

“UNPREDICTABLE”: HOMELESS MUSIC VIDEO ADVOCACY

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of Master of Social Work

By
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

“UNPREDICTABLE”: HOMELESS MUSIC VIDEO ADVOCACY

By
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Signed Certification of Approval page
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DEDICATION

This project would not have been accomplished without the encouragement of my project chair, Valerie Leyva, Ph.D., and reader member, John Garcia, Ph.D. I genuinely appreciate their support and review. Thank you to my mother, Maria C. Castorena; you always understood me, asked how I was doing, and you were always there for me. I am so thankful to my dearest brother, David Maldonado, whom I love dearly. To the Director of Behavior Health, Alfonso Apu, I could not have completed this journey without your support and expertise. To Sevaughn Banks, Ph.D., MSW, Director of Field Education at California State University, Stanislaus, thank you for all the wisdom, time, education, and support you have provided. Finally, thank you to my mentor, Martha Ruiz, LCSW, of Molina Medical Center. I started this journey because of your recommendation. At the end of it, you were still there supporting me.

My Master of Social Work journey began during my time working for the Frequent User Program at the Community Medical Centers and St. Joseph's Medical Hospital. I became the first case manager assisting individuals needing services from the Frequent Users program in the Emergency Department. As a case manager, I learned how to better assist patients. Most of them were homeless individuals experiencing numerous health issues. Being a case manager allowed me to assist many patients to improve their quality of life by connecting them to resources they needed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thank you, Sutter Tracy Community Hospital, for recognizing the homelessness video, “Unpredictable,” as a call to action during the March 21, 2018 presentation. Kennett D. Everett, Clinical Social Worker, wrote a letter of recognition to Kiololo Brodie, MSW, Ph.D., Department Chair/Program Director. The letter of recognition stated,

I am writing this letter to thank you and California State University, Stanislaus for allowing student Patricia Valencia to participate in our annual social work conference. Ms. Valencia’s video on homelessness, “Unpredictable,” was well received by our hospital community partners. Please accept our gratitude for sharing your student with us” Kennett D. Everett

University Music Department Program Director, Gregory Jacquay, was a huge support, providing the proper resources to copyright the video.

Thanks also to my family for their unconditional love and support and allowing me to follow my dream furthering my education.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to create a video with lyrics that brought attention to the issue of homeless in the region. The goal of creating “Unpredictable” was to give a voice for the homeless through social media, depicting the issues the homeless population experience. Furthermore, the author had the opportunity to work with services providers and homeless individuals to get inspiration for the lyrics and images that were presented in the video. Working with professionals to put together this music were music producer Sepia Sound Production, Philip Hennen, and Music Forever Entertainment LLC. Having completed the video, “Unpredictable,” the goal was to post it on various social platforms such as YouTube, LinkedIn, and the Homeless Task Force Facebook page City of Tracy Councilwoman Rhodesia Ransom. This video project illustrates the importance of mainstream social media as a powerful method for bringing awareness of homeless issues to the world at large. Social media is an effective method to broadcast homelessness awareness to the public and politicians and is an opportunity for the public to voice their opinions. “Unpredictable” demonstrates the lack of affordable housing and emergency shelters as barriers to long-term solutions.

INTRODUCTION

Description of the Project

The purpose of this graduate project was to advocate for homeless individuals and families and to increase public awareness. To achieve this purpose, a music video with lyrics and images, “Unpredictable,” was created to depict the issues the homeless population experiences daily. The goal of “Unpredictable” was to vividly capture the barriers, struggles, successes, dreams, and aspirations of the homeless in the city of Tracy and the San Joaquin region of California. Through the powerful influence of social media, “Unpredictable” was posted on various social platforms such as You Tube, LinkedIn, and Facebook. A councilwoman from the City of Tracy agreed to post “Unpredictable” on her Homeless Task Force Facebook page.

As a change agent of society, it is a personal and professional responsibility of the author to create awareness and shed attention on the plight of the homeless. Although the project specifically focused on the San Joaquin County region, the project sought to grow beyond San Joaquin County to raise awareness on a state and national level as well.

Homelessness remains an issue that appears not to have a clear political or social answer or solutions. Indeed, cultural influences and prejudices coupled with the myriad antecedents leading to homelessness (e.g. mental illness, drug use, exposure to violence, and poverty) cause this issue to be one of great complexity. One factor is clear: awareness must precede change. One of the great benefits of the Information

Age is the use of media to raise awareness. Therefore, the dissemination of “Unpredictable” is expected to raise awareness about homelessness locally, with the possibility to reach beyond the San Joaquin Valley regional boundaries. Music and media have been known to help people readily grasp the homeless plight, raise public empathy, and, therefore, function as a call to action. According to McNulty, “News constructions may influence the opinion, beliefs, and actions of the public or policy makers” (McNulty, 1992, p. 6).

