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Community Placement Reflection

This semester I completed my third clinical placement in a community setting at YES Youth and Family Shelter in downtown Peterborough. YES works with homeless youth (16-24) and families within the community. Throughout this placement I gained new skills and improved ones that I already had. These included my critical thinking, interviewing, teamwork and problem-solving skills. Throughout my time at YES, my partner Jessica and I had the opportunity of being apart of YES’s Food Cupboard Service that they provided for past/present residents of the shelter. This service took place every Tuesday-Thursday and Saturday from 12-3pm weekly. The food cupboard allows YES the ability to provide youth and families experiencing food insecurity or unexpected expenses etc., a box of groceries to help with food and saving money for that month. The residents are asked questions about what they would prefer in their box, if they have any allergies and if they like seafood before staff proceed to fill the boxes. Each person who comes to food cupboard are also welcome to any clothes, toiletries or hygiene products that YES has on hand that the resident may also be in need of.

Before my placement at YES my thoughts and perceptions about homeless youth were very different than what they are now. Before coming to YES I had imagined homeless youth to be unmotivated and sometimes even choosing themselves to be homeless. Throughout this placement and engaging with residents and running the food cupboard, I quickly realized that my perceptions of this population were very far off. The residents, both past and present, were all very happy to see and interact with any worker and many felt as though YES is a safe place for them and somewhere where they can turn to when they need help. Many residents also enjoyed being able to talk with someone and having somebody interested in their well-being.

An experience where I reflected about the interaction for the rest of the day, was when two fourteen year old boys came in for the food cupboard because they had no access to food for that period of time. This made me feel confused, worried and also a little upset as I believe a fourteen year old should not have to carry around the stress of worrying about trying to find themselves enough food. Once we began talking to each-other I got a better understanding of their current situation and what was going on as to why they needed this service from YES. Both were very open and willing to talk about their situations as they began to feel more comfortable.

After this interaction I began wondering how many other kids live like this and what it must be like for them. Through conducting the annual YES client satisfaction survey with the residents, my partner and I were able to discover some of the reasons as to why some of the residents became homeless through interactions with them. From a literature review about youth homelessness and food insecurity in Toronto, lectures and hearing personal stories I began to get an understanding about the factors involved in youth homelessness. Many residents stated that there are not enough shelters to eat at, and if there are they are almost always too full or already at capacity (Tarasuk, Dachner, Poland, & Gaetz, 2009). This leads to youth food insecurity, which can then lead to panhandling and stealing (Tarasuk et al., 2009). Within the article it also stated that out of all the youth that they interviewed, mostly all (161) of youths were food insecure within the last 6 months (Tarasuk et al., 2009). This made me question my values and beliefs as it did not seem right for children to be experiencing food insecurity. II began to look at strategies or ideas around this issue and through the article it stated that many times the issue of youth food insecurity is fixed symptomatically and not all together, therefore there needs to be g a policy change or advocating from public health agencies in regards to this issue (Tarasuk et al., 2009).

After researching and analyzing youth homelessness and food insecurity, my perceptions of the homeless youth population have changed. I now understand that many did not want or choose to become helpless and that many, if they had the right resources and supports would be interested in helping themselves. This placement has given me the opportunity to learn about this population and their needs and how I as a nurse can help to change their situation. Personally I think being able to get a better understanding of the individuals situation and figuring out what you can do/have to help them, such as resources, advocating etc. Overall I believe I gained a lot of new insight into this population and a better understanding of a nurse’s role in the community and the responsibilities we have to these populations.

References

Tarasuk, V., Dachner, N., Poland, B., & Gaetz, S. (2009). Food deprivation is integral to

the ‘hand to mouth’ existence of homeless youths in Toronto. Public Health

Nutrition PHN, 12(09), 1437.