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Program Evaluation: Assessing A Housing First Initiative

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Caitlin Pennicooke

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

Caitlin Pennicooke

MA, Liberty University, 2016

BS, University of Hawaii-Manoa, 2013

Professional Administrative Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Public Administration

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August 2021

Abstract

Housing First is a nationally recognized approach to solving homelessness, but literature does not account for the unique characteristics of geographic locations that are isolated and have high cost of living. This study examined one such city and benchmarked it against another. To protect the identities of these cities, the alias Island City (IC) for the city under examination and Sun City for the benchmark. This research explored IC's Housing First program related to mitigating homelessness. The purpose of this study was to benchmark IC's Housing First program against Sun City's program using the context, input, process, and product (CIPP) evaluation model. Through an evaluation of publicly available information and interview, IC's program strengths and weaknesses were extrapolated. Overall, IC had all the tenets of a successful Housing First program, including various housing options, services available, and numerous outreach initiatives. However, IC struggled to capitalize on opportunities on a larger scale and create enough resources to match trends in homelessness. Lessons learned from Sun City's program, included leadership, diversified funding, increased transparency, data sharing, and emphasizing innovation in Housing First solutions, could aid IC in expanding the scope and extent of its reach leading to positive social change.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my husband, family, and friends who offered unconditional love and encouragement throughout this journey. I could not have done it without you.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank my husband, Warren, for his continuous support, countless edits, and for keeping me on target. Your insights and critiques were invaluable, thank you for always being there for me.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Problem

Introduction

In this qualitative study, I conducted an in-depth program evaluation analysis of Island City's (IC) Housing First Program using a comparative benchmark against Sun City's Housing First initiatives as they relate to homelessness. IC and Sun City are aliases used to conceal the identity of the parties involved. IC is the city under review and Sun City is the benchmark. IC, a geographically isolated metropolis, has struggled to combat homelessness for the last decade. In 2015, the State of IC declared a state of emergency and enacted an aggressive campaign to address the rise in homelessness (State of Hawaii, 2016). In response to this State of Emergency, IC developed a Housing First initiative to mitigate homelessness. Since the program's implementation, IC has faced challenges meeting the demands of the homeless population. A program evaluation against a successful benchmark documents what the program has accomplished to date and provides valuable information about whether and to what extent aspects of the program are working (Frechtling et al., 2010). According to Frechtling et al. (2010), there is a dependent relationship between program evaluation and implementation by producing data and messaging critical information to all stakeholders involved.

In this study, I examined IC's Housing First initiative's strengths and weaknesses related to homelessness. I conducted a comparative case study of Sun City's Housing First initiatives to identify other techniques, methodologies, and practices IC can incorporate to enhance its program and its impact on homelessness. This study has implications for positive social change as it allows IC to improve its support to the

homeless population located on the Island of Island City. IC is located on the island in the Pacific Ocean, spanning roughly 60.5 square miles, with approximately 5,664 individuals per square mile (World Population Review, 2020). The mountainous terrain in the middle of the island restricts development to the northwesternmost facing coastlines. IC's ability to build new infrastructure is limited as most of the island is privately owned.

Furthermore, IC is geographically isolated from the rest of the mainland United States and relies on imports primarily for most consumer goods and materials. In 2012, the State of IC imported 92% of its food products (Bill for an Act Relating to Food Security, 2019). Overreliance on imports limits its self-sufficiency, drives up the cost of living, and has implications for any extensive housing development program. IC ranked the as the ninth most expensive city in the United States with a projected salary of \$122,000 to live comfortably; however, the average salary is around \$60,328 (Real, 2020). A program evaluation that addresses these characteristics adds information as to how other metropolitan areas can combat homelessness.

Problem Statement

The main challenge faced by IC is ensuring its Housing First program meets the demands of the homeless within its jurisdiction and has a positive impact on mitigating homelessness across the island. Homelessness is a statewide issue for the State of IC. This issue has received special emphasis by state leadership and the State's Interagency Council of Homelessness. Unlike the rest of the state, IC is unique as it has the only megacity, and approximately 69% of the state's homeless population lives within its jurisdiction. As such, IC has the most significant representation of the homeless

population, with the added challenges associated with large city living—high costs of living and little room to expand. With that in mind, this study focused specifically on IC’s Housing First initiative and evaluated its program effectiveness.

Under the current Housing First model, IC has only seen a 9% reduction in homelessness in the past five years; that equates to approximately 450 persons (Partners in Care: O’ahu’s Continuum of Care, 2019). According to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (2019), Housing First initiatives are a means to quickly secure housing for the homeless while removing as many obstacles as possible. It is also much more intensive as it requires providing tailored services geared towards ensuring individual stability. An analysis of IC’s program can highlight how effective IC is at identifying housing, tailoring services, and providing that stability—assessing where IC is succeeding and where reworking or relooking aspects of the program is warranted to suit its at-risk population better. This study adds to IC’s understanding of how its current Housing First practices fail or advance progress in combating homelessness. According to the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (n.d.), one of the central components of the Housing First design is its integration into society and the community. Understanding how IC engaged both society and the community will yield lessons applicable to all other cities. Additionally, with IC’s unique characteristics, corresponding research can highlight innovative ways to examine and overcome issues with Housing First programs in areas that do not have the same environmental and situational factors as most cities.

IC’s homeless challenge is not unique to its island. Instead, it is a systemic issue faced by municipalities around the globe. Many cities around the world struggle to meet

the necessities for this at-risk demographic. According to the United Nations (2018), at-risk populations, and the homeless, are expected to surge by the year 2050, when the global population will transition from 55% to 68% living in urban areas. IC, and other cities, will be better postured to address influxes of homelessness if they revise and streamline efficient housing initiatives. On a more localized level, this study provides IC with the means to promote positive social change by enabling IC to match the demand for housing and services to the homeless community's needs. In doing so, IC can improve the overall quality of life for its most significant at-risk population and give them the means to develop self-sufficiency.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the IC's Housing First Program. After studying and analyzing the data, the study led to recommendations to maximize the program's success and revise areas that fall short of its intent. The issue facing IC is reducing homelessness through its Housing First initiative. However, IC has seen a 450-person reduction in homelessness (Partners in Care: O'ahu's Continuum of Care, 2019) since December 2014, only 103 of these individuals reintegrated through its Housing First program (Pruitt et al., 2019). Thus, falling significantly short of the number of individuals reported during the 2020 Point in Time Count—4,448 homeless individuals, with 2,346 listed as “unsheltered” (Partners in Care O'ahu's Continuum of Care, 2020). IC's Housing First program's current state is not sustainable for mitigating homelessness on the scale required to impact significantly. IC was benchmarked against

Sun City's Housing First Program to assess how to address shortfalls. This study's guiding questions are:

GQ1: What are the strengths and weaknesses of Island City's Housing First program?

GQ2: How can Island City improve its program to secure housing for more of its homeless community?

GQ3: What practices and procedures used by the benchmark of Sun City's can be used by Island city to expand the reach of its program?

There are gaps in the scholarly literature related to Housing First initiatives within geographically isolated locations with exponential costs of living, little room to expand, and a dependence on imports from the United States mainland. A search of the Walden Library and Google Scholar yielded no results for Housing First programs with isolated communities and high living costs experienced in IC. The research associated with isolated communities was specific to rural environments. Research related to high living costs corresponded to metropolitan cities within the continental United States. that had direct access to resources.

Potential to Address Gap in Organizational Understanding

I developed this study to address the gap in IC's Housing First program. There is a significant gap in improving its program to strengthen the Housing First program within a geographically isolated location with high living costs and limitations for horizontal growth. My study aims to help IC identify steps to advance its housing initiative and implement practices to address shortfalls within the existing program. By considering

IC's unique characteristics, my study provides a more tailored approach to address the immediate needs of IC and the homeless communities. Further, this study adds to the research on the development and execution of Housing First programs across the United States.

Nature of the Administrative Study

In this qualitative study, I conducted a program evaluation of IC's Housing First Program and benchmarked it against Sun City's. I utilized Daniel Stufflebeam's (2014) context, input, progress, and product (CIPP) evaluation model to assess the strengths and weaknesses of IC's program. The CIPP model was used to evaluate both housing initiatives based on context, inputs, processes, and products. Due to the unique location and homelessness demographics, no city within the United States is homogeneous to IC. However, benchmarking a successful program still provides valuable lessons learned, techniques, and procedures that benefit IC. According to the Homeless Point in Time Counts for the past five years, Sun City has seen success in reducing the number of unsheltered homeless veterans, youth, and the chronically homeless (San Diego Regional Task Force on the Homeless, n.d.). Sun City also has an aggressive Housing First model. From 2014-2017, Sun City created 3,111 housing opportunities and rental vouchers, over 624 new units, and invested over \$54 million towards Housing First developments (San Diego Housing Commission, 2017). From 2018-2020 Sun City is projected to invest \$79.7 million towards securing permanent supportive housing for 3,000 homeless within the city (San Diego Housing Commission, 2017). The significant difference between Sun City and IC is that Sun City has twice the population size and twice the number of

homeless. However, the cost of living is relatively comparable. Descriptive statistics compare changes in homelessness and homeless demographics for both cities. Statistics also assessed the turnover rates within the respective Housing First initiatives. For data sources, I used publicly available information from IC's and Sun City's government websites. I accessed publicly available information from the U.S. Department of Human Services, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. The program evaluation and comparative benchmark were used to identify areas where IC can revise its current Housing First model to meet the homeless community's needs more effectively and lay the foundation for a sustainable housing solution.

