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The Fight for Housing

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CHHS400

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Abstract

California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) is a law firm chain that resides in 22 counties here in California. Focusing on the issues of housing, education, transportation, workers' rights, and benefits. Monterey County is facing a housing crisis resulting in residents being displaced. The project implemented to address this issue is an outreach presentation program. To advise students of fundamental tenancy rights in California. Using this method, the hope is that they can advocate for themselves and avoid exploitation in the future. The students and mentors from CRLA created the outreach program. Some recommendations to aid the housing crisis are to make fundamental housing rights known and to provide resources available that can assist afflicted populations in the county regarding housing and legal representation regarding housing should the need arise for an individual.

Keywords: Housing, Law, Tenant Rights

Agency

California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) is assisting with this issue. They are a law firm chain stretched all over California, focusing on housing issues, education, precisely K-12 benefits, transportation issues, workers' rights, and benefits. CRLA also helps low-income families and gives legal advice for free due to being a 501(c3). In 2020 they assisted about 54,00+ affected individuals, closed 6,303 cases, served 1,737 disabled individuals, and assisted 1,285 seniors.

The issue

As inflation increases and living costs continue to rise, people struggle to afford their basic needs, especially rent. With about 17 million Californians unable to afford rent, it has become a staggering problem. Especially with about 44%, almost half of Californians are renters. Despite proposed measures such as adding additional dwelling units on properties, it is still insufficient to keep up with the demands for safe and affordable housing. Despite being the nation's most robust economy due to Silicon Valley and other expenditures, there is still a considerable population of homeless people and borderline homeless people all over California. For example, there was a 12.7% increase in homelessness in Los Angeles from 2019 -2022. In Monterey, homeless people increased by 26% from 2019-2022. Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, when people lost their jobs, it increased their risks of losing their homes and homelessness. A Tener Center study at UC Berkeley, found towards the end of 2020, 5% of the population participating in the study missed their November to December rent. Landlords' relief efforts across the state and every single form available, from the need to be made aware of Senate measures to new policies, people still struggled to make ends meet.

In Monterey County in 2022, the affordability of living on the central coast and other parts of the county has skyrocketed in a recent report. To afford the monthly rent, a person would need to make at least \$36.50 hourly to about \$37 hourly to afford the monthly rent. Most of the population lives off of minimum wage, which may be about \$19 hourly, and in some cases, it may be less due to some employers paying \$15 to \$17 hourly. It can be nearly impossible to pay rent in the area since it is almost more than twice the rent rate. While 27% of Californians receive Section 8 vouchers and a \$5 billion distribution under the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), more is needed. Since the average rate of rent is about \$1,900+, meaning that even with assistance and working multiple hours, it can be challenging to afford a home. Additionally, the requirements to get into these programs can be very slim, and the waitlist to receive these benefits can sometimes take years.

Contributing factors

Knowledge

The lack of knowledge, especially one's rights in terms of housing, can leave multiple populations powerless. This element can contribute to the lack of understanding of California housing rights and renters' rights in California. One challenge in knowing one's rights is ignorance regarding the legal procedure. When an individual's rights are not known or acknowledged, it makes advocating for oneself more difficult and causes many problems. Furthermore, how does the affected population know who to go to for assistance and who does not know who to fight against? *Evicted*, by Matthew Desmond, highlights why there's the exploitation of housing and states that can contribute to landlords and society as a whole.

Desmond's piece demonstrates how landlords elude their tenants by violating their rights in a way that tenants are unaware of, such as not giving proper notice when introducing a rent hike.

Depending on the contract terms, a tenant should be given 30, 60, or 90-day notice.

Besides, Post COVID laws implemented protections for tenants. For example, Landlords can do a tenant screening service under the California Tenants Act to see a tenant's ability to pay rent. Still, it cannot be penalized for COVID-19, primarily debts or faults in paying rent. Yet due to people not knowing proper protections in place about rent rates, a lot of them fall short.

