Task 5: Research Plan Corrected

Frank T. Gragnano

Department of Counseling and Human Services, Old Dominion University

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Dr. Sharon Silverberg

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Stakeholders

The program I have chosen to evaluate is the Street Outreach program at Norfolk Community Services Board (NCSB). The Street Outreach program consists of the Projects for Assistance in Transitions from Homelessness (PATH) and the Homeless Initiatives. NCSB's PATH "is a federal, state and local partnership that provides outreach and assistance to adults with serious mental illness who are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of becoming homeless" (Norfolk, 2022). PATH is sponsored by the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) and financed through a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Norfolk Community Services Board is 1 of "nearly 440 local organizations that provide PATH services" (SAMHSA, 2022).

The stakeholders are many and varied in the roles they play. The NCSB Housing and Homeless Services Division Head, Carolsure McGehee, is a primary stakeholder and the person I have had the most contact with so far in this evaluation. The Housing and Homeless Services Division Head works directly with the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Programs Manager, Randy Plante, who assists in placing persons in permanent supportive housing.

The Homeless Initiatives Project as listed on the Norfolk (2022) website "provides street outreach to persons experiencing homelessness in Norfolk. This project funds two full-time Outreach Specialists who provide direct services for those on the street, serve as navigators through the housing process, and provide short-term case management once an individual is housed" (Noroflk, 2022). The Outreach Specialists, who are also Case Managers, that I will be working with are James Jones and Cyndi Katz. Additionally, the team also has an Analyst in Marla Robinson, another Case Manager named Shanikwa Martin, and another Outreach Specialist - Julie Chavez. These are the main stakeholders who have something to gain from their program being evaluated.

There are, of course, many other stakeholders related to the NCSB Street Outreach program. Linfield and Posavac (2019) point out that “it is essential that evaluators take into account the many people who are involved with a program in one way or another, those who provide the service as well as those who receive it, and those who are supportive from a distance as well as those whose connection is either mixed or even opposed to some degree” (p. 4). As my research unfolds, other stakeholders will be referenced and I hope that they also find that there will be benefits and gains from their program being evaluated.

Type of Evaluation

In choosing an evaluation model for my evaluation, I opted to choose a combination of models. The Black Box model will be one of the chosen models, as well as the Capacity Building/Empowerment models. The focus of the Black Box model is exclusively on the outcomes. The simplicity of this model will allow the evaluation to be completed more quickly and with fewer costs than associated with other models. While a detraction to using this model is that it may not provide insight into important elements such as mechanisms - I believe the combination of models will solve that. This model relates to my study in that I am concerned with the outcomes of homelessness. While it would be amazing to have “an answer” that would end homelessness, I am hopeful that by looking at the outcomes of the Street Outreach program to date - I will be able to gather data that is relevant and sheds light on the program as a whole.

As I am employed with the Community Services Board (CSB) where I work in Norfolk, I feel the Capacity Building/Empowerment model will provide a great way for the evaluation to be a collaboration that will hopefully ultimately benefit my coworkers and me in the long run. According to Linfield and Posavac (2019) “although a few models are incompatible with certain other models, most provide an emphasis that can be combined with one or more other approaches“ (p. 28). Furthermore, the authors state “evaluators are able to adjust to different settings or demands by employing a different model or combination of models” (p. 29). One of the primary purposes of this model is to conduct the evaluation process in collaboration with staff - with the goal of staff being able to conduct some level of future evaluations. In using this model the hopes are that collaboration with other staff members will yield good information and insights. This relates to my study in that ending homelessness has been a goal of many people for many years. I believe that achieving anything worthwhile takes time, resources, and people. The more people I can collaborate with on this evaluation, the better the quality of the evaluation will become.

Two Evaluation Questions

My two evaluation questions are as follows: “How effective is the NCSB Street Outreach program in reaching and helping homeless individuals in Norfolk and how can the program better serve the individual?”, and “How can the NCSB Street Outreach team be more effective in helping to end homelessness in Norfolk, what aspects can be improved about the program?”

For my first question, I intend to evaluate the effectiveness of the program as a whole, to determine how the program itself can better serve the individuals. I want to understand if the larger percentage of individuals that the Street Outreach team identifies is responding to and receiving services from Norfolk CSB. If not, I would like to determine if and how we can increase those numbers. I would like to find out what methods are effective in reaching people on the streets and what methods are not effective. If the money coming down from SAMHSA is there for us to go out and help people, how do we ensure that we are doing exactly that? For this question, my focus is on the program and how it helps (or does not help) the individual.

For my second question, I intend to evaluate the team that is doing the work and how they can improve aspects of the work they do. I would like to know what approaches they have used when reaching people on the streets; which ones have worked and which ones have not? I am hoping my evaluation helps me to understand the process of what happens once they have contacted and given services to the individual. How is that person then served once they have been “reached”. I would also like to know how these processes can be streamlined to become more efficient in maintaining a stable living environment for the individuals contacted by the Street Outreach team. Here the focus is team effectiveness; how these processes work or do not work and what can be improved.