Significance

This study aimed to enable IC to enhance its current Housing First program to mitigate homelessness and reintegrate the homeless into the community as self-sufficient citizens. The study provided suggestions to revise current practices to increase efficiency, breadth, and depth. According to Kumar et al. (2017), the sustainability of Housing First programs relies heavily on thorough program evaluations, engaging the community, and dynamic leadership. To help reach this sustainability, I evaluated these factors and incorporated IC's unique characteristics that complicate the implementation of Housing First programs to reduce homelessness. For this study, the stakeholders included IC, its citizens, and the homeless community. The homeless community stands to gain a better quality of life and develop a foundation from which they can support themselves. IC will be better postured to make a more significant difference in the fight against

homelessness. On a more extensive scale, this study will address gaps within the field of Housing First research. This research could contribute to advancing the approaches of other megacities experiencing surges in homelessness, all of which would contribute to positive social change by accelerating support to this vulnerable demographic.

Summary

In Section 1, I identified and outlined the challenges faced by IC related to implementing its Housing First program to combat homelessness. I outlined the nature and significance of this study to the field of homelessness reduction and the potential for widespread implications. In Section 2, I will discuss the current literature relevant to Housing First programs, as it applied to the challenges encountered by IC. I also delineated my roles and responsibilities throughout the conduct of this study.

Section 2: Conceptual Approach and Background

Introduction

This section discusses the conceptual models and frameworks within existing research from which I built my study. I also address the target organization's background and my role as the researcher. Cities across the world experience challenge with homelessness and take various approaches to assuage the problem. One of these approaches is implementing a Housing First initiative. Housing First programs are comprehensive programs that secure housing for the homeless and provide the treatment, care, and services required to transition that individual into self-sufficiency (U.S. Department of Urban Housing and Development, 2007). IC has made Housing First its main avenue to reduce homelessness. However, the existing program is unable to meet the demand of homelessness within its community. Considering these facts, my study analyzed IC's program to answer the following questions: "What are the strengths and weaknesses of IC's Housing First program?" (GQ1) Moreover, "How can IC improve its program to secure housing for more of its homeless community?" (GQ2).

Concepts, Models, and Theories

The literature related to Housing First initiatives focuses on programs that provide comprehensive services from start to finish. In 1992, Dr. Sam Tsemberis crafted the initial housing initiative for homeless demographics with mental health conditions called "Pathways to Housing "(Pathways to Housing First, n.d.). This program had three phases designed to reintegrate these individuals into society: (a) train the individual to live alone, (b) ensure the individual takes all prescribed medications, and (c) know the individual

will not engage in self-harming behaviors (Housing First Europe Hub, n.d.). Here, services and the treatment of illnesses were separated. Under this approach, it was challenging for some clients to complete the program due to relapses (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2007). As a result, these demographics often struggled to complete the three stages and reintegrate into society (Housing First Europe Hub, n.d.).

In 2007, HUD oversaw an extensive Housing First study to ascertain if it was a practical methodology to reintegrate homeless populations afflicted with mental illness and substance abuse addiction. This model emphasized permanent housing, offering supportive services, aggressive outreach programs, and ongoing case management after completing the program. After 12 months, the study population demonstrated reduced psychiatric symptoms, substance use, and increased income and self-sufficiency. Based on the study results, HUD (2007) endorsed the Housing First program as the program of record for combating homelessness.

In 2014, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness provided seven criteria essential to developing a Housing First Program. First, clients should have the flexibility to choose their housing accommodations. Second, there is a distinction between property management and case management. Third, housing is safe and affordable, costing no more than 30% of an individual's income for lodging and utilities. Fourth, accommodation is integration within the community. Fifth, clients must have leases per local tenant laws. Sixth, individuals cannot be denied housing due to assessments of an individual being "ready" for services. Finally, enrolled homeless clients play the lead role in developing their treatment plans (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2014).

According to Gilmore et al. (2014), early-stage evaluations are essential components of any program. These early evaluations have significant impacts on securing information necessary for the successful implementation of the program. Without this information, the program could impede its efforts and ultimately fail. Stufflebeam (1970) argued that evaluation models enable decision-making in four areas—planning, structuring, implementation, and recycling. These programs require four categories of evaluation: context, input, process, and product, which came to be known as the CIPP evaluation model. Context evaluations match program goals and objectives with the program's clients (Umam & Saripah, 2018). If the goals, objectives, and needs are incongruent, planning will always fall short. Input evaluations include assessing the cost/benefit analysis, resources, performance, and review of the program's design. Also considered in this evaluation phase are other alternatives, methodologies, and strategies (Agustina & Mukhtaruddin, 2019). Process evaluations examine the variance between the program's design and what the program looks like during implementation. Here activities are tracked and evaluated based on the program's goals (Aslan & Uygun, 2019). Finally, product evaluation is an examination of the program's outcomes and impact on the clients. This phase measures the program's merit and actual cost-benefit analysis from a holistic approach (Agustina & Mukhtaruddin, 2019). In 2014, Stufflebeam and Coryn published a CIPP model guide that identified each phase of the program evaluation's inputs and outcomes. I used this guide as the foundation for my program evaluation of the IC's Housing First initiative.

Benchmarking is the process of comparing programs, processes, and services. Benchmarking requires an organization to identify the program's critical criteria or service and find a company that does it better. Then the organization must fully understand how they operate and how the other company does it differently. Once this analysis is complete, the organization can add, modify, or remove its current long-term success practices (Touminen, 2016). I used benchmarking principles to select a city with a successful Housing First initiative and compare it with IC's program. For this study, I used Sun City. These cities are comparable in cost of living, access to jobs, transit reliability, and average housing and transportation costs (Center for Neighborhood Technology, n.d.). However, Sun City has a significantly larger population of 1.42 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019) and nearly double the number of homeless with 8,102 than IC (San Diego Regional Task Force on the Homeless, 2020). Despite these differences, Sun City has a proven history of success, with its Housing First program will serve as a catalyst on which IC can build. Furthermore, between 2013 and 2016, Sun City experienced a 29% reduction of homeless veterans (San Diego Housing Commission, 2017b). Subsequently, Sun City has aggressively addressed homelessness by creating over 18,332 housing opportunities, including vouchers, unit development, and incentivizing landlords to increase affordable housing, surpassing the city's projected goals (San Diego Housing Commission, 2020). Sun City's successes provided valuable practices to improve IC's Housing First initiative.

Key Terms

Chronic homeless: An individual without residence for a period of 12 months over three years.

Sheltered homeless: Homeless individuals residing in shelters, facilities, or transient accommodations

Unsheltered homeless: Homeless individuals residing in places not intended for residential or private use, such as parks, sidewalks, beaches

Client: In Housing First, the client is the individual afflicted with homelessness

Provider: Any public, private, or non-profit entity that provides care, treatment, or support to the client

Relevance to Public Organizations

Extensive scholarly literature and resources are available on Housing First programs, their development, implementation, and how to address homeless communities' needs. There is ample research concerning reducing homelessness for certain groups, such as veterans, youth, and those experiencing mental health issues. A significant amount of research is available for how different cities, states, and countries tackle homelessness through Housing First initiatives. Much of this literature features urban communities that are consistently expanding as more individuals move to cities. Little research exists about Housing First programs in rural communities (Stefancic et al., 2013). In rural communities housing programs can experience challenges due to limited public transportation, limited housing options, and fewer service providers (Stefancic et al., 2013). Due to their isolation, rural areas often lack the quantity and proximity to

essential resources. On the other hand, in urban environments, resources like access to public transportation and the availability of services are commonplace. However, in urban settings, housing programs can struggle with a large homeless population, requiring cities to prioritize which clients have the greatest need (Kertesz et al., 2017). Homelessness is often linked to the high cost of living associated with most cities, as increases in median rents translate to more individuals finding themselves on the street (Anderson, 2018). There is a lack of research addressing Housing First programs in isolated locations, have a high cost of living, and experience a scarcity of resources.