Another caveat is housing availability, which tends to be very limited in Monterey County. Even though the demand for housing grows, the means to build it are fixed, causing a surplus of people compared to the accommodation available. Furthermore, it is hard to build housing in some areas of California, even with demand; it becomes increasingly more difficult to get housing rights and building opportunities. Limitations in housing developments can be due to litigation in certain areas. For example, in 2018, there was much talk about expanding housing in the Fort Ord area surrounding the campus (i.e., the old barracks), But it was blocked for a long time due to the place trying to protect water sources beneath the ground. Limited groundwater resources resulted in a slowing down of housing built, resulting in displacement. Apart from state and federal law, a county law ordinance in Monterey County states that it plans to "limit residential growth." At a national level, even though new housing construction is past built, it is still minimally approximated to the spikes in population. Therefore, it is becoming challenging for renters and college students to find housing. In addition to staggering fees, The Application fees would eventually dent a person's wallet since Every application fee is Around USD 50, despite the California Tenants Act stating that an application fee can be at most \$52.50 (California Tenants Rights Act, Page 15). Fees and other similar details can still put an individual

at a disadvantage. If an individual is applying for ten different housing units with ten other landlords, the screening process alone would be an extra \$500 in just trying to find a new home. And when competing against 437,325 people in Monterey County for a home, the odds are slim (California Census 2020 Monterey Bay).

Unaffordability,

Unfortunately, unaffordability also contributes to rising costs, limiting housing options. Unaffordability causing limited options for housing is especially true for this area, where a standard studio costs a minimum of \$1,300 in rent, which can be \$1,500 or more after utilities. A study done by Harvard University found that a staggering number of Americans as a whole cannot afford their housing. Data shows that more than a million Americans live in places they cannot afford. The study says, "Over 38 million American households can't afford their housing, an increase of 146 percent in the past 16 years." (*Harvard University, 2016*). In Monterey County, 49% of people spend more than 30% of their income on rent.

Consequences

The consequences of doubling or tripling the rent rate for Californians can be catastrophic. It can result in 3 significant effects: overcrowded housing, rent hikes/increases that surpassed past years' rent rates, and even homelessness. The consequence can be either borderline homelessness or complete homelessness on the streets. Unfortunately, if people do not know what rights they have and what legislation they are safeguarded under, landlords will manipulate them. This is usually seen either through rent increases or possibly harassment or, in some cases, both. Despite AB1482's existence, a law protecting people from predatory rent increases, not all housing applies to its protection. Some housing not covered under AB1482 is

temporary, hotels, churches, and higher institution housing, such as University housing. To make matters worse, the Costa Hawkins Housing Act of 1995 prohibits city vacancy over a tenant's rent. In other words, the landlord can put any price on a given space.

Overcrowding

If more than triple or double rent rates are needed, some people are subject to overcrowding. This may be eight people in an apartment or more than four in a room. In Monterey County, according to the United States Census Bureau data, about 1 in 8 people, or 12% of Monterey County's population, reported living in overcrowded housing. Additionally, overcrowded housing can spread multiple infections and diseases, more frequent homelessness, and family housing, especially, declines where they do not have proper protections against infectious diseases such as COVID-19 and other contagious/communicable diseases.

Proposed solutions

A few solutions to counteract this issue could be holding workshops and outreach in affected areas with housing issues. That way, the communities affected can know what they are protected by legally. Introducing resources that assist with issues during the workshop can be beneficial. For example, if an individual requires financial assistance when they cannot afford the rent for the month, they can be referred to ERAP, and if not, perhaps some local agencies that can further assist them in the matter.

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Limited availability. No knowledge of housing /tenant rights. Unaffordable housing .	exploitation of tenants	Higher rates of rent Overcrowded living spaces. Homelessness

Project Purpose

This project aims to minimize the lack of knowledge on tenant rights in underrepresented communities in knowing the area. Another purpose is that if workshop attendees need help, they can receive assistance from nearby agencies such as California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), Emergency Rental Assistance Program ERAP, and The Monterey College of Law. This project aims to reduce the disparities among individuals in low-income areas who are constantly under emotional and financial duress.

Project Justification:

The project is because out of the 443,481 people living in the Monterey County area, about 1/3 have affordable housing. On the other hand, if people can afford a house, they can still deal with unsafe living conditions, such as environmentally or internally. However, when it comes to housing affordability is not only knowledge to be considered but also the knowledge of what rights you are entitled to as a tenant. For example, if a tenant is rejected from renting a space because of a negative credit score, a landlord must say why the tenant is being left. This is known as the Fair Crediting Report Act. However, when a person enters a tenancy for the first time, they may not know this.

