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Grace Adamson
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Sherilyn DeStefano
Susannah Kricker
Richard Mendez

See next page for additional authors

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Assessing the Need for a Social Worker at the Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf
Grace Adamson¹, Moshe Bitterman¹, Sherilyn DeStefano¹, Susannah Kricker¹, Richard Mendez¹,
Tyler Wark¹, Nina Xue¹, Kelly Saunders² Judith Christensen, PhD.¹
¹University of Vermont College of Medicine, Burlington VT, ²Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf, Burlington VT

Introduction
Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf (CEFS)
• Largest direct service emergency food provider in Vermont
• Serves over 12,000 people/year
• Works to alleviate hunger through grocery services, hot meals, and home delivery
• Offers a culinary job training program
• CEFS seeks to understand client need for assistance in accessing/coordinating additional public assistance services and resources
• If so, could CEFS improve its services by staffing a social worker on site?
• Project Goal: Collect data from CEFS users to assess current need for in-house social worker to assist with diverse needs beyond emergency food assistance.

Methods
• Conducted literature search to identify surveys/needs assessments regarding role of social workers in low-income, high-needs populations
• Interviewed CEFS Community Engagement Manager
• Designed survey (based on above) to assess:
  • Basic demographics of CEFS clientele
  • Clients’ use of other assistance programs and need for additional services not currently available
  • Barriers to accessing public assistance programs
  • Anticipated utilization of social work services
• Draft survey piloted over two-week period
• Final survey revised and administered to 70 users of CEFS over a four-week period
• Responses entered and analyzed using Microsoft Excel

Results

Key Findings
81% of respondents stated they would use a social worker at CEFS
51% reported difficulty accessing services.
Most common barriers included:
1. Paperwork
2. Determining eligibility
Only 2 out of 70 food shelf users surveyed reported an income above 185% of the federal poverty line

Need in Relation to Usage of Services

Discussion/Conclusion
Take-Away Points
• Services utilized are not meeting clients’ needs
• Barriers cited most frequently:
  • Filling out paperwork
  • Negative experiences seeking services
  • Lack of transportation and internet access
  • Confusion about eligibility
• Above barriers could be addressed through social work services
• Most respondents have a household income which makes them eligible for federal and state services
• Many respondents expressed feeling satisfied, comfortable, and respected during CEFS interactions

Limitations
• Small sample size
• Limited survey collection period (October)
• Data is from a self-selecting population as clients volunteered to participate
• Possible variation in survey administration (seven administrators)

Future Directions
The high level of eligibility among respondents, barriers to accessing services, and expressed desire for service coordination suggest a strong need for a social worker on staff at CEFS. With a person in this position, the food shelf could further provide opportunities for their clients to break the cycle of poverty.

References