For current strategies, the National Alliance to End Homelessness (n.d.) posits five integrated solutions to ending homelessness. The coordinated approach ensures that the community develops innovative solutions to address the homeless' needs. Rapid rehousing means that once homeless clients are identified, they can quickly be housed and begin receiving services. For the most vulnerable populations, the mentally ill and those with substance abuse issues, permanent supportive housing is considered the most effective method to transition them out of homelessness. Another solution is a crisis response system with an aggressive outreach program and housing options. Finally, programs to combat the homeless must have the means to secure employment and income for their clients (National Alliance to End Homelessness, n.d.). National and international housing programs have incorporated these methodologies in varying degrees. However, these strategies have shortfalls. A study conducted by Canham, Wister, and O'Dea (2019), identified that Vancouver, Canada's Housing First program limited participants and funding by categorizing "chronically or episodically homeless,

by excluding those with transient housing accommodations. Verdouw and Habibis (2018) found that although the ultimate goal of Housing First is to reintegrate the homeless within their communities, homeless clients often have diverse aspirations for independence and self-sufficiency.

Additionally, programs can inadvertently create organizational and individual barriers, which hinder Housing First programs. Administrative barriers come into effect when programs implement limited resources, services, or additional steps to receive benefits. Offering services only during set hours or increasing enrollment criteria are examples of organizational barriers. Individual barriers are facets that limit a client's access to care, such as transportation, poverty, mental illness, or substance abuse history. The more barriers that exist, the harder it is for clients to access the treatment and services available (Parker & Helmut, 2012). While the solutions provided by the National Alliance to End Homelessness are a solid foundation for modern Housing First research, organizations must work to reduce barriers at all levels, communicate with the homeless to understand their desired end states, and not exclude homeless clients because they do not fall into the most vulnerable categories.

Organization Background and Context

Homelessness has been an ongoing challenge for IC for over a decade. In 2015, the homeless crisis forced IC's Governor to declare a state of emergency (State of Hawaii, 2016). Shortly after that, IC implemented its Housing First initiative to mitigate homelessness and reintegrate the homeless community. Since its implementation, the program cannot match the demand with the quantity and scope of services. As such, a

study is required to evaluate the program's strengths and weaknesses so that IC can revise its current practices and expand its efficiency.

IC is unlike any other city in the United States. First, its island is approximately 2,400 miles away from the rest of the country. This makes it the most geographically isolated megacity in the world (Caldwell, n.d.). It relies heavily on exports from the United States and other countries, with imports accounting for 96% of trade (U.S. Trade Numbers, 2020). The predominant funding source for IC is real property tax, representing 37.84% of the total revenues (City and County of Honolulu, 2018). The remainder of the income comes from various taxes and services IC provides. Thus, it lacks a stable economy from which to fund its projects and responsibilities. Consequently, raising property taxes systematically also contributes to poverty and homelessness, as more individuals are outpriced from the market. In 2015, it was estimated that the wage needed to afford a two-bedroom lodging was \$34.81 per hour, whereas the minimum wage was \$7.75 per hour (HUD Exchange, n.d.).

IC's homeless demographics are also unique to the island. According to the Point in Time count for 2020, Native Islanders, Pacific Islanders, and Multiracial individuals are 210% more likely to be homeless than the general public. Least likely to be homeless were individuals who identified as Asian (Partners in Care O'ahu's Continuum of Care, 2020). In the State of IC, Native Islanders and Pacific Islanders historically make significantly less income, roughly \$20,000 compared to that of their counterparts, and 42% of all households were identified as "cost-burdened" compared to national statistics (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2017). The Point in Time count

also identified that 24% of the homeless were chronically homeless, 28% experienced a physical disability, 25% had a mental health problem, and 18% had a substance abuse problem. However, unsheltered homeless rated higher in all these categories when compared to the sheltered homeless. Sheltered homeless means the individuals are residing in temporary accommodations like shelters and safe havens. Unsheltered homeless live in public spaces not designed as accommodations like parks and sidewalks. The chronically homeless have been homeless for over a year or have been homeless more than four times in three years, equaling twelve months. Chronically homeless also have a disability of some kind (Partners in Care O'ahu's Continuum of Care, 2020).

Since 2015, IC has designed and taken many steps towards addressing the needs of the homeless. These have included outreach programs, partnerships with various organizations within the community, and the Housing First framework's implementation. The program's vision borrows from Nelson Mandela, "It is in your hands to create a better world for all to live in it," lending to the need for a community movement (City and County of Honolulu, 2019, slide 2). IC's mayor, highlighted that only when the city, state, and service providers work together can homelessness be resolved. Within these constructs, he advocated for aggressive legislative changes, incorporation of local landlords to increase affordable housing units, and more comprehensive services from government, private, and nonprofit sectors across the island (City and County of Honolulu, 2019, slides 8-9). The current emphasis for IC's Housing First program is addressing the chronically homeless demographics.

Role of the Student/Researcher

This study consists of a program evaluation of IC's Housing First initiative and its implementation. I have no relationship with IC, Sun City, or any of their Housing First partners. However, having lived on its island for seven years, I am familiar with the unique challenges that homelessness presented within the IC. I am motivated to provide an outside perspective to help IC tackle this complex issue and have widespread success. My role was to conduct an in-depth analysis of the current framework, compare it to Sun City's program, and generate recommendations for advancement or implementation. My motivation for this study was to give back to the community and positively impact IC's efforts to resolve homelessness. I assessed that IC could do more for the homeless and an outside perspective could help identify areas for improvement due to its prolonged struggle with this issue. This belief is a potential bias, which I combated by utilizing peer and faculty feedback and requesting third-party reviews of my results, analysis, and data.

Summary

In Section 2, I discussed the literature contributing to my conceptual framework on Housing First initiatives, critical components of housing programs, and the CIPP evaluation method. The literature did not adequately address how to administer programs with IC's unique geography, high cost of living, and homeless demographics. Notwithstanding, the basic best practices and strategies can be applied, and the lessons learned are still valuable for assessing how IC can improve its program. Section 3 identifies how data was collected, analyzed and I conducted the study.

Section 3: Data Collection Process and Analysis

Introduction

IC's challenge is improving its fight against homelessness through its Housing First initiative. IC struggles to match homeless demand compared to the number of services, units, and permanent housing support needed. Subsequently, the study analyzed the existing Housing First program, identified strengths and weaknesses, and offers recommendations to expand the homelessness' scope and extend of support. This section will address the alignment between the research question and proposed methodology, identify the sources of evidence I used, and articulate the study's methods.

Practiced-Focused Questions

IC has challenges optimizing its Housing First initiatives to mitigate homelessness within its jurisdiction effectively. The Housing First model is a nationally recognized strategy to reduce homelessness. There is very little research on how Housing First programs are implemented in geographically isolated locations, dependent on imports, and have a high living cost. Notably, there is a significant gap in the literature to address the challenges faced by IC. I conducted a single case study comparing IC's program to Sun City's to address the gap. All data collected were used to answer the study's practice-focused questions:

GQ1: What are the strengths and weaknesses of Island City's Housing First program?

GQ2: How can Island City improve its program to secure housing for more of its homeless community?

GQ3: What practices and procedures used by the benchmark of Sun City can be used by Island City to expand the reach of its program?

Sources of Evidence

I designed this qualitative study to benchmark IC's Housing First program against Sun City's initiatives. To do so, I used the CIPP evaluation model to conduct a program evaluation case study of both cities to ascertain the benefits and shortfalls of each. Under this framework, I explored the program's intent, investments, outcomes, and alternative approaches to consider. The sources of data I used were publicly accessible reports, data, and statistics; government websites for IC and Sun City to access program information, results, and strategies; the websites and reports of identified partners in their Housing First Programs to determine the interoperability efforts, and services afforded to the homeless. I used city and state homelessness Point in Time counts and statistics to identify homeless demographics, changes over time and review turnover rates for each city. City, state, and federal level interagency councils on homelessness, housing offices, and health and human services were used to identify trends and collect data on IC's and Sun City's programs. The HUD websites assessed time information, housing stock information, and the Housing First framework. The data collected were analyzed for themes and patterns that could help improve IC's program.

Published Outcomes and Research

To find literature and outcomes related to Housing First programs and reducing homelessness, I used the Walden Library website, academic databases, google scholar, and search engines. I used search terms including program evaluation models, Housing

First history, Housing First programs and homelessness, Housing First program sustainability, Housing First program and high cost of living, Housing First program and isolated communities, Housing First initiatives, and cities with successful Housing First programs. The literature review scope spanned from 2011-2020 and included peer-reviewed articles, journal articles, books, newspaper columns, and internet sites.

Archival and Operational Data

To conduct a program evaluation and case study, I used operational and archival data from IC, State of IC, and Sun City government websites and their affiliates and the websites of Housing First partners. These sources provided direct access to Housing First program information, strategies, and homelessness demographics and identify how partners contribute to the initiatives. The data from these sources included quantitative numbers regarding the quantity of homeless, breakdowns of homeless demographics, and trend data. Qualitative data included interviews with the homeless, testimony, and government, private, and nonprofit assessments. For example, HUD requires the Point in Time Counts annually. The data were collected by volunteers, the City/County officials, or conducted by academic institutions on behalf of the city or county. This data is publicly accessible information and does not require special permissions or coordination.