The stories of people who are currently homeless are illustrated throughout “Unpredictable” and a narration of their experiences was included. This music video gave an opportunity for the homeless and for their community advocates to share their stories. Therefore, the project drew on the expertise of community advocates and organizations that regularly intervene on behalf of the homeless. The project created an opportunity for both the homeless and their advocates to engage with one another in an action that expressed their shared experiences.

Objective of the Project

Four objectives were created for this project to ensure the purpose and goals as mentioned in the previous section were successfully achieved. The four objectives were as follows: 1) Create partnerships, 2) Collaborate with a music video producer, 3) Analyze feedback received, and 4) Implement a social media campaign to successfully achieve the purpose of the project. This section provides further details on the project objectives.

Create Partnerships

The first objective was to create partnerships with people throughout the San Joaquin Valley region who are impacted directly by homelessness (i.e. people who are homeless). Creating a partnership with staff who provide services to the homeless population was also included. The purpose of the partnership between homeless individuals and their case workers was to inspire the content for the music video “Unpredictable.” In addition, interviews, informal conversations, and stories from community members contributed to the inspiration of the message to portray throughout “Unpredictable.” This collaboration among the various partners led to the vision of images and lyrics included in “Unpredictable.”

Collaborate with a Music Video Producer

The second objective was to collaborate with a music video producer to create a visually moving and inspirational video with a clear call to action. The guidance of a music video producer was critical during the editing and production process to

incorporate images that were captured during the recording of the video. Three editing sessions were required to create “Unpredictable.”

Analyze Feedback Received

To determine the progress and effectiveness of video content, the third objective was to receive feedback from the various partners of the graduate project to assess how well the video and lyrics captured the stories and created empathy from the viewer. The feedback was elicited through informal interviews and conversations in a brainstorming-type style. Notes were taken during these informal sessions to determine the information to account for during the final rendering and production process of the music video.

Implement a Social Media Campaign

The fourth objective was to implement a social media campaign designed to disseminate the video “Unpredictable.” Achieving a successful campaign would entail reaching the goal of increasing public awareness of the plight of the homeless. A Tracy, California political figure (Rhodesia Ransom), agreed to upload the video to her Facebook page to provide greater accessibility and create a wider influence on police officers, policy makers, local nonprofit organizations, and the community at large. The intention of the music video was to create a large impact that would not only increase awareness of homelessness, but would also create public empathy for the homeless population and function as a call to action

Significance of the Project

The significance behind the purpose of the project was to educate viewers regarding the challenges and stigmas faced by the homeless population. According to McNulty, “We witness the homeless on the streets, in the tunnels, on places and outside our convenience stores we people overlook them” (McNulty, 1992, p. 2). While homelessness is a pressing problem in most large metropolitan areas, as well as in many rural communities, many people appear to be content with turning their backs on the issue of homelessness. As McNulty states, “News stories about homelessness in media profoundly influence our conceptions of what it is and why it exists” (McNulty, 1992, p. 2). It is the obligation of concerned citizens and professional social workers to continue to ensure that the plight of the homeless remains visible. Music and video may be an effective platform for achieving that goal

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This section examines various sources of literature regarding homelessness. Topics included in this literature review are the Housing First Model, Pathways Model, and using music to change public awareness. Prior to exploring these topics, it is critical to gain perspective and an understanding of challenges the homelessness face and the political views of homelessness.

In the United States, homelessness has become a vexing social and political predicament for communities and legislators. According to J. D. Fargo, “The problem of reducing homelessness in U.S. communities has challenged policymakers and advocates, who have looked to academic research on homelessness to understand its causes and design strategies to prevent and reduce homelessness” (Fargo, 2013, p. S340).

