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Resources for the Homeless Youth

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Author Note

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Abstract

The internship was completed at Youth Alliance, across all of their projects. The rise in homelessness around San Benito county and its adjacent counties has caused numerous people to lose their homes. Most of these people are low income and their children have to go through losing their home, living in shelters, or seeking shelter with a family member or family friend. This project was devised and used to provide research and background information on homelessness and what it can do to youth who have to experience homelessness. The purpose for developing this binder is to help address the high rise in homelessness, decrease in public assistance as well as higher unemployment rates. The homeless resource binder will help with preventing more youth from dropping out of school, help find health care and mental health care to provide the assistance needed to deal with the struggles of homelessness. The results for this project based on the responses from the case managers in multiple programs, showed through a survey that 88.9% of the clients/youth are not currently homeless, but over 90% of case managers said they would love to have the homeless resource binder in their programs, as a reference if the need ever came up in the future for the youth and their families.

Keywords: Homelessness, Binder, Youth, Resource

Agency & Communities Served

Youth Alliance is a 501c non-profit organization founded in 1995, working directly in Hollister, Gilroy and Morgan Hill to create thriving and equitable communities within these cities. The mission of Youth Alliance is to provide innovative and culturally relevant services that strengthen and enrich youth, families, and the community. Their vision is to empower youth as leaders who contribute to the social and economic betterment of their community. The organization works to bring innovative, culturally appropriate and comprehensive services to give youth and their families the necessary tools to help shape their lives as well as the community in which they live (Youth Alliance, 2014).

The agency puts its efforts into an empowerment policy for communities with high poverty, rural locality, and migrant parents as well as youth. The program works not only with shaping the community but also with programs to help provide positive focus on school. The program also works with preventing violence throughout the schools, while providing the only program for pregnancy prevention, which is uncommon within the area of San Benito county.

The agency provides support for the counties through after-school programs, summer programs, late night programs, early intervention, bilingual counseling and case management (Youth Alliance, 2014). These programs are all within the overall organization and provide the support needed to a lot of the youth. While they help the K-12 education system, the organization also provides services for the at-risk and homeless youth, and intervention programs for the juvenile justice system, teen parents, and others While also reaching the parents of the youth through leadership and engagement programs.

The communities served within the program are the lower income population, migrant families, rural locality and youth within K-12 as well as 18-24. The agency works primarily with

youths, not with their parents. Although they do provide support to the parents, they do not always directly work with them, we tend to focus more on the youth, and give the family services through the youth. There are about 8,500 children, youth and families that are served within the organization every year, and 81% of those clients are economically disadvantaged within the community (Youth Alliance, 2014).

Problem Description

Homeless youth tend to have to grow up faster, in order to provide for and help their families and themselves. The youth within the agency have to work with us to give us a better understanding of what the family needs help with. Doing so is forcing these youths to grow up and deal with adult issues as teenagers, when they should be in reality doing what teenagers do: focusing on school, visiting friends, learning to drive, etc. The youth instead has to make sure their family is secure. Often the family needs help with rentals or rental assistance, and since the youth is not head of the household the most the program can do is provide food assistance and hygienic products.

According to Chrystal Stegan at the Family and Children's center, when a child is forced into homelessness, they are also forced to learn how to support themselves without knowing what it takes to be stable and independent at such a young age (Stegan, 2020). A lot of youth don't have the necessary skill set to grow up that quickly and support themselves, they themselves are still trying to figure out how to cope with growing up and preparing themselves to become adults, but when they have to grow up due to homelessness, they tend to make due with what they have, but at the same time they want to bring in some sort of income to help their families out, and while they mean well they don't have any background knowledge on how to work and have little to no skills ready so they can find work.

The youth are faced with this sense of instability and are eagerly trying to find that stability because they don't have a place to permanently stay at, and they are always looking for a place to stay that is safe, warm and inviting. But what also troubles them is their need for food and a lot of the time these poor youth don't know where their next meal is going to come from, and if they will even get to eat at all. Homeless youth rely on their parents to provide them with their basic needs of shelter, food, water and they focus on building relationships, connections, finding jobs, gaining skills, building their portfolios, resumes, etc. but being forced to be homeless with their parents, their mindsets shift. A lot of the youth forget to do everything they want to do, in order to focus on helping their parents find those basic needs to survive.