Evidence Generated for the Administrative Study

For this program evaluation, I intended to conduct four to six interviews with Housing First leadership from both programs, however, I was only able to conduct one interview. The participant was affiliated with IC's Housing First program and knowledgeable about the current policies and initiatives associated with its program. Prior

to starting the interview, I obtained verbal consent from the participant to be interviewed and to record responses. In accordance with Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies data will be kept for five years and secure with encryption. The IRB approval number for this study is 01-04-21-0975005. As a point of departure, the following questions were used:

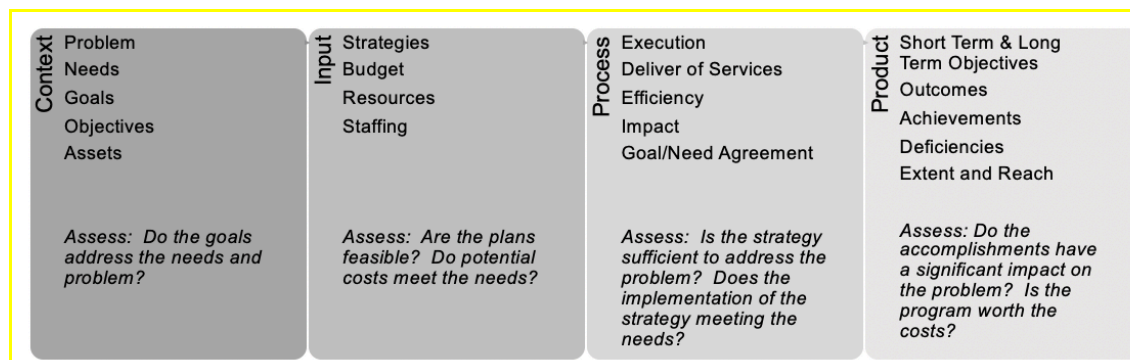
1. How many years have you been involved in the Housing First programs?
2. How would you assess your knowledge and experience level with these programs?
3. What do you assess as the most critical component of the Housing First model?
4. In your experience, what has been the most significant challenge to Housing First implementation?
5. How would you define success in a Housing First program?
6. What metrics do you use to measure these successes and shortcomings?
7. In your opinion, what would lead a Housing First program to fail?

I made numerous attempts to secure additional interviews but was unsuccessful. I tried contacting the lead housing authorities and Housing First authorities via telephonic and electronic means. I reached out to the public affairs offices. I also called the numbers listed on IC and Sun City's websites attempting to arrange interviews. I received one email response, where the recipient directed me to a different point of contact. I also received one call-back from which I was able to schedule the single interview. I assessed that the lack of response from either city was partially related to the impacts of COVID-19. The lack of interviews is a limitation as, I intended the interviews to augment my

study and provide valuable insight into the respective programs and metrics for successes and shortcomings. Further, I expected the data derived from the interviews to fill in gaps that may be present in publicly available information.

Due to the lack of interviews, I revisited the publicly available data available and dug deeper to ascertain themes, trends, and patterns I may have missed. I also reviewed data, strategies, and recommendations provided by lead organizations within the Housing First field to best frame the strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations. While these additional steps do not compensate for interviews and potential insights into each Housing First program, valuable information can still be derived from this study to assist IC in improving its program.

I conducted the study with publicly accessible information and reviewed all available Housing First program information for IC and Sun City. For this program evaluation, I used Stufflebeam and Coryn's (2014) CIPP Evaluation Model guide to conducting a comprehensive assessment of IC's and Sun City's Housing First program. I began with the goals, objectives, and needs assessments. I reviewed program designs, including the allocation of resources and strategies from each respective city. Then I examined the program implementation and compared it to the needs and objectives identified by the municipalities. Then I assessed the outcomes of the program as it related to the city's unique goals.

Figure 1*CIPP Model for Housing First Program Evaluation*

Note. Information derived from Stufflebeam and Coryn's CIPP Evaluation Guide, 2014.

Before conducting the study, I reviewed all accessible data for IC and Sun City related to the CIPP evaluation model. With the compiled information, I systematically assessed each program according to the CIPP evaluation framework. I considered how the program exceeded, met, or fell short of the metric for each category. The data were compared to identify common trends and patterns and determine which practices could improve IC's program. The process took approximately sixty days to complete. While IC is aware of the study, it was not an active participant. IC is the target audience for this study, not the client.

Analysis and Synthesis

A program evaluation of publicly available information and reports were used to answer the study's research questions. Using the CIPP model guide from Stufflebeam and Coryn (2014), I analyzed the four evaluation categories and took copious notes for IC and Sun City's Housing First programs. I carefully reviewed the notes for first-impressions and then manually code them to ascertain patterns, themes, inconsistencies,

and significant differences between the two programs. I used descriptive statistics to compare population sizes, changes in annual homelessness percentages, Housing First turnover rates, and demographics of the homeless populations. To ensure the evidence's integrity, I collaborated with data from multiple sources to check the fidelity of information. Additionally, I had all results peer-reviewed to mitigate any potential biases in the study. Any information gaps or outliers are annotated and listed in the Findings and Implications section for full transparency. I provided IC a copy of the study with an executive summary documenting the outcomes and recommendations.

Summary

In section 3, I outlined my qualitative program evaluation concept to address the Housing First challenges faced by IC. I used the CIPP evaluation model to assess IC's Housing First initiative's overall strengths and weaknesses. I used Sun City's program to identify lessons learned and best practices that IC can implement. In Section 4, I discuss my study results by characterizing the findings and implications for future research. I also identify recommendations for IC to improve the scope and extent of its Housing initiative to reduce homelessness.

Section 4: Evaluation and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to conduct a CIPP program evaluation of IC and benchmark its Housing First Program against Sun City's program. IC has struggled to match the demand of homelessness within the Island of Island City to meet the homeless community's needs. While there is extensive literature on Housing First programs as the means to mitigate homelessness, there is a distinct lack of literature for how to address homelessness in an area that is geographically isolated, has a high cost of living, and finite resources. To address this lacuna, I evaluated both IC's and Sun City's Housing First programs utilizing Stufflebeam's CIPP model to compare program components. I also conducted one interview to glean an inside perspective about IC's program strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. I used the data derived from this study to make recommendations that could benefit IC's program. Section 4 covers the findings and implications from both program evaluations, interview, descriptive statistics strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of the study.

Findings and Implications

Island City: Context Evaluation

Context evaluations assess the alignment between goals, assets, and the need at hand. IC's overarching goal is to end and prevent homelessness under the State of IC's statewide response to the issue (City and County of Honolulu, 2019). IC aims to establish 1,600 new affordable housing units annually, with IC securing 800 and the state matching its efforts over four years, generating an expected 6,400 units (City and County of

Honolulu, n.d.). IC is also focusing on incentivizing private developers and the community to increase the affordable housing stock while reducing the city's budget expenditures for housing development. Further, IC is leveraging federal grants to help finance and support its initiative. IC also plans to link affordable housing development with its ongoing rail project (City and County of Honolulu, 2017b). IC projections assess that 2,400 unsheltered homeless are in the streets every day, and approximately 46% of residents are at risk of homelessness (City and County of Honolulu, 2019d.). IC has one of the country's worse homeless situations due to the extent of homelessness and limited resources available (City and County of Honolulu, 2015).

Sun City Housing Data: Context Evaluation

Sun City's goal is to end homelessness by taking centralized ownership of the assets, resources, and encouraging innovative ways to create opportunities. Although resolving homelessness and securing additional housing options is at the forefront of its methodology, there are supplemental goals of maximizing resources through operational efficiencies, fostering an innovative climate, and using an integrated systems approach. This sub-goal has enabled personnel to identify new ways to conduct outreach, secure federal funding, and provide services (San Diego Housing Commission, 2014). For example, Sun City was the first Housing First program to secure control of all federal housing vouchers from HUD and is 1 of 39 cities to receive federal Moving to Work funds to aid in property purchases for housing options (San Diego Housing Commission, 2017). Sun City struggles with having the fourth largest homeless population in the United States, extremely low vacancy rates, and an affordable housing deficit. In 2017,

Sun City assessed over 9,116 homeless on any given night (Regional Task Force on the Homeless, 2017).

Discussion

Do goals address the needs and problem? One of the earliest and most critical steps of any program is ensuring goals are nested with the problem at hand. Both IC and Sun City have the overarching goal of ending homelessness. Without further specificity, these goals are unrealistic as they are not timebound or achievable. IC added specificity by setting a set minimum number of affordable housing units built each year to match or exceed 6,400 units in total. With an average of 2,400 unsheltered homeless on the streets each day, this goal would match the need. However, it is unclear whether all affordable housing units will be allocated to Housing First initiative or if they will be split with the low and very-low-income individuals. If these units are divided, it could impede goal-need alignment. Another goal set by IC is co-locating Housing First establishments with the island rail project. This expands employment opportunities for the homeless and provides an immediate means to connect with resources. However, the rail is still under construction, and there has been limited advancement in developing those areas.

