Alessandra Lopez

Professor Yong-Chan Rhee

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Managing Public Organizations

Churches United for the Homeless and Issues Surrounding Staffing Shortage:

A Case Study

Retention rates at Churches United for the Homeless located in Moorhead, MN has been an issue notably in existence. However, due to the population the homeless shelter serves in the community, this continued issue is felt at a higher capacity. Currently, there are three entities run by Churches United for the Homeless. Two of those entities are homeless shelters and the third is an apartment complex dedicated to housing the homeless population. Due to staffing shortages, current employees feel the additional burden of taking on tasks beyond their normal obligations, rotating shifts between each three entities. Typically, each entity has shelter advocates and case managers stationed at each unit to compensate for the numbers in each location of shelter. This creates the opportunity for burnout to take place which poses the risk of causing more grief to the public organization.

Per the shelter guidelines, once an individual or family has been residing in the shelter for two weeks, they are assigned a case manager who is tasked with assisting the clients find stable housing. Due to shortages in the appropriate staff, those who are to be assigned case management services have come to face extended wait times and prolonged attempts at securing housing. Those who are using emergency shelter as housing, do not view the location as a home, rather it is viewed as " a place of transition". (Moloko-Phiri, Mogale, and Hugo,

2017). Furthermore, they view the shelters as "a stepping stone that can give a homeless person a start" (Moloko-Phiri et al, 2017). With staff spread thin, concerns regarding quality of care have been voiced by those residing in the shelters to community partners.

Notably there has been an influx of traffic through community partners for services once accessible through the shelter system itself. This phenomenon coincides with concerns voiced and has drawn further attention to the internal operation by leadership at Churches United for the Homeless. Although the public organization is considered a partner of the Coordinated Access Referral Entry Stabilization system, otherwise referred to as CARES system, there has been a lack of communication throughout that local partnership. To the knowledge of the partnerships with Churches United for the Homeless, there has been no clear course of action noted to be taking place to supplement staffing to once again reach full capacity. Furthermore, there are no clear additional steps that are being put into place in order to assist with retention and gain additional new staff. In order to reflect and gain insight on these current issues at hand some suggestions for the public organization are transparency, anonymous surveys structured by a third party for confidentiality purposes to note the morale level of current staff, and educational partnerships in order to develop strategies to not only make employment opportunities appealing for the organization, but also assist with retention rates of those who are hired on.

As stated prior, there had been no communication toward local partnered agencies. Since there was no notice to expect additional foot traffic, some institutions have been blindsided by the accelerated need for services. In example of this, Lakes and Prairies Community Action Leadership Inc. is a known access point for the Housing Assessment Tool,

which places those experiencing homelessness into the CARES coordinated entry system database which in turn places them on a waitlist for a housing program in their retrospective counties of interest. There are set times each day of operation in which those who are needing to complete the assessment can walk in, or call in, to have this completed. Due to high volume of traffic, those who walk in are not guaranteed an assessment can be completed within the given time, thus continuing to perpetuate delays in their attempts to gain stable housing.

If the public organization can first take accountability for the shortcomings regarding the staffing issue, rapport, if jeopardized, between partnered agencies can be restored. Viewing this from a principal-agent theory perspective, this method can provide " a flexible framework for modeling innumerable institutional arrangements, and comparing their potential for inducing desirable behavior" (Gailmard, 2012). Using this, adjustments can be made at partnering agencies regarding accessible services to those who are coming from the shelter due to the short staffing. Additionally, using transparency can create trust that may have been lost during this period of time.

Following this, for those who remain in positions within the public organization, a survey can be sent out using a third party using inclusive language and different methods of accessibility to ensure confidentiality so accurate data can be collected from current staff. This is a method commonly used to gauge morale of the employees in an organization. Due to the current situation at place with rotation between staff and three entities, using the information can be beneficial to address current struggles and hardships being felt by staff, additionally suggestions for staff retention may be considered. Including the current staff can lead to a feeling of representation which will benefit the public organization as those in that position can

"view the bureaucracy as legitimate and trustworthy" (Grimmelikhuijsen, Jilke, Olson, Tummers, 2017). However, limitations to this is lack of staff participation and suggestions that may not be capable due to funding constraints. But, with transparency for the use of the tool, and reiteration for a common end goal to better the public organization, those who are employed with Churches United for the Homeless can be urged to willingly participate.

With the increase in staff shortages throughout the time of COVID-19, many institutions have developed methods to attract new employees and strengthen their retention rates. Leadership can create connections with these institutions in order to educate themselves on methods that may be best suited for their operations. Another item coming out of the pandemic is virtual educational opportunities. Since the organization relies heavily on technology, using those already accessible resources can be a cost effective method in order to use the recommendations on credible research. Although technology is often used as an asset, it can sometimes be a hindrance. A limitation to this method could be unreliable technology to appropriately gain the knowledge from webinars and presentations. Oftentimes there are video or audio interruptions that can randomly occur. It is also imperative for this method to work, that the information being sought out is that, that can be translated to the environment of working in a homeless shelter environment. If this can be considered, preparations for these limitations can be appropriately handled and coordinated.

Retention rates and staff shortages is an issue presently occurring within the public organization of Churches United for the Homeless located in Moorhead, MN. Currently, this public organization is in charge of three entities in the community. Due to the issues with staffing, the fear of current staff burnout due to higher volume of work obligations as well as a

halt in services available for those residing in the shelter have become a community issue. Due to the staffing issues, there have been shifts regarding traffic rates in local community partner organizations. In order to combat these issues, there are three suggestions for the organization to implement.

Firstly, the acknowledgement of shortcomings paired with added transparency can repair the rapport with those previously stated community partners. Additionally, the trust in leadership can be strengthened between staff if there is accountability and transparency. Secondly, including a survey held by a third party with inclusive language and different methods of accessibility to promote confidentiality can assist leadership within the organization to gauge current morale of their staff and also use the data taken from those to make additional adjustments to promote retention and attract new staff.

Lastly, using education to view current data that has assisted other organizations with staff attraction and retainment. Because of recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, this has allowed for multiple methods of accessibility to this educational information using technology currently at hand of the public organization. Implementation of these three suggestions can promote the goal of full capacity regarding employment for the organization in order to regain the ability to service those residing in their shelters.

References

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