Contributing Factors

Homelessness is a huge issue in California and while there are efforts being made, there isn't enough change happening and now homelessness is a huge problem. While there are measures and some resources being accessed, many of these homeless people do not know what else is out there, and if these people do know what resources are available they may have a harder time accessing them. According to Cal Matters "more than 150,000 of its residents sleep in shelters, cars, or on the street" (Levin & Botts, 2019). Most of these people do try to seek out resources but can't seem to find them. In Los Angeles, there are more than 5,000 homeless people living on Skid row and they all struggle to find resources to help them out because they either get turned away or they have no way of reaching for those resources. The last count of homelessness in California was in 2019 and marked that nearly 151,278 were homeless. We see that this number is sky high, and the reason being is because there is an increase in rent and less assistance to help with rent management. When it comes to low income families, we see so many families struggling to stay in a home, which leads to moving constantly. According to a journal

article on homelessness, "Homeless families can be found living in cars, abandoned buildings, and homeless shelters within virtually every American city. Some families are able to avoid this type of severe material hardship by doubling up with friends and family" (Fertig, Reingold, 2008, 486). Although some families have the comfort of being able to go to a family member's house, that is not the reality for everyone. Many families do not have family close by and instead have to deal with either living in their car, or finding the nearest shelter that will not separate them as a family. Many shelters do end up separating families despite the emotional benefits they would gain from being able to stay together to get through hardship. This also creates instability within the family if they get separated in the shelters when finding a place to stay, this can then lead them to live in abandoned homes to avoid being seperated.

There has been a recent decline in public assistance for those in the homeless or at-risk bracket. We see this more after the recession of 2008, and it continues today. Homelessness and poverty are linked together, as lack of funds makes it harder to meet even the most important needs such as housing, food, healthcare, and childcare.. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, the decline of public assistance has taken a toll on families, "Many families leaving welfare struggle to get medical care, food and housing as a result of loss of benefits, low wages and unstable employment" (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2020). This happens due to the availability of public resources declining in the state, as well as not updating our welfare system in every state, to make it more efficient at finding stable employment for the families who need it. Public assistance has become harder for families and youth to find help within their communities. Furthermore, these changes in the system that determines who needs assistance mean that there are new criteria. According to an article by Luke Shaefer, welfare had redrawn the line between the deserving and undeserving with employment as the test. This has benefitted

single parents with employment who are deemed as "deserving," but decreased the chances for those in poverty with unstable employment to be able to benefit from receiving aid, due to them being deemed "undeserving" (Shaefer, Edin, Fusaro & Wu, 2020, 1001). While the reforming and reshaping of how to determine eligibility for public assistance such as welfare is a good thing, it is also making it increasingly difficult to find assistance for those who have an unstable job, and it is still a challenge for many to find assistance.

Unemployment is the final factor that affects homelessness. The families who have come from a different country to find work often get seasonal jobs. Migrant workers in particular suffer the most in the winter time; due to the crops not growing in winter months, they are all laid off and struggle to find employment due to lack of skills and education. According to a journal article from Swinburne University, "the homeless face multiple hurdles in obtaining employment, particularly jobs that pay a living wage and are not transitory" (Steen et al., 2012, 2). Families of migrant workers find it harder to get a job that is not transitory due to their educational background or the lack of skills they have, which then pushes their children to have to find jobs in order to pitch in. Sometimes the children working do help the family, but often even that is not enough. Unemployment strikes the family hard in the winter season, which then leads to them losing housing, and possibly needing to find a shelter until they can find work again, or the next growing season begins.

Unemployment has an impact not only on individuals, but also on their entire family. This is because most of the time, both parents lack marketable job skills, have low education levels, or have lost a job and are finding it difficult to get another. With lower-paid job skills and education levels it is increasingly difficult to find work if certain criteria is not met, and often this occurs in migrant families who immigrated to the United States looking for work, but lack

the job skills to find high-paying employment when they arrive. Currently the unemployment rates are decreasing from their high rate after COVID-19. According to the Employment Development Department (EDD) unemployment in California was at 12.3% in 2020 due to the pandemic, and slowly as the state started reopening many people went back to work or started finding jobs again. As of August 2021, the unemployment rate is at 7.5 % which is increasingly better than last year but still higher than it should be.

Consequences

The consequences of the contributing factors listed above can be avoided, but in order for that to happen there is a need for more help at ending homelessness. To start off, there is a mass of homelessness within families and most often than not the children tend to suffer. These poor kids want their basic needs met, and they tend to just forget about their health, relationships, and making connections they end up delaying their future plans of going to school, and making something of themselves (Stegan, 2020). A lot of these kids have a hard time making connections due to the fact that they lose out on getting the education they need because they work so hard to help provide for their families too. When teens choose work over school we are also seeing them lose their friends and their entire childhood/ youth years, they should enjoy being teens and not worry about being adults just yet.