Sun City aims to end homelessness through empowerment and a centralized framework. Employees and partners are encouraged to innovate, create, and leverage all opportunities to expand the reach of Housing First. The centralized framework connects all services, providers, and resources to manage assets and leverage capabilities best. In doing so, Sun City has secured full rights to all federal housing vouchers and sustains federal funds and grants that are invested into affordable housing acquisitions. Here the

goals are focused on the human dimension and less on tangible benchmarks. This makes the goal and needs alignment abstract, leading to a more creative and diverse approach. However, there is a threshold where too many ideas deplete resources and lose effectiveness. As it stands, Sun City's need exceeds 9,000 individuals, which requires extensive resources and funding.

Island City: Input Evaluation

Input evaluations assess the strategies, systems, and capabilities the organization has to execute its program. The primary strategy for IC is threefold—create more housing options, update regulations and policies to encourage private-sector development, and integrated housing options with the island rail project (City and County of Honolulu, 2019). The mayor focused on regulatory reforms to offer widespread incentives for private developers, including waiving fees and increasing tax exemptions associated with affordable housing units. IC granted private citizens similar tax exemptions if they were willing to build small studios on their properties to bolster homeless efforts (City and County of Honolulu, 2015). IC budgets approximately \$500k to the Institute of Human Services division, which leads the Housing First Program and related outreach services (City and County of Honolulu, 2019e). IC has \$40.3 million is reserved for acquisitions and development of new housing options. An additional \$10.4 million comes from federal grant programs specifically earmarked towards affordable housing. Still, a portion of these funds is invested in low-income residents who do not qualify as homeless (City and County of Honolulu, 2019). The island rail project is a city initiative to link outlying cities with the major city to reduce traffic congestion, expand job opportunities, and

decrease commuting times. By nesting the rail with Housing First, and affordable housing developments, IC will expand employment opportunities for the homeless and increase self-sufficiency (City and County of Honolulu, 2015).

Sun City Housing Data: Input Evaluation

Sun City established a centralized framework to address homelessness, creating a single location for all homeless resources, case management, and associated actions. This framework enables providers across Sun City county to connect resources with the client. Further, the system includes determining revenues, costs, resources, and outputs for all tenants of the Housing First program (San Diego Housing Commission, 2014). Sun City created a Governance Board of Regional Continuum of Care to direct funds and created the Regional Task Force on Homelessness to lead policies, operational focuses, and initiatives across Sun City County (San Diego Housing Commission, 2016b). From 2018-2020, Sun City allocated over \$255 million to invest in projects related to homelessness and was awarded \$29.8 million to permanent supportive housing development (San Diego Housing Commission, 2017b). Sun City has approximately 3,635 shelter beds, 2,511 Permanent Supportive Housing beds, and 706 Rapid Rehousing beds (Regional Task Force on the Homeless, 2017).

Discussion

Are plans feasible? Do potential costs meet the needs? As previously mentioned, IC aims to use policy reform to incentivize development and nest Housing First with its rail project. This innovative approach augments potential funding shortages faced by IC and leverages the private sector to reduce a systemic issue. Based on the Mayor's

proposal in 2017, the required affordable housing allotments per new building project will range from 5-20% of the total stock—a minor decrease from existing policy. Half of the affordable units must remain at 120% annual median income (AMI) in exchange for the reduction. The other half must remain at 100% AMI, which makes the units exponentially more affordable. These units must remain at these set AMI percentages for 30 years as opposed to ten. In conjunction, IC waived significant fees, including property taxes on affordable units, private activity bonds, and expedited building permits (City and County of Honolulu, 2017b). These changes allow developers to save money and make a more significant profit within the market. However, while this legislation extends affordability, it decreases new affordable housing introduced into the market. In IC, where much of the population is low-income earners, this could negatively impact the dispersion of units between those at-risk for homelessness and the homeless. Connecting affordable housing with the rail does maximize the opportunities associated with care and supportive services. By co-locating the two, the homeless have an easy access point from which to commute to and from employment, care, and to obtain self-sufficiency. The drawback is that the rail is still under construction and corresponding housing efforts are contingent upon the rail's completion. Otherwise, IC will have to create alternative means to connect clients with resources. Finally, IC's budget is relatively limited. Annually, IC budgets \$500,000 for its Institute of Human Services to administer Housing First services. It allocates an additional \$40.3 million towards acquisition and development and receives \$10.4 million in federal grants. This equates to about \$11,500 per homeless individual, based on the 2020 Point in Time Count. On average, the renovation of one

unit as affordable housing costs over \$40,000 (Kimura, 2007). IC's program is feasible inasmuch as it can secure private sector buy-in and finalize the rail project. Outside funds, grants, and donations are also needed to ensure required costs are met and sustained.

Sun City's people-centric strategy is dynamic in regards to the different strategies and approaches to end homelessness. Sun City credits its employees with consistently advancing methodologies and techniques to reach the homeless. As part of this, the city has created a centralized system that records all care, services, revenues, costs, and resources connected with Housing First to gauge efficiency and streamline care. The city also created two separate bodies, the Governance Board of Region Continuum of Care, to manage funds, and the Regional Task Force on Homelessness to manage policies and operational initiatives. Combining these three provides a system of checks and balances through which all Housing First elements are screened. Sun City has a substantive budget dedicated to Housing First and receives recurring grants, funds, and awards from the federal government and private sectors. From 2018-2020, Sun City dedicated over \$255 million towards permanent supportive housing and was awarded an additional \$29.8 million, averaging to approximately \$94.9 million per year. This equated to about \$12,300 per homeless individual in 2020. This does not include the funds provided by public-private partnerships, contributions, and agreements that Sun City secures through advocacy. Unlike IC, Sun City owns and oversees nearly all affordable housing units, vouchers, and rights within its jurisdiction. Sun City has the components necessary to manage a successful Housing First program with its internal checks and balance system

and tight control over resources and funds. The sustained funding sources and significant internal budget allocations also lend to a feasible cost-needs agreement.

Island City: Process Evaluation

Process evaluations examine how the cities execute their programs to ascertain how efficiently services are delivered. IC has implemented various programs and initiatives to reach the homeless population and connect them with services. IC developed three outreach initiatives to reach the homeless. Homeless Outreach and Navigation for Unsheltered Persons (HONU) is a mobile-based platform that temporarily occupies public spaces, serves as a transitional housing option, triage center, and brings providers to the homeless (City and County of Honolulu, 2019b). This temporary triage center remains for approximately 60-90 days and can house 80-100 individuals to secure permanent supportive housing and address their needs. This program launched in late 2019, and data is still limited. IC has also capitalized on utilizing the Island Police Department (IPD) as a link between the homeless and services due to the frequent interactions. IPD has received training in Crisis Intervention and mental health training, making it one of four police departments in the nation to secure Crisis Intervention Team grants (City and County of Honolulu, 2019b). Under the Health Efficiency Long-Term Partnership (HELP), IPD has also partnered with community and health care professionals to get homeless off the street by connecting them with available shelter beds and housing options. Thus far, HELP has placed over 216 homeless into shelters (City and County of Honolulu, 2019d).

Between 2015-2019, the mayor implemented a challenge to mitigate veteran homelessness. This drive led to 2,016 veterans placed in permanent supportive housing (City and County of Honolulu, 2019c). In addition to housing vouchers and rapid rehousing, IC established a Landlord Engagement drive where property owners with vacant rentals can house the homeless or at-risk citizens for tax breaks and guaranteed deposits. The purpose of this engagement is to augment housing shortages across the island (City and County of Honolulu, 2018b). IC has also taken a positive step in creating permanent housing solutions through its Kahuiki Village project. Kahuiki Village is still under construction, but when finished, it will have 144 one to two-bedroom homes, shared farming spaces, onsite child care, and have partnerships where residents can secure employment with nearby businesses. This project will house over 600 homeless (Kahuiki Village, n.d.). Under the Mayor's vision, it will build similar villages along the island rail stops to ensure the homeless' access to and from job opportunities (City and County of Honolulu, 2017). IC emphasized that private corporations and companies spearhead affordable housing development in exchange for significant tax breaks, reduced permit costs, and various exemptions from the city government, in conjunction with updated building legislation (City and County of Honolulu, 2015). According to its 2019 study, IC's Housing First program has reached 268 individuals, with 103 clients completing the program (Institute of Human Services, 2019). However, these numbers do not accurately reflect the number of homeless that have received treatment, been placed in shelters, or secured permanent supportive housing through IC's affordable housing strategy, outreach programs, and community efforts that complement the Housing First

initiative. One challenge in identifying the total number of advances is that they are not clearly listed or aggregated, nor is there a centralized location annotating progress.

