Northwest University

An Integrated Outpatient Program:

Fostering Community Support Group for Mental Health at Church

Guided Thesis

Bia Fiamo

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Dr. Forrest Inslee

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ESSAY 1: CONTEXTUALIZATION

Introduction

One principle remained relevant throughout my journey for learning in the International Community Development (ICD) Program and during fieldwork. Contextualization is the term we were introduced to on the first day of the program. After receiving hands-on practice in the community with the locals, I quickly grasped the meaning of contextualization. In practical terms, a community developer practices contextualization while listening and collecting information from stakeholders while seeking a solution to a community problem. Contextualization welcomes open dialogue from all parties, breaks through cultural barriers, and offers opportunities for collective leadership. Whenever possible, contextualization principles favor cultural norms and share practices within a defined framework. I will discuss the relevance of contextualization in a global context and at church, and will establish the connection between religious practices and cultural rituals to aid in a better understanding of this principle. Furthermore, I will discuss contextualization in my future endeavors as a community developer, related to solving addiction relapse in the community. I include some external examples applicable to contextualization to further support my arguments.

Contextualization In a Global Context

During my fieldwork experience, I encountered numerous opportunities to develop my project and incorporate contextualization whenever possible. Nevertheless, the more I tried to relate to individuals battling addiction, the more I struggled, primarily because I had a different background. This observation may explain why some modern global developers also struggle to develop a contextualized solution in their community. Conversely, the lack of contextualization in the global south can induce an Eurocentric point of view which only serves to aggravate the

problem. Modern developers should be careful not to adopt Eurocentrism, as this might yield controversial outcomes in the global south. The concept of Eurocentrism "refers to the assumption that European or Western ideas are the only ideas or approaches that are important" (Willis 18). Because of the nature and misconception of the global south's customs, they are presumed unclean and therefore inferior. As a result, people from the global south face biased regulations, norms, and controversial policies in the region. Such is the case at the recent 26th United Nations Climate Change conference in Glasgow (Park and Vercillo). Following their failed attempt to solve famine in Africa, modern developers blamed local farmers for mismanagement, all with no regard to producing a contextualized solution to the problem.

When developers travel to foreign countries to implement projects, they must not immediately dismiss their subjects' cultural practices and norms. Though they may appear different or unfit to others, these practices are the lenses of understanding and functionality in that region. In his book, Richard Beck explains the power behind sympathetic magic to establish a connection between two objects based on their similarities. According to Beck, "the logic of sympathetic magic, similarity creates a connection between two objects. Thus, the voodoo doll is made to look like the person I want to curse" (24). Just like in the modern world, Christianity retains its communion rituals along with other figures' status in the church to create a connection with God. In this case, there is an underlining misconception of facts and fiction from the Gospel for a believer. On the other hand, the diverse religious adaptation of the Bible proves the need to adapt rituals and practices in a given society. These practices vary from one society to another, all related to the people's history, tradition, and beliefs. The same cultural practices may have influenced stories in the Bible to which some evangelists, over time, questioned their authenticity.

Furthermore, Osborne brings out the relevance of reliability of historical facts in the Gospel. The author emphasizes criticism made by some evangelists, proving that traditional customs may have influenced the factual recount of the stories in the Bible. The author asserts "we must make certain that external, cultural forms are contextualized but that internal, super cultural norms remain inviolate" (Osborne 33). Osborne's research seeks to enhance the preaching of the Gospel and break through cultural and traditional norms. By Osborne's definition, contextualization is "that dynamic process that attempts to interpret the significance of a religion or cultural norms for a group with a different (or developed) cultural heritage" (33). This explanation supports the reason modern developers should not disregard cultural heritage in communities when implementing projects. Modern world community developers must therefore tread carefully not to eradicate these practices. Kuenkel reiterates these fundamental rules and explains that if we want to change the world, we must develop compassion for how people are, build on their potential, and practice doing things differently (loc. 2178). Though some of these ideologies may be fanciful and others logical, these cultural practices should not be marginalized out of context.

Contextualization at Church

Located in Union Gap, Washington, Breakthrough Church has seen a rise in attendance since they opened in 2006 (Pastor Brian Jennings). Union Gap is dominantly Latino, accounting for 48% of the population (Demographics). The Latino community cultivates collectivism and contextualization by "providing leadership development to promote self-advocacy within existing communities" (Healthy Latino Families Initiative). The community, therefore, falls under the "Individualism vs Collectivism (IDV)" cultural dimension on Hofstede's model. More precisely, the Latino community leans toward collectivism because "individuals can expect their

relatives or members of a particular in-group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty" (Insights, Hofstede). In this regard, Breakthrough Church members look up to one another for support and uphold the faith with absolute trust in God's healing ability.

In the spirit of building trust and lasting relationships, Breakthrough Church incorporates weekly gatherings in their core activities. Within the church, these activities promote shared leadership and empowerment. The church gives participants the necessary tools to form leaders and build contact during their Outreach and Connect Group program. To establish relationships, gatherings "must occur in a mutually beneficial learning environment and involve multiple opportunities for the participants to have cooperative interactions with one another" (Salter McNeil 37). The community in Union Gap is dominantly Latino. They value community life through frequent family-and-friend gatherings. Pastor Brian Jennings at Breakthrough Church supports this tradition by holding small gatherings at participants' homes. In a recent encounter with Pastor Jennings, he informed me of the relevance of their Connect Group at Breakthrough Church. Pastor Jennings also said that apart from Sunday meetings at church, they usually conduct small group meetings in individuals' homes. However, because of Covid-19, these meetings have been put on hold. They are hoping to resume home gatherings this spring.

