Stories of Success: Service Provider Knowledge of What Works with Homeless People

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Research Aims

Aim of Doctoral study:
• “to explore the relationship between engagement in occupation (everyday activities) and the experience of wellbeing for people who are homeless in Townsville”

Final research question
• How do services assist people experiencing homelessness in Townsville to improve their wellbeing?
Introduction

• Case Study of Townsville
• Rate of homelessness 93 per 10,000 (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2008)
• Tropical climate
• High Indigenous population
• Regional services draw people to Townsville
• Its a great place to live
• Unique case study
Method

- Appreciative Enquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008)
- Strengths-based method, encourages collaboration and power-sharing (Reed, 2007)
- Focuses on stories of success (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008)
- Focus Group
Participants

- 6 service provider organisations
  - Emergency accommodation (crisis & chronic homelessness)
  - Emergency support (food, crisis, support services)
  - Outreach Service (Public place dwellers)
  - Homelessness prevention
  - Homeless Health service
- 34 participants (range of experience from weeks to years)
- Frontline Providers and Managers
Data Analysis

- 24 stories of success
- Transcribed and coded
- Thematic analysis
Barbara’s Story

- 4 months in a home after 20 years homeless
- I started working with him 7 months ago
- He is cooking, cleaning, living a normal fantastic life
- Building the initial trust
- Not just one barrier
- I will still work with him as long as I am here
- Couldn't have done it without him agreeing
Roberts Story

- 16 year homeless
- Mental problems and drug and alcohol problems
- About 1 year in that house
- Focus on sons and moving forward
- Having a lot of fun and not so formal
- This service is excellent
Results

- *Genuine Relationships: A life raft in the ocean of homelessness*

- *Building Strengths and Securing Housing*

- *Rebuilding Lives: A path to community*
Genuine Relationships: A life raft in the ocean of homelessness

• “Getting to know them as closely as I can, listening to them, making observations about their strengths and then working with the positive reinforcements of those strengths, it takes a long time, little steps at a time and slowly being a bit more positive and bit more positive.”

(Jane)
Genuine Relationships: A life raft in the ocean of homelessness

• Keeping the door open
• Active agreement of clients
• Relationships prevent drowning in despair

“We give our clients more emotional support and we empower them to feel that they can do it themselves... I have often had clients and they say oh thank goodness I always know you are going to give me some kind of direction.”

(Angie)
Building Strengths and Securing Housing

• “You have to keep believing in yourself that you can do it by yourself, you don’t need anyone else to do it for you. I will walk with you and be your support, but you will make it through.”
  (Gillian)

• “just a starting point anyway because once you get them there, you have to do quite a lot of work to get them to understand the limitations of sharing a unit... or living in a house.”
  (Adrienne)
Rebuilding Lives: A Path to Community

- Health care
- counselling
- Work and budgeting
- Reconnecting with family and community

“We try to make a path, to link them back into the community so that you are significant to others in the community.”

(Angie)
Discussion

- Genuine relations based on trust and respect
- Empowerment: opportunity and self esteem
- A place to ‘be’ accepted and build confidence
- Steps toward dealing with multiple issues
- Prematurely ending relationships breaks trust
Conclusion

- Importance of housing
- First step towards rebuilding lives
- Relationship as life rafts
- Empowerment and encouragement
- Achieving own goals
- Relationship end when no longer needed
References

• Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011
• Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2008
• Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008
• Conradson, 2003
• Johnsen et al., 2005
• Kryda & Compton, 2009
• Reed, 2007