Who is The Family Tree?
The Family Tree leads Maryland in preventing child abuse, connects caring communities, and builds strong families to improve society for generations. A national affiliate of Prevent Child Abuse America, Parents Anonymous, and the National Exchange Club, The Family Tree serves more than 23,000 people each year. They offer a wide variety of parenting services, including parenting education support (evidence-based parenting classes), counseling, home visitation, respite childcare, community and professional trainings, and a 24-hour parenting HelpLine.

Our Project:
We evaluated the current training program for volunteers working for The Family Tree’s 24-Hour Parenting Helpline. Evaluation included observation of trainings with volunteers and HelpLine calls. Additionally, research was conducted on best practices for training through an extensive literature review and interviews with similar organizations across the nation. Currently, we are using the information gained through our evaluation to develop a new helpline volunteer training. The goal of this new training is to best meet the needs of volunteers and the clients that they serve in the community. Continued evaluation of the new training will allow us to observe how changes have affected The Family Tree and their clients.

Scholar Activities:
1. Meeting regularly with The Family Tree staff to discuss the goals of the project and to learn more about the organization and helpline
2. Completing the volunteer training and studying current training materials
3. Observing calls at The Family Tree and discussing current concerns for HelpLine training
4. Developing a summary report of observations and current research areas → meeting with The Family Tree staff to discuss report
5. Conducting literature review and interviews with organizations across the nation to develop best practices and recommendations for The Family Tree’s helpline volunteer training (report of findings developed) → meet with The Family Tree staff to discuss findings and next steps
6. Develop a new volunteer training, including a manual and presentation with active learning activities
7. Develop tools to help The Family Tree implement recommended best practices and track progress and effect of changes
8. Develop tools to measure impact of new training on volunteers and the clients served by the helpline

Outcomes and Accomplishments:
Goal 1: Observation of current volunteer training
- Multiple observations of calls with clients
- Went through volunteer training and received all current training materials
- Discussions with The Family Tree staff about current training

Goal 2: Research on best practices for volunteer helpline training
- Literature review on best practices
- Interviews with organizations across the nation
- Compilation of report summarizing information gained on training

Goal 3: Creation of a new training manual and presentation, best practice/recommendations sheet, and monitoring/evaluation tools
- PowerPoint/manual modified to reflect recommendations from research
- Monitoring and evaluation tools such as volunteer surveys created
- Active learning tools for volunteers created e.g. mock call scenarios

Lessons Learned:
1. Receiving responses from cold calls/emails is not easy and it is better to create a long list of contacts and assume many will not respond
2. One year goes a lot faster than you would expect! Time management and planning is extremely important
3. It can be difficult to manage to find time to meet with multiple individuals with busy schedules, being flexible and being honest with your time is an important skill
4. It’s great to have big goals, but it’s also important to be realistic and accept that you may not be able to accomplish everything when you have time and resource limitations
5. The Baltimore community is welcoming, generous, and truly amazing! This project showed me how much Baltimoreans care for one another and helped me connect with this city

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