Contextualization Application

My project focuses on promoting togetherness with emphasis on forming groups to help nurture individuals in their recovery process. The following two articles explain in detail the importance of societal support in promoting mental health and preventing relapse.

In his article, Stanton first establishes the relationship between care structure and social support in relapse prevention. He then points out that the public is misinformed about clients' stability and performance in society. Stanton proves that incorporating interpersonal issues and loved

ones' input regarding addiction positively contributes to the recovery process, and suggests that one's "emotional state or motivation should not be conceptualized as purely internal to the individual because they may be impacted negatively or positively by interpersonal interaction" (Stanton 341). Stanton denounces the systemic societal treatments and promotes the inclusion of interpersonal issues during recovery. His findings contributed to understanding the importance of concurrent social support during the recovery phase. It also supports the argument made in my project, which calls for incorporating external peers leading a support group and opinions in the treatment process.

In a comprehensive journal, Cheung et al. identify cognitive factors contributing positively or negatively to the individual recovery process. In most cases, these factors create role models and labeling that craft societal stigma creating unhealthy control over the individual mind. The authors advise implementing strategies contributing to long-term recovery rather than adopting short-term approaches. They also stress incorporating cultural-traditional factors as well as understanding innate behaviors leading to "inadequate personality that predisposes the individual to drug abuse" (182). Among others, Cheung et al. introduce the role theory that stipulates behavioral conducts directly influenced by societal role models in their entourage. Recognizing these internal and external factors influence the individual healing process and help eliminate elements affecting their mental health. In the end, the authors found that "cognitive factors appeared to be the most important causes of success in abstinence and were especially important for those maintaining abstinence for a long time" (195). The *American Psychological Association* discovered that Cognitive Behavioral Treatment (CBT) helped individuals learn to be their own therapists through exercises that helped develop coping skills.

These findings addressed some concerns I gathered during my fieldwork. I noticed a unique interaction between some of the residents I had observed over a number of days at the local Gospel Mission. Over an extended period of time, Melanie and Louisa developed a dependable relationship while recovering from addiction at the Gospel Mission. They spent the day supporting each other, sharing chores, cooking together, and keeping each other's behavior in check. Because Louisa was the mentally stronger resident, Melanie heavily relied on her coping skills to refrain from relapsing. It is a constant and weary struggle, Louisa told me during our interview. Melanie did not feel mentally strong enough to successfully graduate from a two-year recovery program. However, she is thankful to have Louisa by her side, keeping her on track and helping her navigate through all the assigned daily behavioral exercises. During our interview, Melanie acknowledged that morning group prayers, Bible reading time, and personal meditation periods have all contributed to her recovery as well. Melanie reports that, while she felt guilty for having introduced her daughter to alcohol and drugs, her struggle now lies in staying sober to set a good example to her grandkids.

Future Endeavor

I have devoted the last few years to searching for meaning in my work. Now that I am nearing the end of the ICD program, my understanding of vocational work has broadened. As a prospective community developer, I derived passion from inspirational experiences, sometimes by engaging in hardships for better insight. All was done in a giving spirit, for I may never attain satisfaction or find purpose in my work. Kuenkel affirms that "passion is what creates energy because it focuses attention. It organizes life, creates order in our path, and attracts people and opportunities" (loc. 2141). Finding passion and purpose in my work is as essential as paying my bills. If not done accordingly and on time, there is an underlining fee for redundancy. After

working in the field and searching for meaning in my work, I often asked this simple question: How can my life experience and knowledge contribute to society? It is not enough to merely fall into the repetitive learning cycle of predetermined lessons. A future community developer must learn, assimilate, and apply concepts already proven successful in other societies. But it is about discovering new practical theories while welcoming creativity and innovation to attain a sustainable solution. Kuenkel finds that the search for sustainable solutions "invites us to see excellence as a gateway to innovation. We want to bring creative ideas forward so that they can help the world" (loc. 1821). It is about adapting to new situations and recognizing that principles that worked in one society may not apply in others. Moreover, the developer must be wary about administrative policies that may unhinge initiatives and delay development. I then understood that "when collaboration initiatives get lost in administrative procedures, key performance indicator definition, or territorial fights for the right strategy—" (Kuenkel loc. 2161). For a project to take root in a designated community, the developer must consider all internal and external obstacles to ensure sustainable results. The developer must welcome differences of opinion to avoid divergence.

Conclusion

Contextualization aids in building a dynamic community. Success is all but assured with the right tools from cultural rituals, stakeholders' participation, and shared practices. These tools help construct a sustainable solution within a precisely defined objective. It is about the willingness to contextualize ideas, opinions, and practices in a giving community. Contextualization is the livelihood for research, the pillar enabling a community project to take root and succeed. Moreover, modern developers should refrain from adopting a Eurocentric point of view while attempting to solve foreign community problems. This mind set can delay projects

and create discrepancies within the working sector. Furthermore, developers should remember

that a perfectly ideal solution in one region may not necessarily be adaptable in another. It will

eventually create a conflict of interest. This type of conflict time and again has proven to hinder

results, deplete funds, and retard progress. It is about welcoming diverse opinions in order to

foster productive strategies.