Sun City Housing Data: Process Evaluation

Like IC, Sun City has tackled Housing First with a widespread and comprehensive approach. Sun City uses its Landlord Engagement and Assistance Program to mitigate homelessness within its jurisdiction, specifically homeless veterans. Landlords are guaranteed to receive \$500 for the first veteran rental and an additional \$250 per client. Landlords also receive funds for damages, security deposits, and listing expenses (San Diego Housing Commission, 2016). This initiative secured over 430 landlords to aid homeless veterans (San Diego Housing Commission, 2017). Additionally, Sun City developed a Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement System as the central database to track, assign, allocate, and prioritize all homeless services. This includes a vulnerability assessment tool to ensure optimal care, and those of greatest need are serviced first (San Diego Housing Commission, 2016b). Each year Sun City hosts Project Homeless Connect, a joint public and private sector event. The homeless can receive medical treatment, vaccinations, pet care, housing assistance, meals, and supplies free of charge (San Diego Housing Commission, 2019).

Sun City also takes the lead role in Housing First within their jurisdiction. While Housing First is a public, private, and non-profit partnership, the Sun City Housing Commission actively seeks solutions and innovative ways to reduce homelessness (San Diego Housing Commission, n.d.). From 2014-2017, the Sun City Housing Commission and partners secured over \$45 million to increase permanent supportive housing stock by

624 units and over 1900 housing vouchers (San Diego Housing Commission, 2017). The city also introduced two pilot programs to assist in the education of homeless individuals and families. The Monarch School Project helps up to 25 families by providing rental assistance, meals, supplies, and job training as long as the child remains enrolled in the school (San Diego Housing Commission, 2016b). The Guardian Scholars Program is the first partnership between a university and city leadership to assist 100 college students who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness. Under this initiative, recipients will receive assistance with tuition, meals, books, and lodging. The city and university will invest approximately one million dollars annually (San Diego Housing Commission, 2015). Sun City has been recognized as a Housing First leader due to its ability to secure funds, integrated approach to both systems and public-private partnerships, and innovatively creating affordable housing. Sun City has also been awarded for its transparency in all aspects of its Housing First program (San Diego Housing Commission, 2014), making all reports, findings, and actions centralized and easily accessible.

Discussion

Does the strategy sufficiently address the problem? Does the implementation of the program match the needs? Despite limited funds and resources, IC's strategy has made an impact on homelessness within its jurisdiction. In its pilot, Housing First program with the Institute for Human Services, 90% of clients have not returned to homelessness. This creates a strong foundation that can be implemented on a larger scale and service the most vulnerable homeless populations. Connecting services to the

homeless are also critical to any Housing First program. IC has introduced numerous outreach platforms, including nesting services on google maps and creating a hotline for those in need. By enhancing the variety and reach of entry points, IC can connect with more individuals more efficiently. HONU, HELP, the Mayor's Veteran challenge, and Landlord engagement initiatives all contribute something significant to the Housing First program. However, these initiatives need to be implemented on a larger scale to have more of an impact. For example, HONU services one location for 60-90 days. If IC implemented two or three HONU stations at any given time, over 200 clients could be cared for at any given time—including transitioning them into permanent supportive housing. Likewise, the Kahuiki Village project has profound implications for how IC can establish self-sufficiency, employment, and supportive housing in one centralized location. With little room to expand, IC should explore doubling or tripling the scale of the villages by introducing multiple story dwellings. While this project is primarily funded by donations and the private sector, the city can also adopt this model in planned developments along the rail. Further, under the policy and legislative reform, these developments can remain within the affordable housing stock, with a centralized committee overseeing occupancy. IC can have a more substantial impact on homelessness and better consolidate resources by capitalizing on these opportunities to double or triple Housing First projects and control resources. In this respect, IC's strategy has the potential to address the problem and for implementation to match the problem. However, its current projects to be reviewed and scaled to match current trends in

homelessness and geared towards securing assets explicitly reserved for the homeless as opposed to those at-risk for homelessness.

Sun City people-focused strategy has made a difference in its Housing First Program. Sun City has pioneered several public-private partnerships, where the parties involved share the responsibilities of caring for the homeless. The focus of these partnerships is also oriented to the partner's area of influence. For example, its partnership with a local university, Sun City, targets homeless college students. Sun City incorporated its people-first strategy in landlord engagement efforts by guaranteeing monetary assistance and granting additional provisions to protect the owner while expanding housing opportunities. Through Project Homeless Connect, the city provides services to over 6,000 annually, with public, private, and no-profit sector collaboration to ensure the homeless receive medical treatment, advice, supplies, and a plethora of other necessities (Project Homeless Connect, n.d.). Further, utilizing a centralized repository for all services, resources, and actions exponentially increases efficiency and streamlines client care. Because of these efforts, Sun City has frequently exceeded annual goals for permanent supportive housing development, vouchers, and outreach opportunities, making its strategy sufficient and capable of matching the current need.

Island City: Product Evaluation

Product evolutions examine the outcomes, benefits, sustainability, and impact of a program. Island has seen some successes under its Housing First program. According to the 2019 Housing First program summary, over 90% of clients have not returned to homelessness, and the program reached 326 individuals since its creation (Institute of

Human Service, 2020). In line with this, IC has secured 315 Housing First vouchers which enable up to 450 individuals permanent supportive housing at any given time. (Department of Customer Services, 2019). From 2015-2020, IC has decreased veteran homelessness by 24%, youth homelessness by 45%, and family homelessness by 48%. However, from 2015-2019, the number of unsheltered homeless increased by approximately 19% (Partners in Care O’ahu’s Continuum of Care, 2020). IC also adopted the state’s Coordinated Homeless Crisis Response System, with three access points for homeless individuals to seek care and be connected with the most appropriate resources. These entry points include a hotline, outreach programs, and emergency shelters (City and County of Honolulu, 2019). Despite the numerous initiatives and outreaches associated with Housing First, Island has struggled to capitalize on successes on a large scale. For example, the Housing First trial, conducted on behalf of IC, has only serviced 326 clients over five years. However, the number of unsheltered homeless has exponentially exceeded that capacity. Further, based on current policies, approaches, and strategies, IC focuses on incentivizing and facilitating resources instead of developing and executing strategies. Additionally, there is a great level of ambiguity about the percentage of affordable housing units devoted to the homeless versus how many units are dedicated to low- and very-low-income individuals, making it difficult to assess how many housing options are available.

Sun City Housing Data: Product Evaluation

Sun City has made various strides with its Housing First Program. Within five years, Sun City created approximately 6,000 permanent supportive housing options,

exceeding initial objectives in 18 months (San Diego Housing Commission, 2019b). In total, the city has acquired over 6,000 beds and units available, out of which there is an 82-85% average utilization rate (Corporation for Supportive Housing, 2019). Although collective homelessness has only decreased 9% in the past five years, Sun City has seen a 29% reduction in veteran homelessness since 2013 (San Diego Housing Commission, 2017b). Further, the Corporation for Supportive Housing (2019) projected that Sun City was on target to decrease unsheltered homelessness by 50%, end veteran homelessness, and end youth homelessness by 2022. Sun City continues to identify federal funds, grants, and innovative ways to leverage resources to meet the homeless' needs. However, Sun City has experienced difficulties with cross-agency cooperation. Each agency fulfills the functions within their jurisdiction; however, they inadvertently establish competing priorities without communicating their initiatives and hinder effective decision-making (Corporation for Supportive Housing, 2019).

Discussion

Do the accomplishments have significant impacts on the problem? Is the program worth the costs? IC has experienced a slight decline in veteran, youth, and family homelessness, decreasing total homeless numbers. However, it has also seen unsheltered homelessness grow by 19% (Partners in Care O'ahu's Continuum of Care, 2020). This shows that IC impacts specific demographics but is not seeing equal returns within unsheltered populations. This could be related to new entries into homelessness or show a trend where sheltered homeless are returning to the streets. To have the most considerable impact, IC needs to explore this occurrence to best tailor its approach. If

sheltered homeless are reverting to the streets, it is critical to understand the leading factors to be addressed and mitigated. Likewise, if the increase is related to the newly homeless, how can IC reach these clients? What is interesting to note is that the Housing First pilot program has a 90% success rate. While the study population for the pilot is under 400 clients, the framework is highly effective. If IC were to combine the approach of the Housing First pilot and the methodologies used to reduce youth and family homelessness, it would arguably experience rapid growth in its program. However, it is unclear if IC has the resources and funding to sustain a prolonged strategy under this schema. As such, while IC's program has impacted the homeless situation, I do not assess impacts could be classified as "significant." Nor do I assess IC currently has the resource bandwidth to sustain a significant effort. However, I assess that IC's program is worth the cost due to its impact on youth and family homelessness.

Sun City has reduced homelessness by 9% and veteran homelessness by 29% within five years (San Diego Housing Commission, 2017b). Further, Sun City has expanded its permanent supportive resources by over 6,000 within the same timeframe. This equates to the creation of over 1,000 new options each year. If Sun City can sustain this output, it will double its stock by over 12,000 options by 2025. This would exceed the demand for over 9,000 homeless, assuming the size of the homeless population remains stable. Moreover, external reviews assess that Sun City is on track to resolve youth and veteran homelessness completely. The city also expands, adds, and creates new funding options and partnerships to expand its Housing First program resources. In doing so, Sun City has the capital and bandwidth to provide, expand, and renew services within

its jurisdiction. Through these efforts, Sun City has had a significant impact on homelessness and has ensured its Housing First program is well-worth the costs.

