

Speak Out for the Homeless

A Social Issue

One social issue I faced during my social work service was the lack of enough number of shelters in Indianapolis to refer our service users. Many times, clients come or call for assistance with emergency shelter. Unfortunately, when I call different shelters to find an opening for our clients, usually there is no opening, and the shelters ask us to call everyday early morning to check availability for that day. Therefore, one issue in our agency that a social worker can advocate for is to increase the number of shelters in Indianapolis. This is important to address basic needs of marginalized groups such as those with low socio-economic status.

Research the Issue

Indianapolis's homeless population was estimated between 4,800 and 8,000, and the main cause for becoming homeless is job loss (Coalition for Homelessness Intervention & Prevention, 2018). Overall, 19 emergency shelters exist in Marion county from which nine of them are transitional housing for specific users such as victims of domestic violence, and those with substance or alcohol use disorders (Indiana State Government, 2018a). This number is not sufficient to provide emergency shelter services for every person experiencing homelessness (Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority, 2018). Therefore, unavailability of enough shelters is a big issue in Indianapolis, and thus, providing more emergency shelters in this city is needed. Main reasons for this limitation are the lack of facilities and funding (Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority, 2018).

News and Tribune (2016) reported that government money spent on shelters will be decreased in Indiana because of emphasis on housing-first and permanent housing programs. Although in political discussions, housing-first is mentioned as an excellent and cost-effective approach to end homelessness and has significant outcomes (City Lab, 2016; McClatchy Newspaper, 2010; News and Tribune, 2016), it is not realistic. First, in Indiana, housing-first programs are available only for those with serious mental illness and chronic chemical addiction who are experiencing housing crises (Indiana State Government, 2018b). Further, the number of available housings is fewer than the number of people who need that (Huffpost, 2014). This is the reason that housing first applicants should stay in a waitlist for a long time. My observation of our agency's clients approves this criticism. The clients who come to us for emergency shelter assistance are disappointed to apply for housing programs because of staying in a waitlist for a long time. Although there are some services for the homeless such as financial literacy, affordable housing and rental assistance (Indiana State

ntly, cannot address basic needs such as safe housing in an immediate fashion. These systemic issues in providing stable and safe housing for any individual experiencing housing crisis must be a top priority for the state policy-makers to increase funding and create more emergency shelters across the state.

Outline of the Remarks Guiding Advocacy

Introduction:

Sharing a personal story of one of my clients [a 60-year woman sleeping every night under trees, and sometimes police pushes her to move to another place. We worked to find a shelter for her, but all shelters were full.]

Statistics of homeless population in Indiana

Statistics of the number of shelters

Body:

Explaining the consequences of the issue for the individual and community¹

Causes of having insufficient number of shelters in Indiana

Criticism of existing programs [not inclusive, limited in resources, and not immediate]

Conclusion:

Providing a solution for state-level policy-makers [to increase amount of funding and the number of facilities in order to provide safe shelter for everyone experiencing homelessness]

Statement

I chose to write a poem for my statement. Since English is not my first language, I am sure this is not a perfect writing!

Where to sleep!

Every day, when I wake up

Never think

Where to sleep tonight

Cause I definitely know the answer

“My warm and soft bed!”

But, when you wake up

Always think

Where to sleep tonight

Cause you definitely do not know the answer

Maybe under trees in a dark street

Or in a beautiful street behind trash containers

Having my lunch in King Burger

Watching you outside

Take my daily antidepressant pill

You look like angry

So, people think you're “mentally ill”

They do not know the real reason

This is for you are starving well

People do not think the same way about me

For I am dressing well

They do not know the real story

Forget this for now

Let's think more

Where to sleep tonight

I hope tomorrow you know the answer

Where to sleep!

Reflect on the Process

Describe

I prepared for this assignment through observation, research, interview and studying. First, it was very important to observe the existing issues in the agency I am in. The issue I chose for this assignment affects many clients. Second, I searched about this issue and learned about existing policies, their strengths and drawbacks to address this issue. I conducted an interview with someone knowledgeable from the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority. All these resources were very helpful in completing this work.

Examine

My process in determining this social issue was relating to my experience in the field. We had many clients calling to get assistance with emergency housing. Unfortunately, most of the times, when I look for a shelter, there is no shelter available for them. There was a client, a 60-year woman experiencing health issues. She mentioned that she sleeps every day in the street, under trees, and sometimes police comes and forces her to move to another place. I called to around five shelters that day, and all told there is no opening and gave me a specific time to call them back. She did not have a phone, and that was very difficult for her to call back again to those agencies later.

Another painful example was a family whose father lost his job, and the property owner evicted them. Parents and two daughters did not have any place to sleep for that night. After calling many shelters, most shelters mentioned no opening for a homeless family, and finally we decided to divide the family members and to send the father to a separate shelter. This was really a sad story, when I was watching their face and hearing their voice, I was able to feel the depth of sadness they were undergoing. These experiences were important in my decision to focus on this issue.

Stakeholder to target can be policy makers at Indiana state-level. I chose to write a poem as an advocacy form for this assignment. I wish I could choose more interactive forms such as video or rap song, but this is out of my skills. A brief poem to offer in a poetry slam can be useful to make audience familiar with different aspects of this issue. This awareness-raising can help individuals make more informed decisions when they participate in voting or when donating their money.

In addition to this awareness-raising among public, there is potential impact of this advocacy effort for the clients. That is, if number of emergency shelters increases in Indiana, every homeless individual can have access to a safe emergency short-term housing, and does not need to stay in the street. Further, this advocacy effort can prevent separation of family members experiencing homelessness.

Articulate Learning

I learned about a social issue affecting the agency's clients negatively. I also learned some state-level and federal-level policies like housing-first. Although these programs are effective, the eligibility criteria are limited. Specific homeless population, those experiencing mental illnesses or chemical substance use, are eligible to get an immediate housing. Further, I learned about myself that I am a person with great passion to advocate for social justice, and as a social worker, this is very critical. I also learned that I could write a poem! Further, I learned about clients that how vulnerable they might be in addressing their basic needs, and

how crucial is for social workers to be aware of this vulnerability and advocate to address that.

I learned all this through my field experience, researching this issue, interviewing a knowledgeable person in Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority and writing this reflection. As a social worker, this learning is so important, since according to the Code of Ethics, National Association of Social Workers (NASW), social justice is one of core values of our profession (NASW, 2008). I will use this learning in the future to stand for my clients in any setting in the future.

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¹ Makki Alamdari, 2017; Mohaqeqi Kamal., Basakha, Ghaedamini Harouni, Makki Alamdari, Sajjadi, 2019; Mohaqeqi Kamal., Ghaedamini Harouni, Basakha, & Makki Alamdari, 2019