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ESSAY 2: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

What is Qualitative Research?

On June 4, 2020, I started conducting my fieldwork research at the local Gospel Mission. I reviewed my assignment prior to arrival and prepared a set of questions for my interviews. After my phone call with the program coordinator, Scott Loescher, I came in with a predetermined mindset. I thought I had already known what to expect since the facility program descriptions and outlines were all website accessible. I have done my research, read through all the requirements for admission, and prepared my questions accordingly. To my surprise, the first activity of the day that morning was total resident participation. Loescher started the day with a group prayer, followed by a small discussion section where participants expressed their concerns, expectations for the days, and what they hoped to accomplish. This first impression reveals how the program coordinator applied qualitative research concepts in his activities. Even though he may already have a plan for the time, he was also willing to accommodate any residents' requests if feasible. He demonstrated flexibility in sharing his leadership position with the group by allowing input from all parties involved in order to solve any daily problems that may arise. His approach reflects a core practice of qualitative research.

Specifically, qualitative research is the process of collecting data from variable sources to solve a community problem. The primary objective is to intuitively use all the tools available to maximize returns. These tools can be later helped in formulating a feasible solution. This is done with the intention of helping the subject resolve a personal or community crisis. To this effect, the research "involves the gathering of data through methods that involve observing forms of behaviour e.g. conversations, non-verbal communication, rituals, and displays of emotion, which cannot easily be expressed in terms of numbers" (Glossary of Terms). Qualitative research

allows the developer to see and understand the world through different lenses. Merriam and Tisdell assert that qualitative research includes "data in the form of quotes from documents, field notes, and participant interviews, excerpts from videotapes, electronic communication, or a combination of these are always included in support of the findings of the study" (17). These data are subject to interpretation based on participants' experiences and cultural beliefs. The solution can later serve as a prototype in other regions. With the eventual cultural and societal differences in each society, the prototype will subsequently require adjustments to fit the needs of different communities. The following paragraphs will depict the methodologies involved in qualitative research and illustrate how to apply them in a given context.

Qualitative Research Theories

Two useful forms of qualitative research are: Action Research (AR) and Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Action research "works on the assumption that all people who affect or are affected by the issue investigated should be included in the processes of inquiry" (Springer 6). AR invites participants to formulate a solution to their own problems. It seizes opportunities in the moments by allowing equal consideration to all and giving value to those involved in the process. The AR method employs International Community Development (ICD) values by empowering marginalized community groups, giving them a chance to share their stories in a desperate and helpless situation. Stringer points out that AR cultivates "a harmonious, supportive, and energizing environment that is not only personally rewarding but also practically productive" (175). The process stimulates creative inquiry while empowering participants through open dialogue.

On the other hand, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) relies on previously successful experiences to inspire new development. AI helps "in understanding how people interpret their experiences,

how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam and Tisdell 6). The process allows peers, colleagues, and community members to bring tangible evidence to the table. In this case, AI takes a step further from AR by observing and hearing from others and incorporating their success into the new solution. In a faith-based community, these testimonials work on reviving participants' faith in the healing power of the Gospel. Such is the case with AI practitioner Samuel Mahaffy, who recounted his experience in the article *Revitalizing the Faith Journey*. Mahaffy asserts "appreciative processes that allow room for previously unheard and marginalized stories can provide a life-giving counterpoint to religious streams of practice that emphasize hegemonic stories" (50). He discovers that storytelling is a powerful tool in establishing shared identity and building a clear strategic plan.

For instance, the Local Breakthrough Church is keen on including testimonials in their regular Sunday services. Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater explain that "the fieldworker's commitment is an epic one — to capture the perspective of the insiders in the culture" (16). With this knowledge, I decided to capture participants' perspectives in their aspiring cultural environment. During Sunday sermons, the church welcomes individuals willing to come up to the podium and share their success stories with the public. These inspirational moments help those battling addiction or any personal issues to hear firsthand success stories from their peers. The crowd cheers for them as they leave the podium, and they receive one last supportive prayer. Often in these testimonies, their spiritual journey in life follows a clear pattern. It shows where they come from, how they have overcome their barriers, and what they are looking forward to accomplishing in future endeavors. In this case, the church offers familiar ground that provides a safe haven for those seeking spiritual healing and comfort. Any attendant seeking to resolve their problem receives testimony from a successful story. Participants then use these testimonials

moments as tangible proof to formulate solutions to their problems. These are the events

"creating a new energy that is positive and synergistic. It is this energy that distinguishes the

Appreciative Inquiry process from other approaches to change" (Hammond 2). Overall, these

inspiring moments—along with personal accounts I've received during my interviews at the

Gospel Mission—are the reason that I decided to write my project for Breakthrough

Church. However, thanks to AR and AI methodologies, I was able to correctly decipher

participants' needs, which later helped in designing my project.

