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PASSPORT TO SELF-SUSTAINABILITY

A journey to any worthwhile destination involves not just motion but a real sense of movement.

Navigating the transition from the streets to self-sufficiency requires not only a personalized destination path, but also a means of marking – and celebrating – each step along the way.

The ***PASSPORT TO SELF-SUSTAINABILITY*** was the first step in the process of moving away from the traditional provider/consumer relationship by approaching project residents as *participants* rather than *recipients*. It was created through collaboration between the staff and residents of Cottage Housing projects out of our mutual interest in placing the development, implementation and evaluation of their “plan” – and responsibility for its success directly into participants’ own hands.

By creating a clear correlation between program involvement, community service and personal development, this ***PASSPORT*** helps participants see the connection between what they do, how they feel and what progress they achieve toward objectives in their self-defined Personal Action Plan.

Effective utilization of this tool depends on recognition *AND* acceptance of the fact that programs better secure participant *compliance* through internal *commitment* rather than external *coercion*.

The ***PASSPORT***'s design is rooted in the emerging idea of a *strength or asset-based methodology* that focuses on helping participants build upon capabilities rather than analyze and catalogue their liabilities. Its underlying premise is that the competence, confidence and creativity that participants need to achieve their desired aspirations -- becoming effective parents, productive employees, responsible citizens, happy/healthy people, etc. -- are acquired through a sense of connectedness (i.e. sense of belonging, usefulness and influence) to the process that is often stifled by externally imposed obligations. Research has proven the effectiveness of this approach in education and other programming areas¹.

This model is well-suited to homeless people in particular, who by definition literally have no place to call their own and have internalized the trauma of becoming, as one study called it, “profoundly alone.”² Other research showing that issues such as substance abuse and mental illness are as often a consequence as a cause of homelessness³ points to a depth of post-traumatic stress often ignored by approaches that focus on employment, housing and other important, immediate and measurable goals while ignoring underlying issues that often undermine efforts in those directions.

This approach therefore does not work best as an “add-on” to a traditional provider/consumer service-delivery model, but can serve as the centerpiece of a new conceptualization that makes participants the *subject* rather than *object* of activities intended for their benefit. Moving beyond the typical client advisory process, our agency engages program participants in every aspect of the operation – from tenant screening and staff hiring to eviction appeals, community ambassadorship, and corporate board membership. Doing all these things *with* rather than *for* participants, and utilizing the Socratic Method that emphasizes asking questions rather than giving answers, are other key elements in this intervention strategy's recipe-for-success.

¹ “Quality Schools” by William Glasser, MD, Ph.D. and “Fostering Resiliency” by Bonnie Bernard, MSW

² “Homelessness in San Francisco” by Bain & Company (1989)

³ Stanford University Medical School Studies by Marilyn Winkleby, Ph.D; American Journal of Public Health, (10/92)

PASSPORT TO SELF-SUSTAINABILITY

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS:

It is recommended that a point system be incorporated as part of this process to give credit for each activity, providing a way to appropriately recognize and fairly reward persistent effort. These point totals begin to correlate with program outcomes to provide project participants with a tangible connection between their level of program activity/point accumulation and their realization of personal goals.

A new **PASSPORT** should be issued each month. Participants are asked to accumulate their point totals each month and go over the results with their Personal Development Coach (PDC), who logs in the point totals in each category.

A monthly reward system, with small gift certificates, purchased items or some form of recognition or special privilege, provides an opportunity to celebrate the top point earners. We also accumulate and reward the points for a specified group of "neighbors" within the program so there is a collective benefit from their individual efforts.

Finally, it is suggested that the totals for each section be tracked so that participants and their PDC can compare results with "Overall Feeling" ratings within the month as well as from month-to-month.

As the usefulness of this tool gets established over time, it is suggested that it be expanded so that the participant's "Support Team" (see page 2) and even fellow participants can start giving "point" recognition for their positive performance.

A computerized data collection system helps simplify the outcome documentation/tracking process, serving as a historical point of reference for the program participant as well as a valuable input into future program planning. We eventually hope to add a bar code/swipe scan system to more easily log group attendance.

CONTENTS:

Page 1: Cover page

Page 2: "Personal Mission" and "Goal Statement"

This page seeks to adopt the advice of every personal effectiveness or time management system: "begin with the end in mind". In this case, participants are asked, through autobiographic exercises and/or journal work, to define (and differentiate) their reasons for being here on earth from their reasons for being in our program. These combine to provide self-motivation for self-directed efforts toward self-defined goals.

Page 3: "Support Team"

The study referenced above concluded that the only thing that homeless people have in common is that they are "profoundly alone."⁴ As an extension of this initial personal inventory, participants are asked to identify – or to begin to cultivate – a group of individuals who are willing and able to help participants "...do for themselves what they cannot do alone...".⁵ This team will be asked to provide the participant with regular feedback on both the efforts and

⁴ Bain & Company's San Francisco Homelessness Report (1989)

⁵ From Chapter 5 - "How It Works" in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous

PASSPORT TO SELF-SUSTAINABILITY

results of their self-development strategy. We are devising a feedback loop that provides the members of this team with an opportunity to provide their own assessment to a participant's program engagement and progress.

Page 4-5: "Action Plan"

Every participant is asked to develop his or her own Personal Action Plan, with objectives, deadlines and accountability clearly specified. This section encourages the participant to identify the parts of their Action Plan relevant to this particular month by asking participants to define *when* (target date), *what* (objective), *why* (expected result). At the end of the month, they can come back as assess *how well* (self-evaluation) various Action Plan objectives were realized.

