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Evaluating the Process of VIEW and TANF Case Managers in Prince William County's Department of Social Services

Morgan Lawson

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Agency

Department of Social Services in Prince William County, Virginia. Their mission is to provide services that support, protect, and safeguard its citizens so that they can build better, more self-sustainable lives. Stakeholders include clients, case managers and caseworkers, the government and other funders of the agency's programs, and the different directors and supervisors of the agency's programs.

Evaluation

Process evaluations take a look at how an agency is doing what it says it will do instead of looking just at the outcomes or results from the agency. It focuses on the agency's internal and external processes. I evaluated to processes of PWC's DoSS' Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare (VIEW). My evaluation question is: "How effectively are Prince William County's TANF caseworkers being prepared to handle their cases in a way that helps the Department of Social Services fulfill their mission of enabling their clients to live self-reliant lives?"

Research Methods

I relied heavily on qualitative data collection methods. I went to the agency and interviewed the supervisor of TANF and VIEW and one of the top case managers. I also conducted some observation and used a checklist to keep track of my findings.

Results

The caseworkers all have more cases than the recommended number. The agency is well organized and uses knowledgeable staff to help clients use the TANF & VIEW programs in beneficial ways.

They paired TANF & VIEW together, and the strengths of these programs work together in a way that helps clients who take advantage of these strengths better their situations. Caseworkers have yearly training and different workshops they attend to develop their skills and learn how to better handle different situations. The agency also is aware of burnout and heavily encourages its employees to handle it appropriately.

Recommendations

I recommend that the caseworkers have the same standard of note taking, that way each client can have proper documentation so that anyone could look at the file and know what's going on. I also recommend having a workshop on organizational and time-management skills to handle the surplus of cases. Finally, I recommend that they complete their switch over from a paper filing system to an online filing system.

Reflection

Through conducting this evaluation I learned how useful evaluations are in the planning and development of programs, and the role they play in the field of Human Services. Evaluations uncover things that agencies and their programs are doing well, but they also expose the things these agencies need to improve upon. This project helped me develop my communication and problem solving skills, as we were given instructions with minimal direction. This was uncomfortable for me because I like structure and following guidelines, so having to think out of the box and make confident decisions helped me grow as a student and as a future human services professional.

References

Prince William County Government. (2017). Department of social services. Prince William County. Retrieved from <http://www.pwcgov.org/government/dept/socialservices/pages/about%20us.aspx>

J. White, Personal Communication, November 21, 2017

Goals and Objectives

- 1.0 Develop/improve time management & communication skills of caseworkers so they can deal with their large caseloads more efficiently
- 1.1 Determine the standard/expectation of thorough note taking (improving the communication portion of the goal)
 - 1.1.1 where in the file notes should be taken
 - 1.1.2 what information the notes are describing
 - 1.1.3 whether shorthand or jargon can be used (will everybody understand the shorthand?)
- 1.2 Have a mini "self-guided" workshop on time management
 - 1.2.1 caseworkers would meet all together in a think tank setting
 - 1.2.2 caseworkers can brainstorm what successful time management looks like
 - 1.2.3 caseworkers can come up with ideas that would help themselves reach that idea of successful time management (using personal planners, hourly agendas, desk calendars, having one big department calendar, etc.)
 - 1.2.4 have the caseworkers help each other brainstorm and come up with ideas, have them learn from each other.
- 1.3 Each month, assess the case completion number
 - 1.3.1 make sure to record the case completion number of the month before beginning improvements
 - 1.3.2 is there an improvement on the speed of paperwork completion? Are more cases being completed now than before?
 - 1.3.2.1 If so, what helped change?