Qualitative Research Application

Initially, I started having this nagging feeling to find a feasible solution to help addicts

receive long-term help in the community. However, during my fieldwork at the Gospel Mission,

I noticed that most residents had gone through the recovery process before. Evidently, the system

has failed them. I started questioning why the system is seeing such rates of recidivism with

participants. Is it because the medications are not working? What else can we do as a community

to better serve these generations? Unfortunately, many misconceptions surround these addicts,

and they are all too often seen as failures, and ostracized by society. We tend to ignore the

possibility that their fate could belong to any one of us, with just a slight change in our

upbringing, education, or opportunities in life. During her talk show at TED, Dr. Yasmin affirms

that people think:

> Anyone who suffers from a substance use disorder brought it on themselves. They
>
> must be weak, they lack any moral compass, and therefore don't deserve any help.
>
> But if you know anything about this population, you know that this population
>
> does not fit that stereotype – These are mothers, fathers and grandmothers,

teachers, business leaders, cheerleaders, athletes, nurses, and bus drivers, brothers, and sisters. They represent every fiber in the fabric of our society. (01:16-01:52) Whenever the opportunity is presented, regardless of where I am, I offer individuals the chance to formulate their own solutions. Unlike scheduled therapy sessions where every minute is planned, I found these casual encounters more favorable for open communication. Then I started probing for answers with each conversation using open-ended questions. Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater affirm that "open questions … help elicit your informant's perspective and allow for a more conversational exchange" (221). Questions such as: If possible, how can we best help you recover? Or what do you think is missing in your treatment? We can rephrase these questions differently depending on the environment or situation. To my surprise, the answer was almost invariably the same. In most cases, it is not about the medication, the program, the staff, or the treatment plan. They all shared their worry about of lack of adequate support outside treatment facilities. Their family, friends, and community do not provide the kind of support they need to prevent a relapse.

Once released, the residents still carry the guilt of failure, and fall back into the repetitive lifestyle they left behind, unable to change the pattern positively. Karine Jean-Pierre perfectly illustrates this sentiment, stating that:

> It is hard to encourage a sense of freedom and opportunity in children if everything is clouded with fear and worry. I can't emphasize enough how crippling this kind of anxiety can be to young people; to always be in a defensive crouch. And how it drains any sense of agency, any sense that they can shape their lives. (46)

After conducting a couple of interviews, I started working based on their feedback. I initially thought the major problem any addict faced was to stay sober. I quickly learned that most, if not all of them, are concerned about their life outside of the facility. Once released, the residents feel lost, incapable of maintaining the same lifestyle they had at the facility. Where to go from there? Where do they start and how do they sustain a sober lifestyle? These are their biggest worries that do not get answered before their release. Though it wasn't my intent to rephrase my interviewing questionnaires at first, I quickly switched some questions to accommodate their needs. This allowed the participants to take greater interest in our section and open up to me since the questions targeted their personal concerns. For this community problem, the answer lies with the addicts. My qualitative research on the field proved that most addicts suffer from societal rejection more than anything else.

Qualitative Research Limitations

Often, some information may not be available firsthand when the investigator reaches out to participants. In this case, the investigator can employ devices such as Zoom and phone calls to conduct interviews, especially if distance poses a problem. In that instance, qualitative research relies greatly on new technological devices to gather information. These devices can come in handy when collecting data. Still, they do not adequately transmit emotion, or body and facial expressions, nor do they record behavioral changes.

In this case, the interview can yield biased results, especially if the researchers fail to formulate open-ended questions. On the other hand, it is important to gather background information on participants prior to the interviews. I have learned this on the first day of my fieldwork. At the Gospel Mission, Loescher reminded me to be sensitive during my interactions and interviews with the residents because of their fragile emotional state. In this circumstance, I

had to rely on tangible data collected from online and library resources to fully understand his request. The general background information on addicts and mental health individuals I needed to familiarize myself with were only available from prerecorded quantitative research. This process showed that although I had intended to conduct qualitative research, I had to start with information obtained from quantitative research.

Prospective Evaluation Method

Qualitative researchers can incorporate pictures, verbal data, words, crafts, artifacts, and even sketches in their results. However, recently, I have been enlightened by all the successful testimonies from the church. I thought, if my program was to succeed, it would have to lead to the same results. Based on current participants' recounts at church, they have spent years changing their lifestyles and renewing their faith in the Gospel. My project is a prospective additional program for the church, explicitly favoring those battling addiction or mental health issues. The process will allow individuals seeking spiritual and peer support to gather in a familial environment. I have designated a volunteer peer support person to lead the program in my project outlines. This individual must have had a success story of their own, so they share the same background as the participants. The peer coordinator will periodically distribute a survey to collect information on participants' emotional states, fulfillments, and future endeavors.

After a period of at least six months with regular attendance, those participants willing to share their stories will be invited to the podium. The Qualitative research approach requires that community developers adopt a concept of positivism which posits that knowledge is relative rather than absolute. However, "it is possible, using empirical evidence, to distinguish between more and less plausible claims" (Merriam and Tisdell 8). In a Qualitative research process, I must rely on participants' recounts and testimonies to decide whether the project has succeeded. I

will also rely on these verbal testimonies to collect data and evaluate any improvement in their lifestyles and recovery processes. I have chosen a minimum six-month period to conduct the evaluation based on how often I have seen relapses recur with residents at my work. In this scenario, I "could build grounded theory within a case study, or present a person's 'story,' hence combining narrative with case study" (Merriam and Tisdell 6). My hypothetical evaluation outcome will be: if x number of participants were able to successfully reintegrate into society, with no relapse after attending for six months, then the project will have been successful.

Conclusion

Qualitative research is best suited for the collection of subjective data. It is vital for community developers to start with background information on the subjects. They can obtain this information through previously recorded Quantitative results from online resources and libraries. Researchers use their observation and listening skills to gather information necessary to solve a community problem in the field. Also, Qualitative research theory incorporates Action research and Appreciative inquiry methodologies. These tools allow the researcher to seek a solution from the community viewpoint while learning from their pre-successful experience. Qualitative research is about giving voice to the marginalized people in the community.

