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Evaluating Implementation of Recognition-Based Incentive program (RBIP) During Service Learning Curriculum

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Background

Common Threads (CT), a student organization, produces crocheted sleeping mats for people experiencing homelessness. Due to the extensive labor of the initiative, CT was motivated to encourage engagement of medical student volunteers beyond the curriculum-required minimum hours through a recognition-based incentive program (RBIP).

Methods

Students were presented with the opportunity by CT to receive the recognition title of "Community Change Partner". In the Service Learning curriculum at WSUSOM, students are required to complete clinical and outreach service hours. CT offers students the opportunity to complete outreach hours by making sleeping mats out of recycled material. To receive the title, students had to obtain 375 points. Points were awarded based on relative time commitment and value. The RBIP was evaluated by comparing the number of completed mats, monthly volunteer hours, number of recognition certificates awarded, and volunteers engaging in work outside of events in the three months before and after implementation.

Results

Prior to the RBIP, CT supported 30.3 monthly volunteer hours, completed 2 mats, and had no engagement outside of events in three months. After the initiation of the RBIP, CT supported 43.6 monthly volunteer hours, completed 10 mats, had 11 people engage in work outside of events, and awarded 7 recognition certificates in three months.

Conclusion

After RBIP implementation, there was an increase in all evaluated areas, suggesting that the program successfully improved student engagement. Implementing recognition-based incentives is a powerful tool that organizations should use to improve impact and reach of initiatives serving Detroit's vulnerable populations.

Key words: student engagement, service learning, homelessness, participation