Youth need to focus on their futures and while it seems plausible for other youth, those in homeless situations don't get that luxury. Homeless youth tend to drop out of school just to help provide for their families and begin looking for work, and most of the time those jobs won't pay enough for them to help find a living place, food, and other necessities they need to survive. According to the California Department of Education, the dropout rates in California as of 2020 was at 8.9%, which is only 0.1% less than 9.0% in 2019 for the state. Without the necessary

resources for these homeless youth and their families, we will not see a change in trends, these youth will continue to drop out of school, and get jobs that pay less than the minimum livable wage because they have no skills. The community needs to come together to help bring those opportunities to these homeless youth, so they can have a future and make something of themselves when they are older.

Homeless youth find themselves put between a rock in a hard place and it always takes a toll on their mental health. These youths tend to really put a stress on themselves to help figure out where they will sleep, eat and be safe for the night, and it takes a toll on a youths mental health. According to the Family & Youth Services Bureau homeless students reported significantly higher depression rates than youth who have homes, as well as more than half of the homeless students who attempted suicide reported that they required medical attention afterward, compared to 37% of housed students (FYSB, 2020). While these numbers are higher than youth who live in homes with their families, we see that homeless youth tend to have higher depressive episodes, due to not being able to have a stable environment where they can safely express their feelings. Having this much stress is not good on any youth, it can lead to other coping mechanisms besides suicide, such as substance abuse and longer periods of homelessness due to instability.

Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Higher Rates of Homelessness	Homeless youth are helping to provide for their families	Drop out of school
Decrease in Public Assistance		Health consequences
Higher Unemployment Rates		Mental health consequences

Capstone Project Description and Justification

Capstone Project & Project Purpose

The project proposed is to create and implement a homeless resource binder for all the programs within Youth Alliance to reference if they ever have a youth at risk of becoming homeless within San Benito county. When beginning this project the intent of it was to provide those resources and bring more awareness to the organizations that offer to help homeless or at risk homeless youth and their families within San Benito. This project aims to address the problem of low income families having higher debt/low funds by working together as an agency to distribute a resource binder on homeless resources that will give homeless youth and their families the opportunities they need to get back on their feet and into housing and providing those basic needs for their families. The binder will have agencies and organizations inside to help refer clients to the nearest agency in the county of San Benito so they can receive the help they need, even if it is not within the Youth Alliance programs.

The project will help address the issue with the youth having a lack of resources to help themselves and their families. There is a homeless resource binder being created for the county of San Benito, with research on the different shelters, agencies and programs that can help bring some light and comfort to those who are currently at-risk or are homeless in the county. It is possible for any case manager within any program in the organization to recommend and refer their clients to any agencies listed that are within the county their client's live at currently. The binder itself will hold resources for the county of San Benito, which will be distributed to other programs within the agency itself, to help the clients they have, find specific resources the agency cannot provide.

Project Justification

  This project makes sense because, homeless youth tend to not have a plan on how to get themselves out of this hole that they were put in, and they try and try time and time again to dig their way out without help and it does not work out. Case managers help provide that sense of stability for them to come up with a plan, set goals up for themselves all while giving them the support they need to achieve their goals. According to *The Homeless Hub,* "A client-centered case management approach ensures that the person who has experienced homelessness has a major say in identifying goals and service needs, and that there is shared accountability" (Homeless Hub, 2021). A lot of the times, if you give a youth/teen goals, and don't check on them or send them on their way to do it alone, more than likely they won't do those goals, and when it comes time for their check in to see their progress they will either be in a worse situation than before, or they are in the same position they were in at their first meeting.

  Teens/youth need consistency and a case manager can provide them that consistency. They will be there always checking in whether it is daily or weekly, case managers will always want updates so they can see if their client is really accomplishing their goals. The end goal for every homeless case manager is to get their clients to reduce their risk of becoming homeless again, or setting them up to have that stability to be in their own home. This project will provide that sense of stability, so many of those homeless youth want to get their families out of that situation and into a better place, and giving them the resources they need will help reduce their homeless risk and get them into a stable environment where they can succeed and focus on their opportunities and make connections to better their futures.

  Of course, when it comes to case managers they are not the only ones who need to help put in the effort, there needs to be a willingness from their client to want to get themselves back

into their home, or moved into a new home that they can afford. When the homeless youth and their families are assessed and are "identified as being at risk, they are not simply unleashed into the emergency services sector. An intake is done, risks are identified, goals are established and plans are put in place. Individuals and families therefore become 'clients' not of specific agencies, per se, but rather, of the sector" (Homeless Hub, 2021). The family becomes clients and then begin to receive their assistance within not just their case manager, but within the sector they fall into when they were assessed. Families more than likely will continue their services until they are safely in their home or until they are no longer 'at risk' and can be on their own, until the case manager sees the family is at a good place they will assess if they will need to continue services or not.