Pages 6-13: "Participation"

In these pages, participants document their involvement in various activities they're involved in over the course of the day. (i.e. skills workshops, support groups, educational programs, recreation or relaxation exercises, etc.), entering the date and description of each activity, to be signed off by the activity's staff facilitator at the end of the event. They earn one point each for every activity hour.

Pages 14-17: "Bonus Point Sheet"

Consistent positive feedback is a cornerstone of good parenting, teaching, mentoring and all other forms of positive human development activity. The purpose of this section is to encourage staff to provide immediate recognition whenever a participant has done anything that reflects personal progress, new behavior, special effort, etc. by providing individual "points" for 'caught doin' good' kinds of activities that could range from seeing a participant stooping down to pick up trash to reaching out to help a neighbor, etc.

We also use this section to award daily points for education or employment efforts. They also can earn points in this section for any time a staff member checks to see if they have their Passport with them, for having various sections (e.g. "Just for Today" or monthly calendar, etc) are being filled out, etc.

It is suggested that participants get a 25-point completion "bonus" for holding on to their Passport the entire month; conversely, they lose their accumulated points, credit for community service hours, etc. if they lose their Passport. It is also suggested that one section of the ***PASSPORT*** (e.g. "Just for Today", monthly calendar, "Things to Do") be randomly selected each month for an extra 10 points to stimulate interest. Other special promotions can be introduced to keep the process fresh

Pages 18-19: "Just for Today"

This section has separate-but-related purposes. First, it asks participants to identify specific things – large or small – that they are trying to do on a daily basis in order to improve or maintain their physical, emotional and spiritual health (e.g. daily exercise, prayer or meditation, reading, etc.). They are asked to take a brief personal inventory at the end of each day to count up how many of these things actually got done, putting the number in the "Total" box.

PASSPORT TO SELF-SUSTAINABILITY

Second, they are asked to self-evaluate how they felt that day in the "Overall Feeling" box, using a 1-to-5 rating scale (1 = "suffering", 2 = "struggling", 3 = "surviving", 4 = "striving", 5 = "thriving").

Although there will not always be a direct correlation between the numbers in the "Total" and "Overall Feeling" boxes, over time there will tend to be a correlation between the amount of 'healthy living' activities participants pursue and their general 'wellness'. This sheet will also offer a focus for conversation between the participant and their support service worker, program sponsor and other resource persons.

With our increasing focus *transformation* as being program participants' full-time job, the last box ("Timesheet") asks participants for an honest estimate on the total amount of time spent on transition-related activity, (i.e. support groups, education, employment, medical appointments, etc) to begin to hold themselves accountable and see time as a precious commodity.

NOTE: This section is not intended to address Action Plan objectives or Participation Activities that are being tracked in earlier sections described above, but rather to focus on the "little things" that always make the biggest difference.

Pages 20-23: Calendars for Current & Upcoming Months

This and the next section introduces participants to the basic components of a time management strategy, providing a place to coordinate work and school schedules, medical appointments, family obligations, recovery meetings, social activities, etc.

Pages 23-31: On-Site & Off-Site "Community Service"

Service to others is considered a primary tenet of every successful self-help program, encouraging participants to extend beyond themselves in order to experience the benefits of socialization and physical activity/mental exercise while advancing job readiness. Outside activities also have the side-benefit of increasing program visibility and awareness, while internal activities provide in-kind services that reduce overall operating costs. These pages track the actual number of volunteer hours generated by program participants, with one point being awarded for each hour of service.

Pages 32-33: "Outside Meetings"

The further into their transition process they proceed, the more important it is that participants begin to develop outside support for their future life outside our program. This section provides a place to track those efforts.

Pages 34-35: "Things to Do"

This provides participants with separate sections for each day of the month in which to note personal intentions, activity reminders, etc.

Pages 36-37: "Notes" & "Emergency Contacts"

Pages 38-39: "Relapse Prevention Card & Warning Signs/Triggers"

Self-explanatory. Participants are asked to fill this out every month as a review/reminder of patterns that could preface a slip in their positive momentum and forward progress.

Pages 40: Back Cover

Information about the agency/program and its aspirations.

PASSPORT TO SELF-SUSTAINABILITY

CONCLUSION:

To a certain degree, any outcome tracking system is somewhat self-serving and certainly is self-fulfilling.

The beauty of this approach to performance monitoring is that it employs methodologies that enhance participants' sense of involvement, and thereby, investment in the outcome of the process being measured.

Unlike most evaluation mechanisms that divert resources from the process, this one contributes momentum toward the goals sought -- making a positive result all the more likely and more visible, as well as more meaningful and measurable.

The key to successful implementation of this model is a true sense of partnership between program staff and participants in which each is committed to their own continuous learning, change and growth.

It is therefore recommended that program staff as well as participants utilize the monthly ***PASSPORT*** to track participation and progress toward their own self-development goals, and that the agency find ways to recognize and reward employees who are role modeling the same personal growth they are encouraging among the participants they work with.

Originally, this tool was called the ***PASSPORT TO SELF-RELIANCE*** until we realized that our program's goal was not to create autonomous, independent "graduates" but rather inter-dependent "alumni" who remain committed and connected to each other as they move forward through life. That's when we realized that we were striving for ***SELF-SUSTAINABILITY*** at both the individual and programmatic level.

This sort of commitment to do the most difficult thing – change – emerges when there is a level of honesty, openness and willingness, which are the same three principles of every 12-Step recovery program. This intervention strategy in that sense practices what it preaches, thereby establishing a basis for communication, coordination, collaboration and – eventually – cooperation between agency management and staff, as well as between staff and program "clients".

By engaging program participants in every aspect of the operation (with the exception of confidential interpersonal information), this intervention strategy constitutes the most effective/least expensive response to high-need, low-functioning individuals otherwise being served in much more costly institutional settings with lower success rates and higher recidivism.