

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Adolescents in today's society are faced with more problems than any other generation before them (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1994; Hamburg, 1992). They live in a world filled with crime and violence, drug and alcohol use and abuse, and unsafe sex and STDs (Ostrom, Lerner, & Freel, 1995). They struggle with the management of difficulties surrounding emotional and physical development, independence, and dysfunctional relationships with peers, family, and school systems. Some adolescents find it too difficult to cope with these problems and instead run away. It is estimated that 3% of American families have an adolescent run away from home each year (Rohr, 1996).

Currently, there are many facilities available to teens who are on the run. Half-way houses, emergency shelters and treatment programs are all available to teens who are in need of assistance. Research indicates that the main presenting problems of teens in runaway facilities are depression, suicidal tendencies, alcohol and drug use, school failure, delinquent behavior, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and a generic category of severe psychological problems (Denoff, 1991, Rohr, 1996).

Many researchers feel that evaluation research on mental health programs for children and adolescents has lagged behind the research on adult programs (Cornsweet, 1990; Gabel & Shindlecker, 1990). Many mental health issues that present in childhood and adolescence can continue into adulthood, with the possibility of an increase in symptoms and severity (Kazdin, 1993; Cornsweet, 1990). Addressing these symptoms early on can decrease the cost of services in the long run (Berman & Austad, 1991), and will hopefully decrease the pain and anxiety families who struggle with mental health issues experience. Although recently there has been a fair amount of evaluation research conducted on mental health services for children and adolescents, further research needs to be done to determine a greater number of variables that may influence the efficacy of treatment (Pratt & Moreland, 1996).

There is very little evaluation research conducted specifically on teen runaway shelters. The evaluation of various mental health services available to adolescents and

their families provides a basis for evaluation studies on runaway shelters. Researchers have found that many of these evaluation studies are not designed to adequately measure the effectiveness of a program (Cornsweet, 1990; Curry, 1991; Pfeiffer, 1989). Many evaluation studies fail to describe the program adequately. Some studies do not assess progress or change made by the client between admission and discharge (Pfeiffer, 1989). It has been suggested that evaluation research begin to look at multiple variables that contribute to program effectiveness and to include feedback from more than one subset of the program, i.e from both staff and client (Pratt & Moreland, 1996). It has also been noted that few studies have had adequate collaboration between the researcher and the stakeholders (interested parties) of the program being evaluated (Hadley & Mitchell, 1995; Harinck, Smit, & Knorth, 1997; Heflinger, 1992).

Because increased knowledge about the effectiveness of adolescent programs can influence a family's choice of treatment (Kazdin, 1993), it is critical that more evaluations of teen shelters be conducted. Families would then be better informed of various treatment options and could make better decisions about which service or program would best suit their family's needs. Runaway shelters that provide services to teens and their families can be an important component in helping families make the changes they need to develop a healthier level of functioning.

This study's aim was to help teen shelters develop a process of evaluation that can provide useful information regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the program. Shelter administrators could then determine if they are meeting the needs of their clients and in what ways they are, or are not, doing so. This study applied this evaluation process to a specific adolescent shelter.

Rationale for the Study

The purpose of evaluation is to improve, not to prove (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 1985). The CIPP model, an example of an implementation of the logic model, is often used to plan the implementation and evaluation of counseling programs (Hadley & Mitchell, 1995). This model presents four aspects of program evaluation: Context evaluation, Input evaluation, Process evaluation and Product evaluation. Context evaluation and Input evaluation both deal with the planning and implementation of a new

program. Context evaluation seeks to understand what unmet needs exist for planning a new program. Input evaluation asks what resources and constraints exist in the implementation of such a program.

While Context and Input evaluation look at program planning, Process evaluation and Product evaluation both deal with the refining of an existing program. Process and Product evaluation are the two aspects of the CIPP model that will be addressed by this study. This process of evaluation should be used with teen shelters that already have established their needs, goals, and interventions. Process and Product evaluation can both be classified as impact evaluation, evaluations that seek to provide information that will be useful in making major decisions about the continuation, expansion, or reduction of a program (Rossi, 1982). Process evaluation studies a program's daily activities: the activities and interventions used, the implementation of activities by staff, and the timeliness of these activities. Process evaluation produces feedback that can help the staff carry out program plans as intended, or to modify plans if they were found ineffective. Results from process evaluations can give consumers accountability information indicating whether a program did what they had proposed. Process evaluation results can also be useful in helping to interpret product evaluation results because knowing what was actually done in the program plan helps in understanding why clients interpret a program as effective or ineffective (Hadley & Mitchell, 1995).

Product evaluation is used to measure, interpret and judge the effectiveness of a program (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 1985). Product evaluation provides information that helps ascertain to what extent program objectives are being achieved (Isaac & Michael, 1981). The effects of the program services are studied to determine if any "recycling decisions" need to be made, specifically if one an activity or intervention should continue, terminate, be modified or refocused (Hadley & Mitchell, 1995).

