week for an hour and a half for 12-16 weeks. Participants go through a series of different topics each session. The different topics that are viewed are:

- Poverty- Go over what it means to be in poverty and the different definitions of poverty
- How to budget money
- Privilege- define the word and go over the different privileges that each person has
- SMART Goals- short and long term

- Trauma- how it affects poverty and provide a safe space to talk about it

To address program logistics, participants will be asked what other day apart from Friday they are available to meet. Based on the answers a day will be chosen where most of the participants are able to attend. This will provide an opportunity to identify if the current meeting times for NETworX need to be changed to meet participants needs.

Project Justification

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs,

Poverty eradication among migrants [can be done] through empowerment based on more integration and accessibility. Poverty is a situation that hits migrants in particular. In this case, empowering migrants means to ensure them a balanced access to services, in particular the ones available to all other citizens (health, care, insurance, jobs, etc...).

Better access to services for migrants could easily lead to poverty eradication in this social group. (n.d.)

Watsonville NETworX will better serve this population by providing the tools that participants actually need to help them succeed in getting out of poverty. The activities that were included for participants had a purpose that went along with the topic that was being discussed. This provided participants with an opportunity to put what they have learned into practice. Making changes is sometimes necessary to make the program flexible to the participants' needs, in order for it to be more accessible and known in the community. Having interactive meetings will keep participants engaged and they will continue to attend the weekly meetings.

One of the many goals of Watsonville NETworX is to make participants more self-sufficient. Integrating new activities and modules to weekly meetings to have more

engagement will help participants in the long run “because those who have been empowered will become self-reliant from their skills that they have learned, they can have jobs which they will use to take care of their family” (United Nations Department, n.d.). Participants will only learn information that can be used in their daily lives, connecting activities with curriculums could increase the amount of information a participant takes home and into the community.

Project Implementation

An assessment was given to current participants asking questions regarding how they found out about the program, what they are expected to gain, what services they have access or know in the community and how they see themselves from the beginning of the program to the end, and if they have any goals. Based on the answers, NETworx staff was able to determine what most participants need assistance in. In this case, the majority of the participants mentioned that they would like to learn how to budget their money. United Way was being contacted to provide a financial workshop, however, due to current circumstances of COVID-19 the workshop never happened.

It was first thought that by asking participants beforehand of the resources and services that they are interested in can help provide guest speakers that can talk about the resources and services that they are seeking. By providing guest speakers, the hope was participants would become engaged as they will ask questions about things that they are concerned with. Unfortunately bringing guest speakers was not possible for this session but activities were added in order to increase participants engagement throughout the meetings.

The activities for meetings were ready before each meeting and it was made sure that it related to the topic that was going to be discussed. It was also decided that using the new

curriculum for this session would be the best option, but the curriculum has not been translated to Spanish. Worksheets from the new curriculum that needed to be translated were ready a day before each meeting. The project was implemented for 5 weeks, the 6th week was the final week for implementation and when the final assessment was going to take place but due to the current pandemic, the last meeting was cancelled. After each meeting, a two question survey was verbally given to participants and their responses were noted for future reference, these questions asked for feedback from participants.

Assessment Plan

After each session, participants were asked a series of two questions. These questions included what they liked about the session and what suggestions they will like to provide in order to improve the following sessions. If participants liked the sessions it can lead to an increase of participation and can also lead to continuing, finishing the program and returning as champions. By addressing what the participants did not like about the session can help improve future sessions to make them more engaging, interactive or interesting. Listening to their perspectives will make the participants feel heard, comfortable and safe as they will feel that they are being taken into consideration about their needs. Their suggestions were taken into consideration and were implemented every week and it proved to have a higher participation involvement. Attendance was also tracked in order to have a number of how many participants attended weekly meetings.

Expected Outcomes

What was expected to come out of this project was for participants to continue with the program, return as champions and finish the program. By including activities for the first part of

the program it helped to encourage participants to participate and continue with the program. It was also expected for NETworX to continue to be adaptable around participants' needs as much and often as we can. By receiving feedback on what participants liked and disliked helped to improve each session and the overall program.

Project Results

Towards the end of the implementation of the project, all participants were participating in meetings. Adding activities helped with the engagement as participants were doing physical movements instead of just sitting down, reading a curriculum for the whole class. What also helped with the engagement was taking feedback that participants provided. Participants recommended to ask every participant a question at random instead of expecting a response from one of them. They also recommended for each of them to take turns reading instead of just the facilitator reading and having them listen. Although participants' engagement did increase, some of the activities planned did not work as participants stated that they had already gone through something similar through personal experiences. At the beginning of the session a short two question survey was given to participants to write their responses, it was later discussed that two participants were illiterate and it was decided that asking the questions was a better option to receive feedback from all participants.

Conclusion & Recommendations

In conclusion, the participation of NETworX participants did increase when there were activities added related to the topic being discussed. It is important for NETworX staff to accommodate any activities added to the participants' needs. By adding activities all of the

participants were involved, they all participated in every meeting. It will also be important for NETworX staff to ask participants for suggestions and feedback. One of the reasons why this project was successful was because participants' suggestions and feedback were taken into consideration during the implementation of this project. NETworX follows a curriculum in which there are only a few activities for some of the topics that are discussed. Looking for other activities that require some sort of movement is recommended as meetings tend to run for about 1 hour and 30 minutes.

It would also be recommended to bring guest speakers from community agencies to talk about their services and for participants to be more aware of the services available in the community. NETworX currently gives new participants \$15 gift cards for every meeting they attend, keeping this incentive is also important as participants will continue to attend weekly meetings. Another recommendation will be for NETworX coordinators to do one-on-one meetings with participants as of right now most of the focus is only for the weekly meetings. Having one-on-one meetings will also help the agency to better serve and provide for its participants. When doing the pre-test and post-test it is recommended for program coordinators to leave the room as when they were instructed to do the assessments, the program coordinators were telling participants to only write good stuff about the program. However, in this case it had little to no influence as for the most part participants were being asked for suggestions and feedback.

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Appendix A

Scope of Work

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Survey current participants	Finding out what they would have expected	November 22, 2019	Angelica Martinez Laura Andrade
Evaluate surveys for what participants need.	Services and resources	November 2019	Angelica Martinez Laura Andrade Robin Mathews-Johnson
Plan activities for new participants		December 2019 - February 2020	Angelica Martinez Robin Mathews-Johnson
Make phone calls to interested members	Potential members	February 2020	Angelica Martinez Robin Mathews-Johnson
Create a list of participants for upcoming class	Make calls	February 2020	Angelica Martinez
Participant intakes/interviews	Eligibility	January 20, 2020 - February 6, 2020	Angelica Martinez Laura Andrade
Prepare lesson plans. Incorporate new curriculum with old curriculum.		January- March 2020	Angelica Martinez Laura Andrade
Facilitate class sessions/ pre-test questionnaire at the end of class		February- March 2020	Angelica Martinez Laura Andrade Robin Mathews-Johnson
Discuss project purpose with new participants		February 2020	Angelica Martinez Laura Andrade
Poverty Guidelines Activity		February 21, 2020	Angelica Martinez Laura Andrade
Mirror Activity (Goals)		February 28, 2020	Angelica Martinez Laura Andrade
Post Survey	What worked and what did not	April 10, 2020	Angelica Martinez Laura Andrade
Evaluate surveys	Summary of responses	April 14, 2020	Angelica Martinez Laura Andrade