The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty stated, “More than a quarter of the homeless population in urban cities have serious mental illness” (NAMI, 2010, p. 37). According to researchers, the homeless tend to have a history of substance abuse or psychiatric illness along with other health issues. The American Community Survey (2016) stated,

18.2% of adults in San Joaquin County expressed the need for treatment for mental health, drug/alcohol use, in contrast with 15.9% of adults throughout the U.S. Moreover, the drug-induced death rate in San Joaquin County is 56%

higher than California as a whole, 17.3 per 100,000 people compared to 11.1 per 100,000 statewide. (CHNA, 2016)

There is also a high rate of adults without adequate social and emotional support. Other issues in the community that increase rates of homelessness include drug use among youth, exposure to violence, and exposure to poverty. In addition to these issues, there have been many untreated medical problems, untreated and exacerbated because of limited access to community medical clinics and shelters (CHNA, 2016). It was identified that homeless individuals do not have sufficient support when transitioning from institutions such as prison or psychiatric hospitals. A lack of sufficient housing or shelters was also identified. The Annual Homeless Assessment Report found that “nearly 1.6 million Americans used emergency shelter or transitional housing programs in 2009” (Howard, 2013, p. 220).

Another issue that has complicated effective intervention services is that homeless people often experience disadvantages through labeling and social stigmatization and are held responsible for their circumstances. P. J. Phelan (1997) argued that, “Poor people have long been stigmatized and blamed for their situation. According to theory about stigma and about inequality-legitimizing ideologies, homeless people should be stigmatized even more severely than the ‘generic poor’” (Phelan, 1997, p. 323). The homeless may encounter problems when trying to improve themselves; they are often seen as undeserving or judged at fault for their poor decision making. In addition, J. D. Fargo (2013) stated that “many homeless fail

to connect with helping agencies because of their limited stays in any psychiatric ward” (Fargo J. D., 2013, p. 103(2). These brief hospitalizations are often 72 hours or less, severely limiting the time caseworkers have to coordinate services; therefore, clients are put at risk for depression and suicidal thoughts. Some are discharged an average of 15 days before they are fully stabilized. Early dismissals also increase the likelihood of substance abuse which can lead to addiction.

Academic research demonstrates the problem of homelessness is costly, draining social services, such as emergency shelters, acute health resources, and behavioral health systems as well as the criminal justice system. According to the Federal definition shared by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Health and Human Services (HHS), and Veterans Affairs (VA), “homeless individuals’ multiple disability conditions manifest themselves by utilizing the emergency shelter, acute health, behavior health, criminal justice, and social services which can be extremely costly” (P. J. Fargo, 2013, p. S341). In short, the homeless often remain subject to chronic and multiple health issues for which they seldom receive proper care and which are exacerbated by the lack of proper shelter (i.e. a place to live).

Evaluation

All divisions of the U.S. government are aware of this public issue. This includes the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Department (HUD), U.S Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse & Mental Services

Administration (SAMSHA), and The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI, 2010) that raise money to support legislation, research, and other efforts aimed at reducing homelessness and its impact on society (NAMI, 2010). The California Mental Health Planning Council's "Hope for the Homeless" statistics estimated that there are 578,424 homeless people in the U.S. It also stated that California had the highest homeless population (approx. 114, 000), which represents 20% of the nation's homeless. The Services Substance Abuse & Mental Services Administration (SAMSHA) estimated that in January 2010, 26.1% of homeless in shelters had severe mental illness (NAMI, 2010).

Legislators have taken limited action to reduce homelessness in the greater San Francisco and Central California area. Multiple approaches have been taken to understand and address this crisis, but the large population of homeless adults and children still exist on California streets and the California consciousness. The larger issues of oppression which contribute to homelessness were explored through a variety of media, including poetry, video, and music.

Housing First Model

The Housing First model made national headlines in the state Utah in 2015 as a strategy to win the war on chronic homelessness with the concept of housing first. This program's main focus was to provide housing without any requirements. A man by the name of Sam Tsemberis, founder of Pathways Housing First approach, realized that a homeless individual's main difficulty was having a place to call home.

Homeless individuals were faced with challenges of renting or applying for low-income housing. Their response was “They wanted a place of their own” before they had converted to homeless (Lefebvre, 2018).

Pathways Model

The Pathways Housing First (PHF) model illustrates techniques of homeless intervention that have been successful not only in the United States but also worldwide. This model describes a road map, whereby homeless individuals are rehabilitated. This is called “PHF evidence-based practice.” This model was introduced in 1992 in New York City. It originated as a nonprofit organization and became a prevalent homeless intervention (Greenwood, 2013). The Model is based on the theory that a better way of life begins with a steady place to live. This program gave respect to those who didn’t have a voice due to impairments and the inability to make decisions on their own. The PHF framework was able to locate those who were displaying psychiatric symptoms and who were abusing drugs or alcohol (Greenwood, 2013).



Figure 1. Impact validity cycle of research, implementation, and advocacy. (Greenwood, 2013, p. 647)

Greenwood also talks about how the client's decision is important to increase the psychiatric rehabilitation development.