Another component of Process and Product evaluation includes pinpointing the strong and weak spots in a program. This can be done using the experiences of the clients and the program workers, with the goal of program improvement (Harinck et al., 1997). Designing an evaluation with all of these factors in mind allows the researcher to

gain an understanding of what is being done in the program and whether or not the clients and staff find it to be effective.

An important component in the measurement of program effectiveness is the assessment of client satisfaction (Kotsopoulos, Elwood, & Oke, 1989). Beyond general satisfaction, clients can be asked about the process of the program, their interpreted view of program strengths and weaknesses, and their ideas about how or why program activities are effective or not. Pratt and Moreland (1996) suggest that gathering information from multiple sources, teen client, parent, and staff, can give the researcher a broader picture of what aspects of the program are effective and what may be contributing to that effectiveness. This study asked for feedback from both teen and parent clients as well as from shelter staff.

Campbell (1995) states that it is important to know what to measure when assessing program effectiveness. Research questions are usually based on the program's service mission (Hadley & Mitchell 1995). Most runaway shelters will have a program mission based on research indicated needs of their client population. Research indicates that programs can be effective in helping teen clients feel more hopeful about their future and more able to stay in their home if they address specific client needs. These needs can be addressed with components that deal with substance abuse education and prevention, effective coping skills, limit setting, clearly defining boundaries, and decreasing family conflict (Homer, 1973; Denoff, 1991; Gullotta, 1979; Adams & Munro, 1979). In this study, the key administrators of the shelter were asked to provide information about the mission, goals, and objectives of the shelter program and its components. They participated in the creation of the evaluation questionnaire and were provided the evaluation results. They were then be asked to report on definite and potential program changes as a result of the evaluation results.

When to ask the questions is also an important component of evaluation research (Campbell, 1995). A one-month follow-up may give families time to notice a change in their symptoms, but it also gives them time to forget about the specifics of a program and generalize about an overall sense of satisfaction. In this study, the clients' evaluation questionnaire were administered the day of the teen's discharge from the shelter. This

allowed the teens and their parents to experience the program (for up to two weeks) and report on their experiences while it is still fresh and discernable. An immediate reaction from both the teens and their parents may have provided a better understanding of which program components have an impact on the clients. Administering staff questionnaires while they are working a shift gave them the opportunity to give feedback about their experiences while they were still immersed in the work environment.

Theoretical Framework

Phenomenology, studying what people believe about the world and the people in it, was used to guide the collection of data in this study. There are several basic assumptions of the phenomenological researcher. Knowledge is believed to be socially constructed and therefore truth remains forever relative. Objects, events or situations can mean many different things to many different people (Boss, Dahl, & Kaplan, 1996). A staff member at a teen shelter and the client staying there may have very different interpretations of the meaning and effectiveness of a particular intervention. Gathering feedback from many people involved in the program can provide the researcher with a broad picture of what, how and why program activities may or may not be effective. Phenomenologists believe that people should be studied where they live, thus clients and staff were asked to fill out the survey right in the shelter, as that is where their experience took place. They also believe that the “whole” picture should be observed. Staff, parent and teen have an interpretation of their experience with the shelter, and it is important to gather data from all parties. The questions asked in phenomenological research are descriptive. They look for the meaning people give to the intent and actions of their behavior and the behavior of others. The information gathered from these questions is considered valid, reliable feedback about the effectiveness of the program. The staff and family are considered expert, just as the researcher is.

The approach taken in this evaluation study was also influenced by the logic model and open systems evaluation model presented by Julian, Jones, and Deyo (1995). The logic model is a "logical series of statements linking the conditions a social service program is intended to address, the activities that will be employed to address specific conditions and the expected outcomes of activities" (p.333). In this study, key

administrators identified the goals and objectives of the program and the components they feel best address these goals. They were also interviewed to determine the expected outcomes of these program activities. The open systems evaluation model is a tool that can be used to assure that program intentions are achieved and that they are related to the broader community's efforts to address the problem (Cohen & Kibel, 1993). This study used the open systems model by collaborating with key administrators at the shelter and determining not cause and effect, but program impact. The program is clearly part of a larger community effort that will not be addressed in this study.

Using the logic model, the program developer and evaluation researcher assume that, especially where resources are limited and human suffering is involved, establishing cause and effect relationships between intervention and outcome is secondary to achieving desired program objectives (Julian et al., 1995). Cohen and Kibel (1993) developed the open systems evaluation model based on this assumption. They claim that often, social interventions are too heavily embedded in the broader social context to determine a cause and effect relationship. "Open systems evaluation provides a framework that allows evaluation researchers to function as collaborators in an effort to assist program staff in achieving the strategic objectives of a program" (Julian et al., 1995, 334). This model supports the suggestions of other researchers that state evaluation researchers should work collaboratively with program planners, staff, and other key administrators to determine program effectiveness and areas for program improvement (Hadley & Mitchell, 1995; Harinck et al., 1997; Heflinger, 1992). Cohen and Kibel (1993) suggest that evaluation results will be meaningless if they are unable to illicit change and that key administrators must have "bought in" to the evaluation process and results in order for improvement to occur.

