

Community Work as Seen by Others: Joint Report

Students: Bennie Lim A0112582M

Lin Siyan A0114258J

Prepared for: Dr Ngiam Tee Liang

Agency: Bringing Love to Every Single Soul (BLESS)

Contents

| | |
|---|----------|
| 1. Introduction..... | 3 |
| 2. Interpretation of Community Work..... | 3 |
| 3. Role in Community Work..... | 4 |
| 4. Importance of Community Work..... | 4 |
| 5. Community Programs..... | 5 |
| 5.1. Bringing Love to Every Small Soul..... | 5 |
| 5.1.1. Goals of Program..... | 5 |
| 5.1.2. Program Implementation..... | 6 |
| 5.1.3. Mobilization of Resources..... | 6 |
| 5.2. Bringing Learning to Every Shining Star..... | 7 |
| 5.2.1. Goals of Program..... | 7 |
| 5.2.2. Program Implementation..... | 7 |
| 5.2.3. Mobilization of Resources..... | 8 |
| 6. Effectiveness of Programs..... | 8 |
| 7. Conclusion..... | 9 |

1. Introduction

Bringing Love to Every Single Soul (BLESS) is a community-focused, non-profit organization founded and chaired by Ms Francesca Wah, a psychology and social work graduate from the National University of Singapore (NUS). BLESS is entirely managed by NUS students and alumni. We were privileged to have the opportunity to interview Francesca regarding the community work that BLESS actively engages in.

2. Interpretation of Community Work

The meaning of community work in BLESS is clearly exhibited in their mission, which is to engage the community, enrich lives and empower individuals. Thus, BLESS believes that community work entails serving the needs of individual persons, as well as those of the larger community.

BLESS's community work practice adopts the characteristics of community-centered practice outlined by Sviridoff and Ryan, comprising the following elements:

- a) Stimulating collective action
- b) Facilitating resident leadership
- c) Following resident initiative
- d) Using collective action to build assets
- e) Working with building blocks
- f) Working with collaborators

From the above six elements, it can be deduced that community work, for BLESS, is about promoting the involvement and initiative of residents in the community, rather than allowing community workers to take absolute control of community programs. In addition, it is clear that

BLESS believes in partnership and teamwork with residents and collaborators as essential to community work.

3. Role in Community Work

BLESS's role in community work is to develop and strengthen the capacity of communities by providing residents opportunities to engage in community problem-solving. Through encouraging residents to take greater ownership of their community, BLESS works towards fostering and sustaining positive community change.

Another role of BLESS is to find effective ways in which the individuals and families who live in the community can be supported and provided for. This is achieved by identifying and tapping on the strengths of the community.

BLESS also plays the supportive role to social service agencies that provide family services by organizing communities. BLESS serves as the platform to mobilize, coordinate and direct these available resources in the community to the less privileged.

4. Importance of Community Work

BLESS believes that community work is extremely significant, because workers need to be involved in the community if family services are to be provided. Community intervention leads to increased awareness of the available resources and the needs of the community. This awareness enables workers to improve the effectiveness of service delivery and ensure that the services provided are useful and relevant.

In addition, BLESS believes that community work is important because it not only gives residents opportunities to participate in their community, but it also facilitates resident leadership, encouraging citizens to take greater ownership of their community.

BLESS believes that the major strength of community interventions lies in its proximity. Social services are made more accessible to the families in need. Through participation in the community, primary relationships are formed with other members in the community, allowing individuals to develop social networks within their community, which increases the availability of informal and immediate assistance during emergency.

5. Community Programs

BLESS currently runs five community programs, all of which were initiated by the current chairperson. After BLESS was officially established, five teams, each consisting of six unpaid NUS students and alumni, were set up to manage each program.

In general, the decision-making process for each program is such that each program's management team gathers feedback from the community members and proposes certain decisions based on the feedback. The board of directors then holds the final decision.

The community programs 'Bring Love to Every Small Soul' and 'Bringing Learning to Every Shining Star' will be discussed below.

5.1. Bringing Love to Every Small Soul

5.1.1. Goals of Program

This initiative aims to increase and coordinate community giving efforts, enrich lives of the less privileged by meeting their physical needs and be cost-effective in obtaining resources.

