Supporting the Women and Children Affected by Homelessness in South Florida: A Closer Look at This Vulnerable Population

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Background/Introduction

•Homelessness is a systemic issue throughout the United States (1).
•Several counties in South Florida were among the top largely suburban communities affected by homelessness (2).
•Overall objective was to establish a partnership with a community shelter and aid with their specific needs
•We noted that there was a lack of educational material regarding COVID-19 and available vaccines for homeless populations
•Care packages were assembled with an emphasis on essentials such as KN95 masks, hand sanitizers, disinfectant wipes, etc.
•Educational pamphlets with information on COVID-19 vaccines and local vaccination centers were included

Process

•Worked to identify a vulnerable population we would have the most impact on
•Contacted several community homeless shelters and organizations and conducted telephone surveys
•Created a partnership with Lotus House due to their mission of improving the lives of women and children experiencing homelessness
•Needs assessment conducted by survey of Lotus House employees as well as researching public health data
•Determined current needs to be masks, hand sanitizer, gloves, disinfectant wipes, pillows, sheets, towels, and diapers, which we donated
•Another significant finding was the lack of educational materials available regarding COVID-19 and the COVID-19 vaccines, which we created and provided an educational pamphlet

Intervention

- We conducted our physical donation drive in two ways:
  - Set up donation bins on campus
  - Offered the option for donation pick ups
- Advertised these opportunities with flyers on campus
- We conducted a monetary donation drive on our social media pages by doing the following:
  - Asked Instagram followers to donate anywhere from $1–$10 to our Venmo accounts
  - When one of our followers donated, we tagged them on our stories along with the amount they gave
- Through this social media donation drive, we were able to gather **$923.61** which we used to purchase the aforementioned supplies
- Created care packages consisting of all the supplies we gathered and created an educational pamphlet (in both English and Spanish) on COVID-19 and vaccinations
- The goal of our intervention was to positively impact the health, safety, and comfort of the occupants of Lotus House

Implementation Results

- During Lotus House's monthly community outreach program, we distributed our COVID-19 care packages
- Included in each COVID-19 care package were disinfectant wipes, adult and children masks, hand sanitizer, and an educational pamphlet containing information about COVID-19
- We also purchased bed sheets, towels, and diapers, all of which were cited to be urgently needed at the Lotus House
- Lotus House expressed gratitude as the items donated were in great need
- Individuals affected by homelessness who received packages expressed excitement about contents of the package

Conclusion

•We fulfilled our primary objectives of raising awareness of the homelessness prevalent in South Florida, meeting the needs of Lotus House, and educating those experiencing homelessness in Miami
•We distributed 100 care packages at Lotus House after raising $923.61
•Project limitations included finding only 1 organization to partner with, limiting the impact of our work
•In the future, we hope to establish an RSO through NSU MD in order to maintain our partnership with Lotus House
•Our approach can be used to not only build partnerships with local non-profit organizations and homeless shelters, but foster greater medical student involvement in the local community

References

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2. Council on Homelessness, Department of Children and Families (2013). Council on Homelessness 2013 Report. http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/homelessness/docs/2013CouncilReport.pdf