

Task 5: Create A Research Plan

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Stakeholders

I am conducting research on the Henry-Martinsville Department of Social Services located in Martinsville, VA. The stakeholders in my evaluation are Director of Operations Amy Rice, Assistant Director of Services April Evans, Family Preservation Unit Supervisor Vanessa Alonso, and the Family Preservation Unit Senior Worker Cozetta Price. The agency is made up of 100 workers, with downstairs being benefit workers and upstairs houses Child Protective Services, Adult Protective Services, Foster Care, and Family Preservation. Amy is the Director, and she is the glue that holds the agency together. She ensures that everything runs smoothly upstairs and downstairs. She is also our communication between other agencies and the business in our area that we work with, which include court officials, school principals and teachers, law enforcement, and medical personnel. April is the Director over Services. She is the liaison between the services departments and the Director. She is also the one who is just a phone call away for any need we may have, or she is also the sounding board if we need to discuss a case, or how to handle a case. Vanessa is the immediate supervisor for Family Preservation. The ultimate goal of this department is to keep the children with the family if at all possible. Vanessa makes sure that we are making the correct decisions with regards to the child's safety. Cozetta is the Senior Worker. This means that she can fill in if Vanessa is absent. She and Vanessa are each very knowledgeable about the services that we provide for children and their families. All these stakeholders are crucial to the success of the agency and our programs.

Evaluation

The objective based approach accepts the objective of the organization as the outcomes, without critique. My evaluation is based on a social services business, so I feel this approach would be the most appropriate. The agency provides services to each party involved without

discrimination. Although some people may feel that our decisions are wrong, they are made without prejudice to race, sex, age, religion, or sexual orientation. The benefit workers and the service workers are there to make the fairest decision possible, no matter the situation. The best evaluation for this agency is the one group evaluation. The pre-test would be a good tool to see what the expectations are of our clients and our workers; while the post-test activities will tell us what we excelled on and where we could use improvement. Using the pre-test results and the post-test results to brainstorm issues and their solutions is an excellent way to build better rapport between teammates and service workers. Long hours and a stressful workday come with any job in social services. With a good team, working together could alleviate some of the stressful situations and long hours. Working together not only builds the unit, but friendships are made as well. This allows each worker to learn more about the strengths and weaknesses of each worker. For instance, you may have some that simply cannot do a drug test, but it may not bother others. Some may not want to sit in on a visitation, while another worker may enjoy seeing how the parents interact with the child. Everyday is a new learning process and by helping each other, we are encouraging each other to be the best that we can be, and we will learn to enjoy our jobs and the friends we made while working. This leads to my question. How effectively does the programs meet the needs of the current clientele? How effectively does the program reach potential clients, as well as potential referral sources throughout the community?

Programs

Our agency works closely with many local businesses and agencies. Through referrals, we provide services to our clients for mental health skill building, substance abuse treatment, therapy, counseling, parenting classes and parenting aides, equine therapy, anger management classes, and domestic violence classes. Children typically are enrolled in the classes for equine

therapy, counseling, and anger management classes. I think it is neat that the kids can get the equine therapy. This is a new program with horses, developed specifically for the children. The adults will get to use the other classes for help with how to be a parent or just how to get things done. Most parents know that at times, your mentality is just strange. The mental health skill building allows parents the opportunity to work on their issues. All these programs are provided by our community partners to our clients if needed. Sometimes, there may be a time where if you refuse services, you may not get to keep your child.

Methods

During my evaluation, I plan to use written surveys and interviews. Interviews are used when the target audience is unlikely to respond to a written survey. The clients I see everyday will not sit down and complete a written survey so we will just sit and talk, while I interview them. The interview has an advantage over the written surveys because as an interviewer, you can keep the conversation moving by asking follow-up questions. Although written surveys are utilized more often than the interview, I do feel the interview would be better, if we take good notes. I will also use observation to collect data. Watching someone's movements, facial expressions, and body stature can sometimes tell you all you need to know. For instance, if you approach someone who is frowning, standing ram rod straight with their arms crossed and a clenched jaw, maybe the interview should wait until another time, because this client is clearly not happy. Another way to observe is watching the children with their parents. Sometimes this can tell us if there is something going on that should not be, or if the parent just made a mistake and really wants to work on the relationship with their child. After all, the goal in the Family Preservation Unit is to keep families together.

Qualitative v Quantitative v Mixed

The quantitative method deals with numbers-based results, and allows you to measure variables and test hypothesis, so I do not feel that this would be the best method for my evaluation. The qualitative research method deals with words, actions and the meanings therein. This method will allow you to explore experiences and any concepts in significant detail. I do feel the qualitative method would be the best for my evaluation. Some of the methods used for this include interviews, discussions with your teammates and observations. Some approaches for this method could include grounded theory which allows you to base a theory on a particular set of data, action research which deals with your observations, narrative research which deals with your interviews, ethnography which deals with the study of customs and cultures of diverse populations, and phenomenological research which allows an investigation of everyday experiences in the human nature without any preconceived assumptions about what will happen. This method clearly is the best for my evaluation.

Conclusion

I am evaluating Human Service Professionals in the Henry Martinsville Department of Social Services and the programs they use to keep families and children together through the collective efforts of stakeholders and workers in the Family Preservation Unit. Through research of programs, community liaisons, interviews with clients, and observations, I hope to find ways to help our clients and our team work better and promote longevity within the agency.