[With] Maslow's (1947) hierarchy of needs, the model is based on the assumption that until individuals have a home, and unless their basic safety and security are met she or he will not have an adequate platform from which to successfully address other challenges, such as psychiatric symptoms, addiction or employment. (Greenwood, 2013, p. 648).

Furthermore, Aykanian and Wonbyung Lee (2016) state that through history, homeless individuals have been looked at differently and are often misrepresented and in need of assistance (Lee, 2016). The authors also discuss how the homeless have been incarcerated for small crimes such as public intoxication. “These laws criminalized behaviors associated with homelessness as a means of controlling where homeless people are allowed to be and what they allowed to do” (Lee, 2016, p. 183). The article also talks about anti-homeless policies that are supposed to reduce the number of homeless people and which, according to the article, are instituted in the interest of public safety. Laws have criminalized homelessness causing the rights of these individuals to be restricted (Lee, 2016). “A fundamental problem with antihomeless policies is that they are more concerned with perceptions of what homelessness causes, rather than what causes homelessness” (Lee, 2016, p. 183).

Using Music to Change Public Awareness

Presenting a circumstance such as homelessness as a social problem can influence public opinion on actions and policy formation (Calder, 2011). Social policies and legislation are often challenged if the society is unreceptive to them (Lee, 2016) How we relate to messages in the media will determine if we as a community will become involved and pay attention to a problem in the community (Lee, 2016)

Music is a powerful way to change the mentality of people. One rapper and songwriter, whose stage name is Logic, wrote a song about suicide prevention. Through music he decided to try to save lives with his lyrics which offered an alternative to suicide. The song title itself is the Suicide Hotline, “1-800-273-8255.”

He provides the number for his listeners to call, encouraging people to seek help to deal with suicidal thoughts. Similar efforts to Logic's music have been successful. This method has opened up the doors for those suffering from suicidal thoughts to reach out for help. This number is called "a cry for help." The 27-year-old rapper explains his motivation to continue to write music for others is inspired by his followers sharing with him that he has saved their lives through his music. Rapper Logic expresses that he made the song for all those who are feeling on the dark and for them to find the light (Byline: Ben Tinker, 29 Aug. 2017)

A journal article titled, "Every Picture Tells a Story" talks about the 20th century social work discovery that photography was a new way for technology—the camera—to tell stories. Jacob Riis, an author who wrote for the New York Tribune, partnered with Paul Kellogg, an early social worker. Together they produced experimental photographic images of working immigrant children. This was a new idea for social reform. "Photographs of New York's poor, taken by Jacob Riis, the carefully composed and biting images of working children" (Huff, 1998, p. 576). Today this has become a national memory. Through magazines, past history put into books and films can become an extraordinary component to incorporate into social work (Huff, 1998). With today's modern technology music videos capture people's attention. It is a powerful way to change public awareness. The "Unpredictable" project takes a similar approach as a piece of work that will aim to be successful in changing minds. This is a way to communicate about homeless people that includes specifics on issues facing homeless people.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this project was guided according to the four objectives identified as described in the “Objective of this Project” section. The graduate project is anchored by four objectives, and in consulting and planning the following plan was developed. The first step (objective) to completing the project was to build relationships with homeless people and their advocates in order to gain insight into their experiences so that inspiration could be created for the lyrics and images portrayed in the video. This process included engaging in informal conversations with people who are experiencing homelessness and their service providers. These conversations occurred at Community Connections, a resource center for people who are homeless and at risk of becoming homeless. Again, the goal of these discussions was to form a vivid image of their experiences so that these experiences could be expressed in the song lyrics and the associated music video.

The second step involved collaborating with a music video producer to create a visually pleasing and interesting video. Production values were largely determined under the music producer’s guidance. With permission, Company Music Forever Entertainment LLC images were captured from the producers and included in the video. It was expected that the making of the video would entail between three and 20 sessions. The lyrics and melody were composed by the project coordinator and music producer, Sepia Sound Production/Philip Hennen. An example of lyrics is this draft verse:

“Life is unpredictable, don’t know what tomorrow holds,

No shelter for the spirit, mind and soul!

It’s such a rough road to hoe when you have nowhere to go,

Where the dice hits, Lord only knows.”

This music video project was produced in San Joaquin County in the Central Valley of California. “News stories portray homelessness as related to or “emmeshed” in several other social problems” (McNulty, 1992, p. vi). The theory behind this project was that music and visual media have a unique ability to grab people’s attention. Creatively educating viewers should increase empathy for the plight of homeless.