Assessment Plan

The effectiveness of the project's implementation will be assessed by creating a survey on Survey Monkey and distributing the link to every program that will be receiving the resource binder to see if anything can be improved, and if they are finding the resource binder useful. The expected date for the creation of the survey is early July, while the release date for the survey to be distributed will be mid-July. The survey will ask relevant questions pertaining to the binder such as: the contents, the agencies, the relevancy to the program, is it useful information, will it help for future referrals, etc. This will bring in responses to see if there are any changes that need to be made, as well as having resources that can be updated by future interns, if more agencies become available within the county, or some close down due to lack of funding. The responses should be collected by the end of July-early August, to allow for necessary changes and additions to the binder itself before it is ready for full implementation towards all the Youth Alliance

programs. All necessary additions/changes should be completed mid-August for a final revision and submission for distribution to all programs.

Expected Outcomes

The project will bring about a new way to refer clients to other agencies that can provide help that Youth Alliance cannot help with. This will also allow for future interns to refine and add more agencies as the years go on to help provide more resources for clients. The project will allow for Youth Alliance to have more assistance to offer clients. Even if it is not within the agency itself, Youth Alliance can still provide help for clients by referring them to the correct agency to give clients the assistance they are seeking. The project will also bring more resources to the agency that will provide a better understanding of what resources are currently available within the county and where resources need to be expanded, such as shelters, food banks/drives, healthcare, rental assistance, etc. The expected number of responses from the survey is that almost all program leaders will respond and answer the survey questions to the best of their ability and provide any feedback they feel is either out of date or needs to be added in. The expected response time is hopefully within the first week, so all responses can be collected and reviewed by the second week to start conducting the editing process. With the feedback from the surveys, it will allow for the editing process to go by easier, due to having specifics on what to edit and research more for it will help the binder become the best finalized product.

Project Implementation

The implementation plan for the resource binder is the creation of a binder for the county of San Benito, that can be referenced by each program within Youth Alliance. This binder will be created on a Google Doc to format and place all the resources available within San Benito County, from there it will be edited and revised yearly to make sure the data is accurate and

correct. Weekly meetings with the supervisor were done to ensure all was going well and the

project was being completed on schedule. Those meetings eventually went to bi-weekly

meetings, and discussed the research process, how up to date were the organizations and if there

are any that are no longer being used or no longer exist. The binder will be accessible to all of

the programs that work within Youth Alliance, through a digital PDF, and hopefully a paper

edition, for each program. Each program will be able to see what assistance is currently offered

in San Benito County for any clients who need help finding shelters, bill assistance, etc. The

resource binder has been released to the agency sometime in September to receive feedback, as

well as the survey for the binder to the appropriate programs. The survey was created originally

on Survey monkey, but due to complications was eventually re-created on Google Forms. The

Google form consisted of 7 questions, 3 being paragraphs on details or feedback that could be

useful. Once the surveys are sent out, there is a 2-week period where everyone can answer the

survey and provide feedback to see if there are any changes that need to be made, before it can

be sent out as a completed version. Together the survey and binder will give clear feedback on

what works, and what is not working so there can be improvements made before the final edits

can be made and be distributed to every program in a finalized stage. A detailed implementation

plan and timeline can be seen in the Scope of Work in Appendix A.

Project Results

The original timeline, which had planned for the survey results to be sent out and the

project finalized in July/August, ended up being pushed back by 2 months. The original date for

sending out the surveys was in July, but with all the staff out for the summer it was almost

impossible to get responses back in this timeframe. There was also an issue with the original

survey. The original survey was created through Survey Monkey, but the website called for a subscription to send out all the items, so instead a Google Form was created to send out to all staff through their Gmail when the time came. The Google Form was sent out September 23, and the intended targets were informed that they had until October 2nd to complete the form and submit their feedback so the binder could be edited, and turnover completed. Only five responses were received in the first week, and it was a little disappointing to see so little progress on something that has been worked on for months. However, during the second week before the deadline there were 27 responses. All the intended targets responded and were looking forward to receiving the binder when it is complete. These responses are recorded in pie charts in Appendix B (p. 20-21).