Using this framework, I met with the key administrators to determine the client needs that the program intends to address, the activities employed, and the expected outcomes of these activities. I also developed the evaluation questionnaires collaboratively with the key administrators of the shelter. The program objectives were logically linked to the methods used to achieve these objectives, and all were clearly addressed in the questionnaire. The evaluation did not aim to determine cause and effect,

rather it asked for client and staff feedback regarding the program. How do clients and staff experience the program and what do they feel are the program strengths and weaknesses? From the perspectives of clients and staff, does the program help (not cause) the clients to achieve their goals at the shelter?

Purpose of the Study

Although there has been a fair amount of research conducted on adolescent mental health services, there is a dearth of evaluation research designed specifically to determine a greater number of variables that may influence the efficacy of adolescent treatment programs (Cornsweet, 1990; Pfeiffer, 1989; Pratt & Moreland, 1996). There is even less research conducted on the effectiveness of mental health programs that assist adolescent runaways and their families. There were two purposes for this study. The first purpose of this study was to develop a method of evaluation that would collect feedback from staff, teens and parents at a teen shelter to help this and similar shelters determine if they are meeting the needs of their clients and in what ways they are, or are not, doing so. The second purpose was to apply this evaluation process to a specific teen shelter.

This evaluation study addressed the design flaws of other evaluation studies noted by researchers. Specifically, the measurement instrument was created in collaboration with key administrators at the shelter (Hadley & Mitchell, 1995; Harinck et al., 1997; Heflinger, 1992). It also described and looked at many aspects of a shelter program that may contribute to program effectiveness, including type and frequency of activities and living environment (Pfeiffer, 1989; Pratt & Moreland, 1996). The study addressed Pfeiffer's (1989) criticism that some studies do not assess any changes or progress made by the clients and their parents between the time of intake and discharge; it included several scaling questions that ask for feedback on changes made during the teen's stay at the shelter. Pratt and Moreland (1996) also suggest that evaluation researchers receive feedback from more than one population involved in a program. This study asked for feedback from three sources: the teens, their parents and the staff who work at the shelter.

Teens, parents and staff gave feedback regarding the following areas of the program: Overall Helpfulness of the Program; Family Therapy at the Shelter; Skills Learned at the Shelter; Group Therapy at the Shelter; and Atmosphere and Accessibility

of the Program. This study determined which aspects of the program are experienced as helpful by the staff and clients, both the teens who reside at the shelter and their parents. It also explored how and why these aspects of a residential shelter program are perceived as helpful or not by the staff and clients.

The feedback provided by the staff and clients regarding program effectiveness served uncertainty-reduction purposes and practice-improvement purposes (Deshler, 1984). Specifically, the data can be used to discover new approaches or alternative processes for a program and it increased credibility and support for certain existing aspects of the program. The feedback can be used to help identify defects in the program and to help decision makers add or drop specific strategies or components of the program, or to continue or discontinue the program all together. Understanding a program defect can provide information that can also help the program to change and adjust to different situations, clients, or resources. The feedback provided can also help other agencies install a similar program elsewhere.

In summary, the purposes of this study were to collaborate with key administrators to determine what information is important for evaluation, and to provide them with staff and client feedback regarding those issues. The feedback was used to inform the stakeholders about the perceived effectiveness of the program and to provide information about the content and efficiency of the program that will hopefully show possibilities for adjustment. The feedback can help pinpoint the strong and weak spots in the program, making use of the experience of the clients and the staff involved, with the aim of program improvement.

Objectives

The objectives of a program evaluation should be based on two key aspects: the audience for the study (key stakeholders) and the program's goals and objectives (Leber, Peters, & Markman, 1996). The objective of this evaluation was to work collaboratively with the key administrators of a shelter to determine which aspects of the program they are interested in receiving feedback about and to gather information from clients and staff regarding these designated aspects to aid in program improvement.

Research Questions

Research questions should accurately reflect the goals and the purpose of the evaluation study (Leber et al., 1996) and are usually based on the program's service mission (Hadley & Mitchell, 1995). I met with key administrators to identify the objectives of the program. Evaluation questionnaires were then distributed to determine if these objectives were being met. Questions in this study addressed how the program functions, the effectiveness of the program, and the strengths and weaknesses of the program, via staff and client feedback.

Research questions, then, included: What are the program objectives? What are the program interventions used to address these objectives? Are the objectives being met? How effective is the program? What are the program strengths and weaknesses? What population is the shelter serving? Are the objectives appropriate for this population? What do the key administrators plan to do with the evaluation results?