Project Implementation

A few methods at California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) is implemented (See Appendix A) to ensure that people get access to basic legal information through outreach so that they can advocate for themselves. Therefore, people can save time and money through CRLA or local agencies like HERA or ERAP. For ideas, I plan to meet with Vanessa from CRLA and Moren Christensen from the Monterey College of Law. I plan to collaborate with them to see if I can get Outreach ideas and also see if they can advise on what to include and exclude at the workshop. Along with possibly teaming up with TRIO or the Student Union. Along with the CHHS Associated Students senator for collaborating on hosting the event in April. The plan is to do a workshop in building 12 because it may be less costly than the Student Ballroom, which costs \$2,000 an hour, whereas making 12 is free. Additionally, I plan to partner with Associated Students (AS) to get fun incentives for people to be motivated to attend the event. So it can reach the student body, especially graduating students. From there, the plan is to do a workshop on a tenant's fundamental rights and responsibilities in California.

Furthermore, reach out to the art department to see if they can design a few posters, digital flyers, or QR codes to be scanned and give the event information.

Additionally, onboarding a speaker for the workshop within the allotted time is crucial because Vanessa or Phyllis can speak at the seminar. Additionally, it would be nice if Monterey College of Law could also talk at the event; if not, it would be ok too.

It would also be nice to speak to the school to see if we can have food or incentives for the event so students can be immersed in the experience and hopefully captivated. The strategy I plan to use is to gather wisdom from Phyllis Katz and Vanessa Ambriz to use their

recommendations in my workshop. Additionally, I hope to make the workshop available in different languages more accessible and minimize disparities due to language barriers.

For materials to create flyers, I obtained some ink and some advice from Hector Mendoza Anguiano since he is an art teacher with a good sense of art. Apart from that, Before I set up the workshop, I did a few dry runs and reviewed the information with Phyllis and Vanessa.

Moreover, I incorporated some information from the tenant's rights handbook in my prep for the presentation to inform people of the rights they should know immediately. So that way, it will be a manageable amount of information to overwhelm attendees or make their eyes glaze over. But enough to protect themselves and advocate for themselves should the need arise on their tenancy terms.

Additionally, when creating the infographics/flyers for the workshop, I would make the infographic comic-style captivating and informative. Also, I would like to contact the student disability center to make flyers/media for students with special needs to access the information and be protected.

Narrative Scope

So, when it comes to connecting with my mentor and Vanessa, along with the Monterey College of Law. I decided to get in touch with them either through winter break or early January so that way if there are any bumps in the road with my capstone, I can fix them before proceeding with the rest of my plans for capstone. However, I got more support from Vanessa.

Additionally, I want to contact OC3, AS, and the CHHS student senator for details about hosting the event. By February, I plan to get some flyers printed/developed to reach the public. It will contain information about where the workshop will be held, times, and incentives to

promote it. Additionally, I want to make another set of flyers to give essential information on tenant rights in different formats depending on Accessibility needs. On February 22, 2023, I connected with Phyllis, Vanessa, and the Student Disability Center to get approval/feedback from the Posters. By March 2, 2022, I put posters around campus and outsourced the event on My Raft, the school's social media forum. From there, I prepared for which space I would utilize for the presentation.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes I have for this project are for at least reaching college students, teachers, and families living off campus. The plan is to have about 25% of attendees retain the information in the workshop. In terms of attendance for the event, I hope that at least 25 people attend the event. The goal is to ensure that people know their fundamental rights when renting a property; for example, under AB1482, certain housing types must be given proper notice before increasing rent and cannot increase it by 10%. If a tenant's landlord charges a tenant 30% more, it is most likely illegal. Apart from that, I hope any of the attendees' housing issues can seek assistance from CRLA, the Monterey College of Law, ERAP, and HERA. That way, people can get assistance even with their low income. Additionally, it will minimize disparities in the Monterey County area regarding housing.

Assessment Plan

As for the workshop's success, the plan is to measure it by the survey feedback I get from attendees. From there, I will modify the seminar based on the feedback I get from attendees. For example, if I get feedback from attendees regarding a problem, I will do my best to fix it to make

it easier to retain information and make it memorable for them. As for good feedback, I will keep whatever worked well with the target group for future projects.

Introduction

This section deals with the results of the capstone implementation of my project, which dealt with Housing Rights in Monterey. I did the project at California State University Monterey Bay in hopes of reaching the college student population to give them a chance to comprehend their basic rights in terms of housing. The space the project was conducted in was In Ocean Hall Building D instead of Building 12.