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ESSAY 3: ICD VALUES

Introduction

I first signed up for the International Community Development (ICD) program with a clear goal in mind. Ever since relocating to America, I have navigated the working sector and drawn one conclusion—there is only one way to simultaneously find purpose in life and enjoy my work. To do this, I must first acquire relevant knowledge in a field of my interest. Heng points out that "education is less about academic achievement and more about why students should care about what they learn" (303). Growing up in Africa a family member once advised me to pursue my study in a field of interest instead of just seeking a degree that may lead to higher pay. Spending my life doing what I love would bring me more life fulfillment. Passion should be my motivation to wake up every day for work, not bills; these words have resonated with me over the years.

Personal Transformation

The past few years have been more of a work venture than finding fulfillment or purpose. There is a time in life one when reaches a reflective point, forcing one to meditate on past experiences. Derreck advises "that all of us as human beings need to see our magical stories, because they bring us back to the place of humanity, and this glorious idea of being alive" (50). These reflective moments define which direction to take in life, whether to stay on the same path or pursue a different one. Deciding to change course does not necessarily translate to abandoning the ship and jumping to another, or walking the plank. It could simply mean that you have concluded one chapter in life, and you are now ready to close the old page and start another. It means that one must reflect on what was, as compared to what is now, and embrace necessary changes for personal growth. In this process Palmer states that "transformation is difficult, so it

is good to know that there is comfort as well as challenge in the metaphor of life as a cycle of

seasons" (loc. 889). This is a profound reminder of the various stages of life.

With all the societal challenges I have faced living in a foreign country over the years, I

have had no choice but to embrace transformation. Given my upbringing, this has entailed

learning a new language and culture, breaking through communication barriers, and even

adopting a new identity. In this instance, according to Miulescu, "the individuals and social

groups construct and consider their own identity by comparing with 'other' or 'others,' due to

intercultural relations" (692). Suddenly, on most applications, I am 'African American,' no

longer just 'African.' In America, an African American commonly denotes that you are

"descendants of enslaved people who were brought from their African homelands by force to

work in the New World," a definition that holds an entirely different meaning to how I identify

myself before moving to America (Britannica). Where do I place myself now, and what culture

should I convey to my son as his heritage? Should he identify as African American or African?

Should he learn my native tongue along with my African cultural norms? At school, he is

immediately identified as African American. Yet, just like me, he does not relate to any Black

history of this country.

In these circumstances, transformation starts by first recognizing my new living state.

Then, over the years, I redefined who I am in relation to my surrounding community, both Black

and White. Soon, I discovered that my own background has been formed by my education, my

travel experiences, my prior reading, my family, or my patriotism (Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater

203). I reevaluated my stance and arguments when encountering other minority groups in the

working sector. This a lesson I learned the hard way when I once discriminated against a lesbian

friend in my early years in America. Over the years, I transitioned from being indifferent to other

people's issues to being distant, to then later strived to understand their suffering. These first transformational steps, I must admit, did not come easily. In the process, I discovered that people "usually enjoy sharing their expertise with an interested and sympathetic listener" (Merriam and Tisdell 129). Consequently, I entered the listening phase, where I started to sympathize with others and relate to their stories. The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic year, for instance, was a clear reminder that all minorities struggle with the same racial injustice. It was not a case of African versus African American, Latino versus Mexican, or Asian/Indian versus Arab. We were all put into the same pile of immigrants, and are all, therefore, minorities. This societal classification influences one identity and creates resistance to embrace transformation.

New Discovery

In the Bible, in Mark 5, we are told the story of Jesus casting away the demons of a possessed man (NIV). The villagers clearly showed that they were not ready nor willing to embrace this transformation for fear of losing other livestock after seeing their pigs run off and drown in the river. However, Eklund notes that "instead of embracing the miracle of transformation through the testimony of this demon-possessed man who now sat clothed and in his right mind at Jesus' feet, they feared that following Jesus would change their life too much" (27). Clearly, this story reflects our society's reluctance to embrace transformation and eradicate racial injustice today. Probably, some fear losing their privileges, others fear losing financial and political power. Whatever their reasons not to embrace transformation, just like the villagers, it will take a possessed man within their household to welcome Jesus back into their lives. Likewise, I was willing to change my old ideologies after experiencing hardships. I have gone through enough difficulties to finally cast away my prejudices and redefine who I am. This new definition enables me to rule out radical ideologies and redefine the work that will serve my

passion. I realized that living in this society calls for new beliefs. One way that I know to function best is to perform work in the area of service. If that is the case, then I must find purpose in a social cause to help alleviate other people's suffering.