The third step in the methodology was to create a social media campaign designed to disseminate the video with the goal of increasing awareness of the barriers faced by the homeless. A Tracy, California political figure uploaded the video to her Facebook page to provide greater accessibility and wider influence on police officers, policy makers, local nonprofit organizations and the community at large. It was hoped the video would not only increase awareness of and empathy for the homeless, but also function as a call to action to address homeless needs such as the need for more shelters, beds, meals, and psychiatric counseling. The fact is that homelessness is a serious social problem and political interventions appear to be, at most, only somewhat effective.

The final step was to receive feedback from the various partners of the graduate project to assess how well the video and lyrics captured the stories and motivated empathy in the viewer. This feedback was integrated into the editing process with the councilwoman and Community Connections supervisor defining the final version of the video. University Institutional Review Board (UIRB) approval was received on December 11, 2017. The project was to be completed and YouTube-ready by February 16, 2018. The councilwoman uploaded the video to her professional Homeless Task Force Facebook page concurrent with the YouTube upload on March 22, 2018. The introduction to the video is as follows:

Awareness precedes change; there are no easy political and social answers to homelessness. What makes things more difficult are cultural influences on homeless or prejudice and stigma by others. Please watch this video. We hope that it inspires you to act. By Patricia Valencia MSW, CSU Stanislaus student.

CONCLUSION

The author created the music video, “Unpredictable,” because she was inspired by both personal and professional experiences. Working with homeless individuals in the community and building relationships with them affected her deeply. The video is 4 minutes and 18 seconds in length. The following is an example of the lyrics:

“Life is unpredictable, don’t know what tomorrow holds,

No shelter for the spirit, mind and soul!

It’s such a rough road to hoe when you have nowhere to go,

Where the dice hits, nobody knows.

Walk with me try to see what I see

Through the sleepless nights and endless days.

Life is unpredictable, don’t know what tomorrow holds,

No shelter for the spirit, mind and soul!

It’s such a rough road to hoe when you have nowhere to go,

Where the dice hits, Lord only knows.

Rain the rain it falls feel so far away from home

A tear drops from my eye.

Can anyone truly hear me or your eyes are wide but can't see

Lord I ask you why?

The author is passionate about helping homeless people to have a voice and believes “Unpredictable” sends a clear message. She feels their suffering in not having a warm home in which to live and living and sleeping on the streets must be very painful. Not having your family around and not having any kind of support must be very heartbreaking. She is hopeful that new social media such as Facebook will provide greater accessibility and wider influence on police officers, policy makers, local non-profit organizations, and the community at large. Hopefully, people will have more sympathy and empathy for the homeless; it is too soon to determine if it will function as a call to action.

In conclusion, the strength of this project was having the determination to assist the homeless people who are a marginalized population. The weak point of this project was not receiving an immediate response to determine an exact number or a sense of the larger influence the video will have.

Homelessness is a concerning subject and developing new policies is important to be able to provide for the welfare for those who need it. Empowerment

theory underscores the need for government to work toward empowering *all* its citizens, especially the marginalized. The author's first recommendation guided by the literature is to begin supporting and promoting the idea of the Housing First Model. The Housing First Model gets people who are homeless off the streets and then you can deal with the issues of substance abuse, mental illness and health issues. However, it does not happen unless you get them off the streets. This should be combined with U.S. government initiatives to open new hospital facilities specific to institutionalizing those suffering from mental illnesses. The policy of deinstitutionalization has been an abject failure in this country; it has led to more crime and much more homelessness throughout society (Lamb, 2002). "With deinstitutionalization and influx into the community of persons with severe mental illness, police who are the front line deal with these people in crisis without enough hospital facilities" (Lamb, 2002, p. 53).

A second recommendation is for social workers to embrace the social justice perspective in society. Social workers must advocate for the community to implement new policies that will support the people of our community. Legislators need to create new policies that will improve our society. The author believes that Assembly Bill 1618 will benefit the homeless population. Billions of dollars are being spent throughout the U.S. each year to reduce homelessness, but homeless numbers are not dropping.

A final recommendation: people who are homeless should be able to obtain affordable housing; particularly, people who are experiencing a mental illness should

not be living on the streets; housing must be provided. Government policies addressing the mentally ill homeless are imperative.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

“UNPREDICTABLE”: HOMELESS MUSIC VIDEO ADVOCACY

Awareness must precede change. There are no easy political and social answers to homelessness. What makes things more difficult are cultural influences on homeless or prejudice and stigma by others. Please watch this video. We hope it inspires you to act. By Patricia Valencia MSW, CSU Stanislaus.

<https://youtu.be/IAISBK-vaYA>