Interview Feedback

For this study, I interviewed a senior leader affiliated with IC's Housing First program. During the interview, I asked questions related to the strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities associated with IC's program. Based on the feedback provided, the participant attributes the program's success "lies with the providers and Partners in Care, and their ability to work with different providers...and work on the system of landlord engagement for placement areas." The program continues to grow, make advances, and expand its support to the homeless. The program statistics also trend in a positive direction, seeing an "increase in movements within the system" over the last year.

When it comes to weaknesses, one of the most significant shortfalls is the housing inventory. Without sufficient housing and beds, there is nowhere to transition the homeless. Until recently, developers were only engaged with individual-based vouchers, which impacted the motivation to build affordable housing. However, project-based vouchers are being introduced and are expected to help bridge the gap. Challenges include enhancing landlord engagement, ensuring the homeless are emotionally and administratively ready for housing and services, a stressed Housing First system, and ensuring that by focusing on permanent supportive housing, other dimensions—transitional, shelter, and emergency shelter beds—are not neglected. When asked about implementing Housing First programs, the participant stated "people have to be housing

ready, emotionally and things like IDs, social security cards, which are not easy for them to get.” Highlighting the role, the homeless play within determining their own care.

IC also has numerous opportunities ahead of it, including a pilot program where volunteer organizations can sponsor homeless individuals, or families, in conjunction with social workers to increase the number of individuals helped each year. Here, IC is posturing to make better use of federal and state resources to maximize funding and vouchers. According to the participant, “[IC] was just notified by HUD... a new set of vouchers, called Emergency Relief vouchers, around 300 will be issued,” and the city is assessing how and where to use them. The participant also stated that due to the nature of grants, vouchers, and the flow of federal funds, partners are at risk of becoming territorial. However, it is critical to the program’s success for all parties to come together and collaborate. Further, there is a distinct difference between measuring success by the number of individuals who have moved in the system versus measuring success by how many people are still on the street.

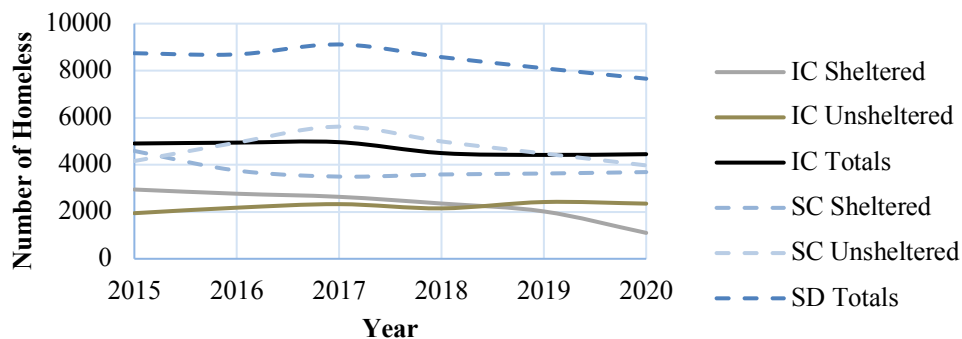
This interview provided valuable insight into how IC’s program was implemented and the interconnectivity of each facet of the program. One of the key areas where IC needs to invest its effort is increasing the affordable housing inventory while enhancing support to shelters and transitional housing. The participant’s insight that success should be determined by changes to homeless still the street, opposed to movements within permanent supportive housing, is an important distinction. Those in housing have taken steps to change their situation. However, those on the street still have the greatest needs and may require more effort, assistance, and a higher allocation of resources to impact.

Until all these individuals have been assisted, homelessness will remain a prevalent problem within Island City. Additionally, homelessness is a multi-faceted problem that requires a multi-faceted approach. Competition or a lack of collaboration between partners will hinder advancement and limit what the community can do.

Descriptive Data

Figure 2

Homeless Trends for Island City and Sand City



Note. The data for homeless trends is derived from the Point in Time Count reports listed on the City and County of Honolulu's (n.d.b) and the Regional Taskforce on the Homeless' (n.d.) websites.

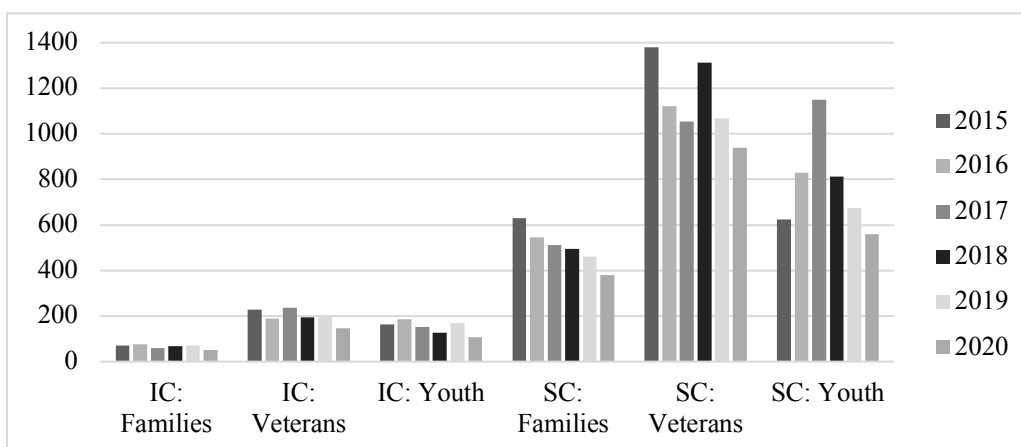
Figure 2 depicts the changes to IC's and Sun City's homelessness from 2015-2020. From 2015 to 2020, IC's homeless population decreased from 4,903 individuals to 4,448, or 9.2%. The number of sheltered homeless individuals decreased by 62%, a reduction of 1,844 individuals. However, unsheltered homelessness increased by 20.9%, equating to a total of 2,346 unsheltered homeless counted in 2020. The changes in homeless totals indicate IC is making a modest impact through its initiatives. However,

the significant drop in sheltered homelessness and rise in unsheltered homelessness may indicate a shift, where more individuals have taken to the streets instead of utilizing available resources like shelters and permanent supportive housing. It could also mean that more sheltered individuals are exiting Housing First programs and are obtaining self-sufficiency. However, homelessness is a fluid entity influenced by various factors, making it difficult to determine if variances relate to the introduction of new homeless clients or if the changes reflect differences in the current homeless population.

In the last five years, Sun City experienced a decrease of 1,084 individuals or 12.4%. Unsheltered and sheltered numbers have similarly decreased by 19.6% and 4.5%, respectively. These numbers exhibit a downward trend across the board, indicating that unsheltered homeless are connected with services and sheltered homeless are transitioning. However, more data is needed to distinguish how these numbers relate to newly homeless and chronically homeless clients.

Figure 3

Changes in Homeless Subpopulations



Note. The data for homeless trends is derived from the Point in Time Count reports listed on the City and County of Honolulu's (n.d.b) and the Regional Taskforce on the Homeless' (n.d.) websites.

Figure 3 examines changes in homeless subpopulations. Both cities implemented initiatives to target and reduce homelessness across family, veteran, and youth homelessness. IC has reduced the number of homeless families from 71 to 52 (26.7%), homeless veterans from 227 to 146 (35.7%), and homeless youth from 164 to 108 (34.1%). IC needs to capitalize on the strategies it used here to target and mitigate other subpopulations. Further, if IC can enhance the services and resources it is currently offering to these groups, it will have a more immediate impact.

Likewise, Sun City experienced a decline in homelessness for these subpopulations. Family homelessness lessened by 250, or 39.6%, veteran homelessness was cut by 441 individuals (21.9%), and youth homelessness went down by 66 adolescents (10.6%). The comparatively low decrease in youth homelessness may indicate that Sun City should add more emphasis or expand services to bolster support. Comparatively, Sun City's subpopulations range from 135-151% greater than IC's, yet Sun City has seen exponentially more success in creating opportunities and mitigating homelessness—a total reduction of 757 versus 156.

Guiding Questions

Guiding Question 1

GQ1: What are the strengths and weaknesses of Island City's Housing First program?

IC has several program strengths, including the high success rate in its pilot program, leveraging organic resources to maximize opportunities to connect the homeless with services, and its aggressive outreach programs, like HONU. IC has done an exceptional job bringing the resources and care directly to the homeless, increasing chances to treat, educate, and assist the community. IC's heavy reliance on public and non-profit partners is both a strength and weakness, as it mitigates IC's financial limitation; however, it also reduces IC's ability to direct and oversee specific program areas. IC also lacks a great deal of clarity and transparency regarding its program, activities, and implementation.

