Waypoint Family Services Cedar Rapids Headquarters

Psychology major, Mental Health minor

Introduction

Waypoint Family Services is a nonprofit dedicated to assisting the survivors of Domestic abuse in the Cedar Valley. During my time at Waypoint, I was a pro-bono Emergency Room Advocate. This volunteer position is to be a first responder for the organization. When a survivor of domestic violence arrives at the emergency room a nurse will ask them if they would like to speak to an advocate from Waypoint. During these consultations, my job as an ER Advocate was to listen to the survivor’s needs and come up with a safety plan. I was on-call for shifts from 5pm-8am on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Training was provided by the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence and consisted of PowerPoints with periodic comprehension questions that gave an overview of the facets of what DV advocates worked with such as the intersectionality of class with different types of abuse, cycles of abuse, the undertakings of the relationship, emotional supportive advocate.

Mission Statement

"Waypoint’s mission: to inspire people to move forward"

COVID-19

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the number of individuals seeking assistance with domestic violence in the Emergency room greatly reduced. I did not have the opportunity to consult with a survivor this semester but there were still learning opportunities to be had in being prepared for calls and by applying knowledge of organizational psychology.

Advocacy Certification

Counseling Skills

Although I am more than halfway through my undergraduate degree I have not been instructed on the fine skills of one-on-one counseling and I was able to learn a lot from this training that was produced for volunteers. The methods used by Waypoint throughout their organization really mirror person-centered, compassion-focused therapy as their core idea of helping involves addressing what the individual specifies as their needs. While this makes sense as an efficient way to operate a non-profit, in a purely psychological way this allows survivors to feel safer and in control.

Person-Environment Fit

I conducted interviews with two advocates from Waypoint to learn more about the Person-Environment Fit of the organization and its volunteers. The attitudes discussed best reflect Valence, Instrumentality, and Expectancy Theory (Landy & Conte, 2016). VIE theory states that the sum of all outcomes’ instrumentality and valence, multiplied by the individual’s expectancy of action, creates motivational force. The two interviewed advocates’ motivation to continue to work at Waypoint came from a desire to do well by survivors of domestic abuse because they themselves were secondary survivors of domestic abuse. The salary and the feeling of satisfaction that comes from this position are both examples of the instrumentality of their behavior. VIE theory also defines burnout as the failure of one objective (e.g. a survivor stops showing up to meetings) which can sully their entire perception of self-efficacy. Self-care would then be a replenishment of self-efficacy ensuring the advocate that they can handle their duties.

Advice for Future Advocates

If asked to give advice to new volunteer Emergency Room Advocates, there would be three things I would make clear. First off and the most important skill to have when being an advocate is knowing how to listen and serve the individual needs of survivors. Personally, and from the accounts of other advocates, the urge to tell survivors what needs to be done is great, however, allowing the survivor to make these decisions both saves on resources and allows the advocate to be compassionate and create safety plans with an individual who may not be ready to leave their situation. Second would be to mentally prepare for calls at anytime. During every ER advocacy shift I would experience a minor sense of dread at the unexpected nature of the job. Third would be to mentally apply the self care skills such as the breathing techniques that are taught when feeling overwhelmed as too much emotional stress will lead to burning out and being an ineffective advocate.

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References