My Learning Journey

At the beginning of the ICD program, I was introduced to the same idea. As a result, I was prompted to specifically think of a social cause I am passionate about and develop a viable solution to solve the problem. I did not envisage this prospect when I first signed up for the program. However, reading through the ICD's books, I quickly realized I connected with the topics with each passing semester. I enjoyed reading the assigned materials; something that was not always the case. I can be rather selective when it comes to the choice of reading material, but surprisingly, most subjects captivated me and caught my attention to the point that I started reading them passionately. I remember once catching myself in awe, thinking how ideally this program fit who I am as a person and how it corresponds to my passion in life. Finding purpose is about recognizing our distinctive position in life, identifying the opportunity at hand, and defining our unique talent and ability to engage in a community crisis. Accordingly, Heng states that through academic education, individuals "would need to learn how to make meaning of their learning experiences and connect these cognitively and emotionally with a vision of how they see their contributions to society" (303). There are endless possibilities to get involved in social justice. If everyone in the community looks deep within, they will find inspiration in their surroundings and daily activities. Kuenkel reiterates this belief when she states that "the capacity for initiating, leading, facilitating, and sustaining the construction of meaningful futures is within all of us" (loc 721). My first year in America was illuminating yet shook my core values. Consequently, I ended up looking deep within and finding inspiration in my surrounding.

Inspiring Moments

      The first time I visited a library, I was astonished by the overwhelming resources at hand. I immediately made mental comparisons to its counterpart in my birth country of Togo. If only we had access to a place like this, it would be a wonderland. In Togo and other African countries I visited growing up, people of all ages would eagerly attend such a library. Then I started dreaming of finding an opportunity to send used books and possibly turning my mother's local shop into a small library/community center. This was my initial inspirational source for my ICD project. I had hoped to involve myself with the local children at the gospel mission to get hands-on experiences of their activities. The goal was to find a parallel of their work in connection with another children's non-profit organization in Togo. That project quickly came to a halt because of the Covid-19 pandemic. I had to redirect my attention to a local issue within my current community. Through his years of humanitarian services and creating the "Global Soap Project," Derreck Kayongo came to the same conclusion. In an interview for a book by Dane Peters, he said that he found that "your community is where it begins. I know that people want to go all over the world, but start with your community, and learn some lessons as you serve, because when you do that, you get educated in how to do things" (50). In 2012, Kayongo received the "Heroes Tribute" CNN's award, thanks to his soap project inspired by his childhood experience at the refugee camp. Though he did not plan on becoming a future Global Soap Project developer, Kayongo came to America, saw an opportunity to help his small community in Africa, and seized it. An unexpected life path turned out to be his life legacy. As if God had planned it all along, right before Covid 19 pandemic hit, I ended up quitting my old job and finding a new one in a mental health facility. However, this new position has opened the path for me to find a new social cause fitting my passion.

Empowerment and Transformation

Looking back at my journey throughout this program, I couldn't have chosen a better

cause or project. Drug abuse and mental health ailments in our society are major issues for our

concern. However, just like the challenges I once faced integrating into American culture, I once

more hit a wall. I quickly realized that I must first find a way to connect with the residents. I

needed to acquire a minimum understanding of their journey in life. Therefore, I quickly changed

tactics, going from simply conducting interviews and observing to becoming integrated into their

daily lives. I first started my fieldwork project with a predetermined vision of what I wanted to

accomplish and the path I needed to take to get there. After a couple of days in the field, I had to

change this mentality and learn to engage with the residents with a clear and open mind. In the

effort to connect with the residents to facilitate my interview, I started spending time with them

as they performed their daily chores. Each resident was assigned a specific task, along with

engaging in other activities within the facility of which the coordinator had approved. These are

the kernels of knowledge which are easily gathered in the field. To my surprise, the residents

spontaneously started sharing their most aspiring goals and expectations with me. I took the

opportunity to inquire more about viable solutions to help them overcome their addictions.

Through these activities, "we learn that we need not carry the whole load but can share it with

others, liberating us and empowering them" (Palmer loc. 819). Then throughout the program, I

realized that I had developed a second nature for inquiry.

As it is commonly known, the gym is a place to exercise, relax and maintain physical

health, but I have now discovered another benefit of being a regular guest—I get to make new

friends, and interact with people of diverse cultures and races. At this time, I came to realize that

people are undeniably willing to share their personal stories, struggles, and worries with others—

especially in the sauna. The relaxing and detoxifying effects of the sauna help open the mind and allow for an easy conversation. I run into some regular guests there, including those who have battled addiction in the past and are still working daily to overcome their compulsion. After the interviewing experience in my fieldwork, my daily life now unwillingly turns into a fieldwork site. I am now naturally probing to investigate, learn anew, and retrieve information from people I encounter every day, mainly when their story piques my interest.

Conclusion

Over the course of this program, I have gradually developed a new meaning for social justice. It is not about holding the torch up high and being the front runner, defending the people with a large asset in my pocket. It is about integration, transformation, and building connections while helping others in the process. Rather than seeking an immediate result for a cause, I have come to break down my steps into smaller goals. That way, each goal appears more attainable. I also learned the benefit of starting with a local community issue before seeking more opportunities abroad. I now view social justice as a path to resolve conflicts and issues within the community and as a means to fulfill my purpose in life. In Mark 5, we see Jesus being cast out of the village for fear of transformation (NIV). In this instance, practicing social justice is to welcome Jesus back to the village, recognize his healing power, and be willing to embrace his teachings. The knowledge acquired from his teachings will serve as inspirational tools for the villagers to solve any community issues that may arise. The villagers knew of this possessed man's suffering for years but allowed him to endure it alone because they did not understand nor connect with him. In this story, Jesus has shown us that, in order to successfully heal our social ailments, we must be willing to overcome our fear and embrace a new methodology. We must be

willing to lose some personal possessions in the process, but it is replaced in the end with better

rewards and spiritual growth.