Guiding Question 2

GQ2: How can Island City improve its program to secure housing for more of its homeless community?

IC can improve its program through increased transparency at all levels, taking a more active leadership role, clarifying the scope of its Housing First program, and capitalizing on its successes to significantly impact the homeless problem. Further, IC needs to invest in locating and securing more funding revenues and maximizing housing options.

Guiding Question 3

GQ3: What practices and procedures used by the benchmark of Sun City can be used by Island City to expand the reach of its program?

IC could adopt several approaches, methodologies, and practices from Sun City to improve its program. First, IC needs a clear direction and program summary and take a more prominent role in its execution. Second, IC needs to aggressively pursue opportunities to innovate, empower staff, and secure permanent supportive housing. Third, IC needs to explore funds and grants offered at all levels to mitigate internal budget shortfalls. Further, when efforts yield strong results, they need to be duplicated and applied on a large scale.

One significant limiting factor for this study and its results is the lack of interview participants needed to clarify IC's Housing First program. Without these insights, valuable context and program details may have been missed. However, despite this shortcoming, the data derived from my study still contains relevant information that can be used to strengthen IC's program. This study is also applicable to the broader field of Housing First initiatives. It contributes data on how such programs can be implemented in areas with unique characteristics, advancing positive social change in this field of study.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Scale and Scope

IC needs to capitalize on their success to expand the scale and scope of its Housing First program at every opportunity. IC can have an immediate impact on homelessness by capitalizing on successful initiatives and increasing the scale of those projects. Utilizing the IPD to address homelessness is an effective outreach, as they have daily interactions and can connect the homeless with services as part of their daily routine. Similarly, HONU can directly bring service providers to the homeless and increase opportunities to treat, educate, and connect with that individual. If one HONU site can serve over 100 individuals, two or three mobile units placed across the island would reach several homeless hotspots simultaneously. The Kuhuiki Village is an excellent example of how IC, a private and non-profit organization, can rally to create a sustainable housing community for the homeless. This development is projected to house up to 600 homeless and enable the residents to live self-sufficiently, and comes with employment opportunities. Had the team designed multi-level facilities instead of single-story establishments, it could have reached 1,200-1,800 individuals. With the intent to create co-locate affordable housing with island rail stops, IC needs to take every action to ensure the Kuhuiki Village model is replicated. The pilot Housing First program has also shown a 90% reintegration rate; however, it has reached fewer than 400 individuals in five years. The strategies used are effective and could make a significant impact if they could reach more people in a more immediate manner. Sun City allocates a significant portion of its budget towards purchasing and renovating properties as permanent

supportive housing and increasing incentives for community support. IC is doing this but could expand the span and scope of its efforts instead of heavily relying on private entities. While budget and resources are a critical factor in accomplishing this, even small service increases can have an immense benefit.

Recommendation 2: Funding Sources

IC needs to leverage all federal, private, and non-profit grants and funding sources to increase the capital available to invest in Housing First. Sun City has secured numerous grants for which IC may also be eligible. For example, under the Movement to Work program, federal funds are delegated down to the local housing commission level and provided the local housing authority the ability to manage funds and vouchers within their jurisdiction (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.). There is a plethora of grants and funds available from all levels of government, private, and non-profit entities related to Housing First, affordable housing, homelessness, and client care. While some of these sources may not be renewable, each can supplement IC's internal budget shortages. These opportunities are easily accessible from the lead agency's website or through databases hosted by third parties. To aid in this, IC could create a team or allocate additional personnel dedicated to Housing First funding. The city could also integrate interns and volunteers to assist in this effort. IC's goal to leverage private and non-profit partners is both a strength and a weakness. With IC's limited budget, this approach minimizes the city's expenditures towards acquisition and development costs. However, by leveraging the private and non-profit sectors to take the lead, IC plays a supporting role and must rely on the private sectors to spearhead Housing First

development, thereby losing control over certain aspects of the program. If IC can secure additional recurring funds and augment deficits with grants, IC could reduce its financial burden while extending resources.

Recommendation 3: Leadership

IC would benefit from a more active role within its Housing First program at the local level. IC needs to assume an assertive position in creating opportunities to develop permanent supportive housing dedicated to homeless' needs. While affordable housing to mitigate those at-risk for homelessness is an essential component, there must also be units reserved exclusively towards homeless clients to reduce unsheltered homeless populations. While private-led development does reduce city expenditures, IC has decreased the percentage of affordable housing required with each building project, limiting the number of affordable housing units introduced into the market. This could have negative impacts on IC's ability to sustain ample units to match its homeless needs. Moreover, a more active leadership role would also allow IC to steer Housing First efforts, legislation and expand affordable housing options to meet the essential needs of the homeless best. Aggressive and active leadership reflect in a stronger presence within the community, steering project-based initiatives, and working to define goals in collaboration with the private and non-profit sectors. Equally important is an innovative approach to finding and securing housing opportunities. Through innovation, Sun City has matched and surpassed its established benchmarks, and it continues to expand the scope of its program. Under this same approach, IC can leverage the innate creative power of its team to do the same. Innovation can be cultivated through training,

recognizing and rewarding new concepts, and implementing a process where ideas are submitted and evaluated.

Recommendation 4: Transparency

IC can improve its program by enhancing transparency at all levels, sharing comprehensive data about each facet of the program, and publishing the successes and shortcomings of each effort. Additionally, IC needs to redefine what is included under its Housing First program, its partners, and data on how funds, services, and resources are implemented across the program. Many of the resources listed on IC's websites are news articles, links to other websites, or report summaries. The information provided does not clearly link which affordable housing efforts are connected to Housing First or geared towards low-income earners. It does not articulate which partner is taking the lead, changes to housing stock, expenditure breakdowns, or how services have increased or decreased since its implementation. Ambiguity can also translate to a mismatch between efforts, objectives, and goals that would inadvertently hinder program advancement. Combining these factors creates unintentional obstacles that can be removed with clear program limits, accurate resources located on a consolidated platform, and regular status reports that articulate how each initiative progresses. Without this level of transparency, an accurate, in-depth program evaluation will be limited.

Strength and Limitations of the Project

This study was advantageous as it addressed a gap in Housing First literature and contributed to understanding this field of study. Additionally, it highlighted opportunities for IC to expand the breadth and depth of its Housing First Program. However, this study

consists of several limitations, which hindered the scope of the study. First, due to the impacts of the coronavirus, IC was unable to have an active role within the study. This restricted my ability to acquire program data, documentation, and data directly from program managers and key leaders. Additionally, this limited my research to publicly available information, resulting in the study missing key components and features of IC's Housing First Program. Second, only having one interview hindered a comprehensive assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, and overall impression of the Housing First initiatives. Finally, during the study, IC elected a new Mayor who has expressed the intent to modify homeless initiatives, which may or may not include some of the recommendations above.

In Section 4, I discussed the results of the CIPP program evaluations and key findings in the benchmark comparison between IC and Sun City. Based on these findings, I provided recommendations from which IC could implement improvement, implementation, and revisions to existing practices. In Section 5, I outline how I will distribute the study to IC and share my research with IC's Housing First Program's key leadership.

Section 5: Dissemination Plan

This study aimed to enhance and expand the reach of IC's Housing First Program and increasing support to the homeless. IC has emphasized mitigating the impact of homelessness within its jurisdiction and its commitment to address the issue. While IC was not an active participant in the study, the study can assist IC in revising policies, practices, and capitalizing on resources. As such, the findings of this study will be shared with the Mayor's Office of Housing, the Department of Community Services, and with key leadership through an executive summary. This executive summary will outline the purpose of the study, key findings, and recommendations for consideration. Additionally, I will provide recipients with my contact information to answer any questions they may have. Upon request, I will provide a presentation to IC's Housing First leadership.

This study also addresses a larger lacuna the field of Housing First initiatives. Other cities across the nation may encounter unique characteristics which impede program implementation. Therefore, the evaluation and recommendations may be useful to a those involved with Housing First programs, government, private, and non-profit organizations involved with affordable housing and homelessness, and public administrators. This study will be made available through publication.

Summary

Housing First is the national approach to mitigating homelessness, emphasizing placing the homeless in supportive housing first, then administering the care necessary to equip the individual to obtain self-sufficiency (HUD, 2007). Most of the literature addressing Housing First applies to large cities where room for development and

resources are reasonably accessible. However, IC's Housing First program is limited due to geographic isolation, reliance on imports, and limited ability to expand. As such, this study evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of IC's program. Using the CIPP Evaluation Model, this study benchmarked IC's Housing First Program against that of Sun City's program. This study identified that IC's program benefitted from its police engagement and outreach initiatives. However, the program needs more extensive funding sources, a stronger leadership presence and increased transparency to enhance its efforts to combat homelessness. The lessons learned from Sun City's program and recommendations provided in this can improve IC's program by expanding capabilities and maximizing opportunities to grow its support to the homeless.

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