Type of Evaluation/Alignment with Questions

Because I am concerned with the outcomes in the Street Outreach program, the Black Box model of evaluation is ideally suited. For my first question, as referenced above - I will be trying to find out how the program helps or does not help the individual. Or put another way - how it has helped individuals in the past: the outcome. Secondly, I want to know how the team has been effective - what works and does not work. Specifically, regarding what has been done in the past, and what the outcomes were. Also, what were the outcomes of things that did not work? It is by using the Black Box model that I will be able to see the "bottom line" so to speak.

The second model I chose to use is how I will handle the collaboration effort part of the evaluation. While I have been in a situation where I was able to interact with someone who was "encamped" on the street, it is not my forte. The Street Outreach team members are the experts on reaching people in the streets. I expect that the evaluation will be a way of learning for all of us. The Capacity Building/Empowerment Model allows for collaboration with the evaluator. For the first question, I would like the team to collaborate on making the program a better program. What processes are in place for housing individuals after they have been reached and how can those processes be continually improved? Secondly, I want to know how the team plans to help the individuals better. What processes do they have in place that they use and like that they would like to continue to improve - and how can I help to facilitate that?

Data Collection Methods

There are three primary methods of data collection that I will be using for this evaluation; interviews, checklists, and agency records. I will be conducting interviews on the premises of the NCSB headquarters at 7447 Central Business Park Drive in Norfolk from July 26th through July 28th. These dates have already been confirmed with the Housing and Homeless Services Division Head and I will be using one of the offices assigned to me as a Peer Recovery Specialist (PRS) during those days.

The first method I will be using is the interview. Depending on timetables for stakeholders, I may be required to do group interviews versus individual interviews. As Linfield and Posavac (2019) point out “Group interviews permit program participants or community residents to respond to the ideas of others; it is felt that such interaction yields richer and more well-thought-out ideas” (p. 93). I am unsure at this time how people’s schedules will pan out, but regardless I anticipate the majority of the interviews will happen in person. While developing my protocols, I will be developing a questionnaire that I will be using during the interview. I will have a standard set of questions that I will be asking all of the staff members. Though I am unsure of the number of questions, I expect I will only have an hour or so to do the interviews - I will adjust the question and answer period accordingly. In the spirit of collaboration, I will be leaving some time at the end of the interview for any questions the stakeholders may have of me as well.

The second data collection method I intend on using is historical (agency) records. In speaking with Carolsue McGehee, the Housing and Homeless Services Division Head, she seemed to believe that there were likely some evaluations that had been done in the past by DBHDS. I will be trying to locate these documents to crunch the data therein. I will be looking at things like whether or not the agency has implemented any of the changes from previous evaluations. And/or - can I see any of the changes visibly within the agency? Additionally, I was told there may be some records made by consumers where they have made comments about the program, the staff, or both. These records will be available to me as well through our Human Resources (HR) department. Again, I will look at whether the comments were positive or negative and whether or not any action was taken regarding these comments.

My third data collection method will be surveys. These surveys will vary in data collected and will require a numerical rating scale. I chose the survey because as Linfield and Posavac (2019) stated “The written survey provides the most information for the cost and effort required.” The surveys will be provided to stakeholders shortly after the completion of Task 6. I plan to collect the surveys upon my arrival at NCSB on July 26th. In the event that some have not completed the surveys, I will follow up with phone calls to ensure completion prior to the interview process. Once all of the surveys are completed I will calculate the numerical values and put that information in my findings.

Research Method

The research method that I have decided to use in evaluating NCSB’s Street Outreach program will be a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods. As Linfield and Posavac (2019) mention, when choosing a research method most people “urge that qualitative methods be used together with quantitative evaluation methods" (p. 156). As I have data collection methods that require both numerical and subjective input, I believe the best choice is a mixed methodology.

For data collection methods that require numerical values, such as surveys, a quantitative approach will be used. For my interviews, I will be requiring participants to answer questions from a questionnaire - this will be a qualitative method. Linfield and Posavac (2019) state that "qualitative evaluation is used here to refer to procedures that yield nonnumerical information that helps evaluators to understand the program and the participants' relation to the program, such as full narratives or shorter explanations." (p. 156) The questions on the questionnaire will require a short answer, hence a qualitative method. In looking at the historical records of the agency, I will be using a qualitative approach to determine if the agency has implemented evaluation suggestions from the past. Reviewing customer comments will require some time and effort to see if their input reflects the strengths or weaknesses of the Street Outreach team. These are non-numerical answers and will also be subjective.

Why Research Method is Best

The mixed method research method is going to be best for my evaluation because I will have data that needs to be looked at that requires both subjective and objective approaches. Qualitative data is subjective or is based on interpretation, while quantitative data is objective or data that is factual. That said, Linfield and Posavac (2019) point out that "qualitative methods permit the development of understandings that cannot be obtained with predefined surveys and checklists" (p. 166). Put another way, getting the answers to the right questions can lead to interpretations that have recommendations that are likely to be used.

While both of my evaluation questions appear to be open-ended questions that would gather subjective responses, the data I am collecting will have some quantifiable result sets. I will be using a numerical rating scale to evaluate what has worked well in the past, versus what is happening now - among other things. The qualitative findings will require the data to be massaged a bit to ascertain findings that will help the stakeholders get something from the evaluation effort.

References

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