

Addendum

A Meeting with Alternative House Administrators and Staff To Share Results and Elicit Feedback

After analyzing the data and interpreting the results of the evaluation, I met with the administrators and staff at Alternative House. I presented the results of the evaluation and we discussed their reactions not only to the results of the questionnaire and interview data, but to the process of creating and administering the evaluation process as well.

Administrators and staff reported feeling very enthusiastic about the results of the study. One administrator commented on how reassuring it was to have empirical evidence of client satisfaction and program success. He talked about the previous experience of gauging success, stating, “We’re used to going by the ‘cardiac method.’ It feels like we’re making a difference somehow, and I sure feel good after a long day, but there was no real way to determine if we were making a difference.” The two therapists in the program talked about feeling reassured of their positive contribution to the program. One stated, “It feels good to hear clients find the therapy useful. Other surveys we sent out six months after discharge gave us a different impression.”

Both staff and administrators also expressed a sense of accomplishment at hearing how clients are finding the program helpful. The breakdown in the program components and the questions about the process of receiving help and support made an impression on them. Many were surprised to hear that the *Talkin* gtheme was so prominent among the teen responses. One administrator said, “It’s easy to get caught up in deep interpretations or complex interventions. I like to hear that just a caring ear to listen is helping some of these kids.” The results of the staff and teens’ experience of the evening and education groups sparked a conversation between a staff member and an administrator. They began brainstorming about how they could change the format of the groups to better suit the needs of their teen clients.

Staff and administrators were very open to making the changes suggested by the participants. We discussed limitations, such as licensing regulations, lack of funding, and a decrease in staff, that might impede some of the suggestions from leading to concrete

changes. Administrators and staff talked about not only feeling open to the suggestions but also feeling energized by them. It seems the results from the evaluation gave them a sense of accomplishment and validated their hard work.

Conversation then turned to the process of creating and administering the questionnaires. One administrator said he enjoyed being a part of the creation process because he felt the evaluation would be tailored to the specific needs of the shelter. He explained, “We tend to be the square peg in the round hole. We don’t fit into a general program format and so generic evaluations don’t work well for us. This is the first time we’ve been able to get this kind of specific feedback.”

We also discussed the trouble we encountered administering the questionnaires. One administrator made the point that right around the second or third week of the data collection phase, there were major staff changes. Because of this, new staff were being trained and had not gotten the instruction from me on the evaluation process that the previous staff members had received. Therefore, they were not only untrained in the process, but not as invested in the process as the previous staff had been. One administrator said, “If the staff knew we would be getting this kind of feedback, I think they would have done a much better job of remembering to administer the questionnaires.” We discussed ways to improve the process, increasing communication and making the data collection a continual part of the shelter program. One staff member stated she felt “uncomfortable” asking parents to complete the questionnaires, explaining, “We’re like here sign this, here’s your kid, here’s his things, and could you also please fill out this questionnaire?” Another staff member agreed the process of getting parents to participate felt uncomfortable in some ways. Everyone agreed that if parents knew at intake that evaluation is a continual part of the program, they would not feel uncomfortable asking parents to complete a questionnaire.

In summary, the administrators and staff were very positive about the evaluation experience. They were pleased to learn clients felt helped by the program, and they were excited to have a blue-print for a shelter-specific evaluation process. Many were talking about ways to improve the process to continue eliciting this kind of feedback for program improvement.