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One Family Scholar Project Evaluation Executive Summary



Center For Social Policy

The One Family Scholar Project provides resources and financial support to low-income and formerly homeless women who are pursuing educational goals. This unique project faces many challenges as it seeks to strike a balance between serving as a traditional scholarship program, which solely offers financial support, and operating as a supportive educational program designed to help women and families make life and system changes. By design, the Scholar Project is quite different from traditional financial support programs. The mission is to provide the supports necessary for low-income women to achieve academic and personal success. In order to do this, the project considers all aspects of a woman's life, how that woman contributes to the larger community, and her potential for doing so in the future.

The One Family Scholar Project is a terrific project. Serving a critically important niche, it is unique and innovative. Recognizing the many barriers low-income women face when attending post secondary education, the founders of this project have made every effort to ensure flexibility while providing a structured and supportive environment. The scholars are incredibly grateful and almost unanimously uncritical.

The Center for Social Policy (CSP) evaluation approach was both participatory and collaborative. The evaluation process took place from summer 2002 through fall 2003. Throughout the year, several meetings were held with the project's founders and funders from the One Family Campaign (OFC), in order to ensure that the evaluation was focused on critical questions facing these key decision makers. The evaluation design included opportunities for direct input from current and former scholars, project staff, mentors, and partner agencies. CSP worked closely with project staff throughout the evaluation, sharing insights as they became available.

The evaluation focused on several programmatic content areas, described here¹:

"The Program has given me the tools for survival"
- Scholar

Recruitment and Application

Each spring the One Family Scholar Project engages in a recruitment process. Priority is given to low-income women with children. All scholars are required to complete an application, including a personal essay and budget, and must demonstrate leadership potential, income eligibility, be referred by a partner organization of the OFC, and have clear academic potential and goals, achievement of which should lead to economic stability.

¹ Many of these recommendations have already been implemented, marked by a ✓.

Recruitment and Application Recommendations

- Work with the partner organizations to explore strategies for recruitment and for supporting applicants.
- ✓ Streamlined application for returning scholars.
- ✓ Simplified the application budget form.
- ✓ Developed a form clearly outlining contents for the recommendation letters.
- Adaptation of an assessment tool - the project is currently developing linkages with a local testing center.

Case Management

A major component of the One Family Scholarship Project is case management, which is conducted by the two Site Coordinators. These Site Coordinators are also responsible for responding to scholars' ongoing needs. In addition to case management, the project arranges for other types of support, such as tutoring, including individual and group sessions.

Case Management Recommendations

- Create orientation and supports specific to the needs of those scholars who are new students.
- ✓ Develop resources for scholars in particular areas, such as legal, child-care, public assistance, and so on. A relationship with Partners for Justice has been forged for legal support.
- Focus on career development.
- ✓ Developed a structure of Associates (potential scholars) and Fellows (graduates) as part of a larger effort to maintain and strengthen connections.

Mentor Program

The mentor component began in 2001, with the purpose of providing the scholars additional support to further their education and develop their career skills. The mentor program matches scholars with women from the community who are committed to providing support and guidance for a minimum of one calendar year. The One Family Scholar Project envisions the mentors as role models, supporters, and challengers for the scholars in their academic pursuits.

*"I am getting financial support; it has been really helpful because I am able now, instead of having to work 3 or 4 nights per week, only [to] work 1 or 2 nights a week. That gives me more time to spend with my children."
- Scholar*

Mentor Program Recommendations

- ✓ Hired a part-time Mentor Coordinator.
- Involve scholars in actively selecting their mentors
- The new Mentor Coordinator should explore ways that staff and mentors can work together to best support scholars.

Financial Support

The Scholarship Project provides flexible financial support, which can be used to meet a variety of needs including child care, tuition, transportation costs, and other targeted expenses. Project guidelines state that the

maximum allotment that a scholar can receive is \$12,000. Determinations are made on a case-by-case basis.

Financial Support Recommendations

Feedback about the allocation process and the flexible financial support was overwhelmingly positive!

- ✓ Ensured that checks are received in a timely manner.

Leadership Development

The leadership development component is a significant aspect of the One Family Scholar Project as it is designed to meet the project's overall goal of social change. The One Family Scholar Project annually provides three mandatory leadership development trainings, including a weekend retreat, as well as other optional leadership development opportunities throughout the academic year.

Leadership Development Recommendations

- Include skills-based knowledge focusing on organizational, communication, and advocacy skills. Specific tools could also include materials describing the legislative process and leaders.
 - ✓ A new curriculum is being developed which presents an ideal mix of skills workshops, self-esteem building exercises, and social analysis.
 - ✓ Created a scholar-led action subcommittee that will take on social action projects.

“When I was a little girl I was a leader. I lost that when I became homeless. Today I’m becoming a leader again. I have been invited to places to share my story. I motivate others. In my field, I can see myself listening and motivating others to become self-sufficient. They can stand up again if they do the first step. Today I’m again making the foundation to come back...I’m going to keep sharing my message.”

–Scholar

Organizational Structure

The organizational structure is currently in flux. Embarking upon a major expansion and replication effort, the program is expanding to a third site for the academic year 2004-2005. In order to manage this growth as well as future plans to develop in other parts of the state as well as nationally, the project is being restructured.

Organizational Structure Recommendations

- Clearly define expectations for the new positions and the advisory group, as well as to delineate roles, decision-making authority, and reporting lines.
- Plan strategically for meeting milestones and goals around geography and population diversity.