Many of the feedback responses that were received all said there was nothing to change, and that they are expecting to receive the link soon to be able to use the binder in their work when they need it. Almost all responses stated that nothing needed to be changed, and that they just needed the link to the binder, while others responded that they had never seen the binder or knew it was in the works but were eager to have a copy in their programs. Although the dates for when everything should have been completed and sent out were pushed back, and responses did not look promising during the first week, all expectations were met, and the project ended in a positive result.

Conclusion & Recommendations

This project was the hardest assignment and biggest investment of time, but well worth it. Looking back at how much was put into this project, it had to be reworked completely three times until the project became the resource binder. Looking at all the results it really showed that

the program leaders/case managers only knew how to look up the resources but didn't have a binder already created with all the information needed at their disposal to refer any youth to outside resources. It was great to also see that many of the case managers were eager to have all the information ready for them and to have those resources available for them to use in their offices, physically or digitally in the company google drive.

The recommendations for Youth Alliance now that the binder is at their disposal is to assign someone to update every year or every 6 months with the most current information, as well as removing outdated information and organizations/non-profits that no longer exist for San Benito County. This is a binder that is to be used every day of the year when needed, all the information must be correct and up to date to make sure no case manager calls or emails the wrong agency. Not only is this information beneficial for everyone, but it also really gives you all the tools needed to really help someone in need within seconds by just looking up this binder in the Google Drive for Youth Alliance, or pulling the physical copy when it is available.

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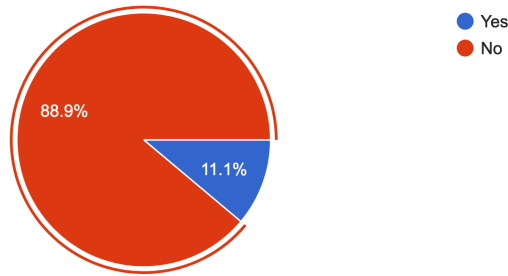
Appendix A

Scope of Work

This should be drafted for Milestone #1, completed for Milestone #2 & updated for Milestones

#3 & #4. Below is a sample format.

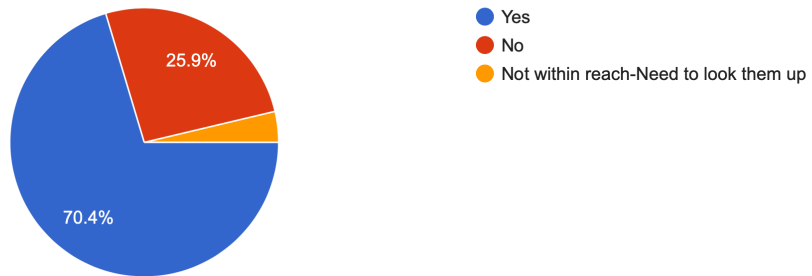| Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Propose project idea		December/January	Eliana
Research agencies/org in San Benito County	Research	February/March	
Capstone meetings	Support	Monthly	Margie
Research homeless statistics	Research	Weekly	
Gather more research on agencies/org that help homeless or at risk homeless families	Research	Weekly	
Refine Draft of Capstone	Draft	Monthly	
Complete Resource Binder	Research/Support	March/April	
Draft of Survey	Feedback/Improvements	July/August	
Refine Survey	Improvements	Early August	
Send out Survey & Binder	Support	End of August/Early September	
Gather Responses to Survey	Feedback	End of September/ Early October	
Review Survey Responses	Feedback/improvements	Early October	
Additional Information/Resources added	Improvements/Final edits	Mid-October	
Implementation		End of October/Early November	Margie, Anthony & Rocio

Appendix B

1. Are any of your students/clients in need of homeless resources?
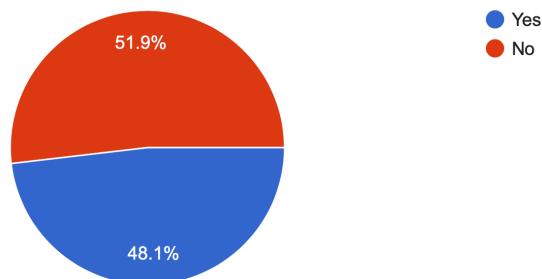27 responses

Yes
No

88.9%

11.1%

2. If your students are in need of homeless services, do you have access to the resources necessary within the program?
27 responses

Yes
No
Not within reach-Need to look them up

25.9%

70.4%

3. You have received a copy of the San Benito Homeless Resource binder, after looking it over is the information in the binder up to date?
27 responses

Yes
No

51.9%

48.1%

6. Would your program benefit from having the binder for referrals to outside resources if any of your students happen to be homeless, or at-risk?

27 responses