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APPENDIX: PROJECT PROPOSAL

Introduction

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, the world unprecedentedly faced a significant shift in mental health. In the medical field, we went from one disaster to another. There are reports of natural disasters, treatment complications, or new diseases causing death every day. Just a couple of days ago, *The Guardian* publishes that "scientists have identified a 'stealth' version of Omicron (a Covid-19 variant) that cannot be distinguished from other variants". The world strives to pull out of the remnants and redefine a new meaning for life through it all. The spectrum of illnesses is no longer confined to physical pain. People have started realizing that there is a conflict of interest when talking about mental illness. Despite all the research, discoveries and treatments, mental illness has now taken an entirely new meaning. We are confronted with a crisis for mental health disorders in the United States. Because of Covid-19, this crisis has spread worldwide now. To tackle this ailment, spiritual place like Breakthrough Church should partner with mental health treatment facilities in town. They are spiritually well equipped to offer social support to community members battling substance addiction and mental illness.

The Need

There is a need to find a practical integrated community approach in order to solve mental health calamities in today's society. The *World Health Organization (*WHO*)* declares that, because of Covid-19, "many may be facing increased levels of consumption of alcohol and use of the drug or are engaging in addictive behaviours". Though we ought to ask ourselves: is this ailment new to society, or is it just now more apparent due to Covid-19? Most recently, we have seen an increase in the demand for the treatment of mental health. Mental illness is directly

associated with many health disorders, including chronic diseases, substance abuse, Covid-19

confinement, and even retirement. Given the variety of conditions causing mental health, my

focus will be helping individuals in the recovery process, especially those battling substance

abuse. How do we redefine this widespread illness? And what approaches served best to tackle

mental health from a community perspective?

Breakthrough Church

Throughout history, the church has played an essential part in our society. I learned from

the Bible to trust in God's plan and follow Jesus's guidance to salvation. He advises, "do not

conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you

will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will"

(Romans 12:2 NIV). He continues, "as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now

remain in my love" (John 15:9). In the effort to reduce the endless cycle of substance addiction,

local churches must open their doors at least once a week for a special gathering. Breakthrough

Church ought to welcome our friends to service and show kindness to those who have deserted in

society. In the Bible, we are reminded that "anyone who withholds kindness from a friend

forsakes the fear of the Almighty" (Job 6:14 NIV). The program will support our friends and

loved ones struggling with addictions and mental health disorders regardless of their beliefs.

The church will serve as a base location to foster a social life revolving around Christian

values and teachings. In order to increase community support for mental health patients, I

decided to add an activity program for the Local Breakthrough Church. I choose to work with

Breakthrough Church because of their existing Connect Group program. They have already

shown interest in connecting the members of the community to a group section. They explain,

"Connect Groups are a great way to meet other people and build authentic relationships while

growing in your faith" (Breakthrough Church). Part of services rendered at Breakthrough Church includes regular Sunday services, prayers, kids' Bible classes, man and woman Bible studies, home gatherings and Connect Group. For the moment, Breakthrough Church opens its doors several times per week but mainly every Sunday for services. They offer two services: one at 9:00 AM, the other at 11:00 AM (Breakthrough Church).

Project Goal

For this project, the idea is not to offer a Christian treatment center but to create a familial as well as a friendly place for those recovering from addiction and battling mental health. How do we expect our generation to function at its best if we continuously alienate them because of their mental health? As a responsible society that holds Christian values to heart, we must demonstrate love and care to those who have fallen off the wagon and invite them to join us in our place of worship. In Psalms 17:7 NIV, it states, "show me the wonders of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes." Despite all this, these people are our next-door neighbors, friends and members of family. Most released addicts seek spiritual guidance and healthy social connections to prevent relapses. For the outpatients, knowing that Breakthrough Church members care, share their stories, and have their best interest at heart can be a powerful tool for mental recovery. Social and community support are now limited to paid therapy sessions and peer counseling. An integrated approach will create a social reintegration program through increased community support coupled with spiritual education. As far as my experiences as a worker at Comprehensive Healthcare and a former volunteer at the local Gospel Mission Center are concerned, I have learned that clients lack consistent community support after their release. After weeks of compiling qualitative data during my fieldwork, I

gathered that addicts worried most about sustaining a healthy lifestyle outside the treatment facility.

For this project, I have attached a referral brochure for Breakthrough Church to invite participants to the program. Breakthrough Church can utilize this brochure to establish a liaison with care facilities in town such as Comprehensive Healthcare, the Gospel Mission, and Apple Valley Counselling for a start. This brochure will serve as a practical tool in planning activities for participants on any designated day. For application purposes, I have chosen Saturday to design the brochure. The activities program listed on the brochure will be an extended program to the existing Connect Group program at Breakthrough Church. This extended program aims to promote spirituality, social engagement, and mental well-being and creates a healthy social connection network. With enough success stories, the program could be extended over a couple of more days during the week with additional activities.

The Role of the Church

The church represents a place for spiritual comfort, and redemption most of all; it helps to establish a direct connection to God. It is reasonable first to consider other establishments for the same purpose. For instance, Comprehensive Healthcare explored the same idea through its service at Sunrise Club. Sunrise Club is an outpatient counselling facility where discharged clients are welcome to pursue community life and counselling. Though inevitably, it seems the program is not appealing to most clients. Unfortunately, they face closing down soon because of a lack of participation. Where there is no faith or rituals, people tend to turn their back to institutions. Throughout the history of mankind, we have seen the likelihood for people to adhere to practices when faith and rituals are juxtaposed. In fact, "the evidence points to how essential rituals are for the recovery of the community. The ritual contributes, common symbolic

responses, identification of emotional locations, common frames of interpretation and development of stories" (Danbolt and Stifoss-Hanssen 357). Faith plays a significant role in the recovery process.