5.1.2. Program Implementation

BLESS collects and collates the specific practical needs of less privileged children in the community by partnering with social service agencies who help to identify these needs. The identified practical needs include school bags, prams and basic furniture.

Then, BLESS liaises with suppliers to obtain the requested items at the lowest possible cost.

BLESS uses the online platform to appeal for donations for these requested items. The public can view the requested items on a website and ‘purchase’ these items as a gift to the children. After obtaining sufficient funds, BLESS pays the suppliers and collects the items. The BLESS team then delivers the items to the social service agencies to be given to the children.

Finally, the social workers from the social service agencies deliver the sponsored items to the children and get them to write appreciation cards to the donors. The BLESS team collects these cards and emails a picture of each card to each specific donor.

5.1.3. Mobilization of Resources

Firstly, BLESS engages mobilizes the staff from the social service agencies as a resource. BLESS recognizes that the social service agencies serve the less privileged, and therefore they are in the best position to identify their needs. These agencies serve as the bridge between the BLESS team and the children, being the ones to communicate the needs of the children to BLESS, and deliver the sponsored items from BLESS to the children.

Secondly, BLESS partners with specific suppliers who are willing to offer their items at a low price. The mobilization of this resource is particularly important for this program, given that

BLESS is a non-profit organization and the items are dependent on public donations. Thus, the effective mobilization of this resource is crucial for the benefit of the underprivileged children.

Lastly, BLESS mobilizes the online community as a resource, by using an online platform to appeal to the public for donations. By using a platform that (a) reaches out to a large population, and (b) provides a convenient method for donation, the BLESS team is able to increase productivity in raising funds.

5.2. Bringing Learning to Every Shining Star

5.2.1. Goals of Program

The goals of this program are to increase community engagement , enrich lives of the less privileged by increasing learning opportunities and empower individuals through participation.

5.2.2. Program Implementation

The BLESS team, together with social service agencies, conducted a needs assessment and identified rental blocks which were populated with low-income families and situated a distance away from local amenities. This is how the rental blocks at which the ‘Bringing Learning to Every Shining Star’ program is held were identified.

For this program, BLESS engaged individuals in the community to deliver a reading program for children aged four to nine years-old. Currently, the children living in the identified rental blocks gather at the void deck weekly and the volunteers read to them.

5.2.3. Mobilization of Resources

This program saw the mobilization of volunteers from within the community as human resources. This involved coordinating and building the individual assets of the community itself.

6. Effectiveness of Programs

The programs have brought about community bonding and a sense of community spirit in various ways.

‘Bringing Love to Every Small Soul’ fosters a sense of community spirit as the community is involved in providing financial resources. The program has reached out to 884 children, saved a total of \$18, 229.80 from purchasing in bulk, and raised a total of \$11, 698.20 to date. This program helps to build up the community by encouraging people to be generous to one another. In inculcating a spirit of giving, members of the community will be more likely to engage in mutual aid when it is needed.

‘Bringing Learning to Every Shining Star’ and ‘Bringing Laughter to Every Single Senior’ programs involve mobilizing volunteers to provide reading programs to the children at rental blocks and visiting elderly who stay alone respectively. When the residents meet for activities together, they bond together as a community. Community spirit can be seen when the volunteers show care and concern for the young and old, fostering a warm and cohesive environment. A total of 120 senior citizens and 154 families with young children have been reached out to through these programs.

The ‘Bringing Love to Every Single Stranger’ program aims to instill community spirit into the younger generation by encouraging pupils to integrate the act of blessing others into their daily lives. By starting young, these children cultivate the habit of helping others and grow up to

become adults who are willing to provide aid to members of their community, thus fostering a community spirit of kindness and helpfulness.

7. Conclusion

BLESS collaborates with community partners and facilitates the involvement of residents in participating and taking ownership of the community. The various programs organized by BLESS taps on the strengths of the community and the available resources in the community to help the less privileged. In addition, through their programs, BLESS cultivates good values in community members, encouraging them to give back to the community in a spirit of care, kindness and generosity.