Project

The activities included a presentation and a post-presentation survey. The presentation was to have some details on Security deposit information, 30,60, & 90- day notices, as well as safety and habitability information. The information was based on common issues and rights seen under California Tenancy. The presentation was to be done by Vanessa, a co-mentor from CRLA, and the student. After the presentation, the student would give people a link to fill out a survey to gauge feedback. Furthermore, the survey would also pinpoint participants toward resources as well. After the surveys were filled, the participants would be entered into a raffle and get a chance to win a \$50-100 gift card from Target or Amazon. From the survey results, the student would add pointers for the next intern at CRLA and include them in the student's capstone results.

Project outcome(s)

The student expected the presentation's outcome to be at least 25 participants; however, the mentors at CRLA never specified the number of participants they hoped to receive during the outreach event. However, not a single participant was at the event.

Results

The session was initiated at approximately on Monday at 4 pm, in Ocean Hall Building D. Despite the session being held for a whole hour to accommodate information on the basics of Tenant Rights, there were no participants. The measure of success if participants were to attend was that at least 10% of participants retain the information presented to them. The method planned to gather participants' data from the presentation was a survey link to all the participants describing what they found helpful, what they remembered from the presentation, and the resources listed in it.

Recommendations

A few recommendations on why the Participant count was low and could be improved on goes as follows and are shown to help future CRLA interns and individuals who would like to make outreach efforts regarding Housing.

After the event, there are speculated reasons why the participant count was low, for starters, it could be that the outsourcing for the event was misplaced, perhaps. The student's attempt at advertising the outreach effort was posters around the school and posting about it on My Raft (the school's social media) for outsourcing. However, asking for help outsourcing the event by suggesting that professors advertise it in exchange for extra credit to attendants would have considerably improved the circumstance. Another factor for the low participant count could be classes due to the presentation on a Monday. A possible improvement in this aspect would've been to change the day it was presented to Friday or someday when college students and other participants would not be busy. The medium in which the information was presented could also be the culprit. For example, the presentation date was in person on Monday. This decreased the participant count significantly because it was not accessible to reach at any time

virtually. However, if participants were present, some of the questions on the survey were to include if the participants found the presentation helpful, what resources they would like to receive in the future, and such. So, another recommendation would've been to switch the medium of the presentation to a pre-recorded presentation, then turned into a Zoom link and shared it with the Department of Collaborative Health and Human Services and then include a connection with it as well to survey Google forms to gather data from participants.

Conclusion

For the Project, despite having yet to have any participants, laid the groundwork for future outreach efforts concerning housing rights and tenant advocacy concerning college students at California State University Monterey Bay. A few recommendations, such as converting the presentation to a Zoom link to make it accessible to the target population, joining with professors and other Department heads to outsource it for extra credit, and switching it to a different day would improve the participant count allowing for more results. The project should be continued and improved upon because, with efficient knowledge of housing rights, individuals can prepare for renting a property in California, improving their chances for adequate housing should graduating students choose to stay in the Monterey County area.

Reflection

As individual students, their knowledge grew immensely during their capstone project and implementation. For example, their knowledge concerning Public Policy and Housing rights grew as they now know. A few strengths of this capstone project is the effort to advocate for others concerning housing in the county area. Still, another strength was the material and data with it, especially coming from a local law firm that is well versed in this matter is a blessing, and having them as support for this project. A blessing from this capstone project was the

wisdom and support I received from Phyllis and the rest of CRLA. A challenge with the project implementation was getting participants since, despite trying their best with their outreach efforts, no one came. A few ways to improve on this for future deployments are to ask department heads / teachers for assistance with advertising / outsourcing the event can be helpful. Also, stronger incentives other than a gift card can be substantial.

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APPENDIX A

Implementation

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline /Deadline
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Include Information from the tenants' handbook along with information from Phyllis and The Monterey College of Law● Contact TRIO, ERAP, The Student Union, and The Monterey College of Law● Meet with Phyllis, Vanessa, and Moren Christensen● Finalize slides, workshop, and rough draft.● Draft / prepare		

<p>surveys.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Conduct/ export surveys● Look up results and finetune them.● Collaborate with AS and OC3 as well as the CHHS AS senator		
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