Whether an individual is seeking a mental, personal or physical recovery, faith lies at the heart of the process. Also, there have been significant changes in society from the introduction of the church. Within its sanctuary, the church carries some rituals, traditions, and codes of conduct related to the guidance in the Bible. Though they may not be the original means, these rituals and traditions influence people's choice of a church. Nevertheless, "the great insight of our spiritual traditions is that we-especially those of us who enjoy political freedom and relative affluence-are not victims of that society: we are its cocreators" (Palmer loc. 714). On a second note, a church establishment has a certain appeal to the believer. The church is a place of worship where people evoke God. Therefore, it must hold spiritual blessing in its walls and surroundings. The church brings us closer to God. We rely on its settings to find spiritual salvation and healing.

Peer Coordinators

Breakthrough Church has the potential to provide spiritual healing. Also, the church is a place to transform a dissolute person into a spiritual model. I can therefore assume that "since spiritual transformation typically involves a process over time, it is said that we need both exalted spiritual models" (Williamson and Hood 136). You may already know them as peer counsellors, and support in most referrals. In this project, we will refer to them as peer coordinators. They are fellow recovered friends with success stories, holding the torch of healing in their hands. No one else can grasp the depth of their struggle better than a leading peer friend for an outpatient individual. Inevitably, "leadership exists when people are no longer victims of circumstances but participate in creating new circumstances" (Kuenkel loc. 1056). In this

journey, "the experience of successful mentoring involves an awareness of Connection, Compassion, Encouragement, Spiritual Change, and Parental Pride" (Williamson and Hood 149). These shared experiences as well as friends are the light that will lead the way to the church. The program will initially be run by existing church attendants serving as peer coordinators. They will act as peer support personnel. Each week the church pastor will select a short section in the Bible for the group meeting section. The peer support coordinator will either read the section themself or choose a volunteer to read it during the meeting. In this process, "I believe the capacity for initiating, leading, facilitating, and sustaining the construction of meaningful futures is within all of us" (Kuenkel loc. 718). All group members are welcome to participate in the discussions. It is a free brainstorming discussion. With this practice, we can initiate "change process built on the capacity of a group of people to change their structure of attention and subsequently their collective pattern of thought and action" (Kuenkel loc. 1081).

After reading the section from the Bible, participants are encouraged to:

- ❖ Explain the reading to their best understanding

- ❖ Relate the reading to personal life stories and share

- ❖ Ask questions

- ❖ Questions are directed to the group in an open discussion

- ❖ Refer to Bible stories and passages for answers

From the teachings in the Bible, the writings once again affirm that "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" *(John 1:9 NIV)*.

Startup Equipment

Besides the existing equipment at the church, all other equipment listed below will be donated by church members, friends, families, and non-adherent community members. Most items listed below are often free donations to charity facilities like Goodwill, Salvation Army, and thrift stores. Community members are highly encouraged to donate any items they can help with to the church.

- ❖ Games board: chess, monopoly, scrabble, uno, checkers, connect four, cards,
- ❖ Ram papers, coloring crayons, scrapbook
- ❖ Pool table
- ❖ Projection screen/ TV
- ❖ Music instruments: guitar, piano, cello, drums
- ❖ Adults 'puzzles, Legos
- ❖ Books: all types of books deem appropriate (courtesy of peer coordinators to triage)
- ❖ Knitting kit

Conclusion

It has been a long road to outline a significant recovery map for mental health illness. As we know it today, society went from known diseases and newly discovered Covid - 19 to aggravated mental health illness. Though we may have measures in place to tackle the problem, much is left to uncover. This proposed outline of program activities is a tentative approach to solving mental health crises. From client accounts at my fieldwork to personal experience at work, I concluded that the problem lies within the community. If only we could redefine mental health from the community perspective, a contextualized approach would likely lead us to plausible results. To better serve the community, I decided to look into the source of the problem

and add an inclusive program to Breakthrough Church services. If we are able to commit to this project, I believe we will have a major breakthrough with mental health and recovery against addiction in our community.

Brochure

https://d.docs.live.net/5d5a2b7f9c45642f/Documents/Brochure%201.docx

Spiritual Healing

Learn from peers
Make new friends
STAY UNITED
We support you
Connect with us

What we offer: Love, devotion, compassion, story time, movie night, games, play music, make new friends, socialize

"I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,
along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;
I will turn the darkness into light before them
and make the rough places smooth.
These are the things I will do;
I will not forsake them"
(Isaiah 42:16)

PROGRAM OUTLINES
Saturday Gathering

- ❖ **1:00 pm to 2:00 pm:** Socializing time
- ❖ **2:00 pm to 3:00 pm:** Group meeting
- ❖ **3:00 pm to 4:00 pm:** Games/music/activities
- ❖ **4:00 pm to 7:00 pm:** Movie night

You are welcome to join us for more deepening and recovery time in the house of God every Sunday. We offer two services: one at 9:00 am, the other at 11:00 am.

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