

“Students For Recovery:” A brief needs assessment

Research on the use and efficacy of Collegiate Recovery Programs (CRP) on university campuses is still in developmental stages, as data is lacking on various CRP models as well as the long-term effects that participation in such a program has on students (Laudet, Harris, Kimball, Winters, and Moberg, 2014). Because resources differ on every campus, CRPs vary in what they offer students. Some CRPs offer housing and follow the model of a residential treatment center, many have dedicated staff members to support the efforts of the program (Laitman, Kachur-Karavites, and Stewart, 2014).

Students from a large Western University (50,000+ students) formed a student organization called “Students for Recovery” in 2015. In order to become recognized as an organization, students must register with the online student organizational system online, find and secure an advisor, and have a mission statement. Registering as a student organization allowed for recognition with other student organizations and access to apply for funds through the university. The mission statement of “Students for Recovery” is to “promote the academic and social well-being of recovering students, faculty, and staff through the practice of social justice, empowerment, and community building. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere on

campus for students, faculty, and staff, who are in recovery from a drug or alcohol addiction” (ASU Tempe Students for Recovery).

In order to better understand the process of supporting a student organization through a CRP to best support the needs of “Students for Recovery,” through the CRP, two questions guided the research. The two Research Questions were:

RQ #1: How do students in the organization “Students for Recovery” envision this group functioning?

RQ#2: What kind of preparation or training would benefit “Students for Recovery” members as they work toward building their three organizational pillars of Awareness, Fun, and Service?

Method

Participants

There were a total of three participants in the research. Two males and one female were interviewed for the purposes of this study. All three participants were members of the student organization called “Students for Recovery.” They were all in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction as well as working toward an undergraduate degree, which are the two requirements for membership within the organization. This student organization was formed in 2015 and the interviews were held in 2016, therefore, the organization was in its nascent stages of development. The three pillars that guide the organizational activities were: Awareness, Fun, and Service.

Instrument

The purpose of collecting qualitative interview data from three participants in the student organization “Students for Recovery” was to find out how the group functions and to determine

how to be of assistance to them. Five interview questions were asked, such as: “What do you see as the function of the group “Students for Recovery? What is your mission and vision? Where do you see as the future of this group? Where will Students for Recovery be in several years?” The complete set of questions is available in Appendix A. Clarifying, follow-up questions were asked when necessary, such as, “can you please elaborate on what you mean by that?”

Procedure

The steps taken to collect the data will be described in this section. First, IRB approval was obtained. The recruitment letter was written to ask for participation in one 15-20-minute interview, and it described the reasoning behind the study, which was to see how students in the organization “Students for Recovery” envision the function of their group, what their current strengths and limitations are, what preparation they need, and future directions of the group. This recruitment letter was emailed to all the members of “Students for Recovery.” Their email list was obtained during a previous meet-and-greet interaction earlier in the semester.

Three students replied to the request for interviews via email and we set up a time to meet at the local Starbucks, located in a central location close to campus. After explaining the consent form, handing the form to the student for their records, and receiving verbal consent, the interviews were audio recorded using a small digital audio recording device. All three students verbally consented to the audio recording. The interviews lasted for 15-20 minutes each.

Data Analysis

In order to best understand the qualitative data obtained from the interviews, I used Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) constant comparative method from grounded theory. A line-by-line analysis is the most comprehensive method for open coding, but for the purposes of this

research, coding was accomplished by listening to the audio files in 3-5 minute chunks for their main concepts and analyzing those concepts into patterns. By labeling the responses and viewing the range of meanings within the responses, categories began to emerge. The categories made for larger groupings and more compact and explanatory data analysis. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), patterns are formed around these categories based on the category's properties (characteristics) and dimensions (frequency). Subcategory can be formed under the larger categories. The three themes that emerged from the data were social support/safety, education and awareness, and community service/advocacy.

Results

Several themes emerged from the data: social support/safety, education and awareness, and community service/advocacy. All three participants discussed the importance of social support as a function of their groups, "Students for Recovery:" for example, when asked the question, "What is the function of the group?" all three participants had similar answers: "to have a safe, fun place for students in recovery," "as a sober alternative to stereotypical college life," and "this is a support for students in recovery that are on campus." The idea of safety was expressed, but I understood it not as safety from harm, rather, safety to be oneself without judgement. One participant mentioned that their group was the "safe spot" for them on campus and another expressed a desire to see a dedicated, physical space for the group: "ideally, it would be nice to have a safe place on campus."

When asked "what kind of preparation do you need to work effectively with ASU students?," the theme of education and awareness emerged. A need to have education about what it means to be in recovery was expressed by all three participants: "recognizing alcoholism and drug addiction as a disease and not a choice and to not hold it against you, to not be put at a

disadvantage,” and “understanding exactly what addiction is: partying too much is not addiction.” To work more effectively with other students, awareness of the existence of the group was also clearly expressed: “awareness just that it [the group] exists, spread the awareness,” “getting more members,” and “making sure departments [on campus] know” about the group. One participant noted that it may be important to bring awareness to potential resources for students in recovery, such as the Disability Center, which may mitigate potential problems with classes or grades. This participant gave an example of having to take time off of school in order to go to rehab, and registering with the Disability Center was a form of protection against negative outcomes, such as failing grades due to being absent.

Advocacy and community service was listed as a strength of the group as well as an idealized future direction of the group. When asked the question, “what is the future of the group? Where will Students for Recovery be in several years?” one participant noted that the campus is a “recovery desert,” with minimal recovery meetings available, and stated that “meetings on campus” would be “ideal.” Another participant answered the question by stating, “I would hope that...the club does sporting events together, advocate, get bigger.” When asked to describe the strengths of the group, participants said, “the fact that people have the desire to start something from nothing,” “fellowship,” and “I want this thing to be a *thing*.”

Discussion

To answer Research Question #1, “How do students in the ASU organization “Students for Recovery” envision this group functioning?,” the results suggest that students are interested in promoting their group to more people and providing support. One participant stated that this group “identified a need, getting that support” for students in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction. Creating a “safe space,” or a “safe spot” on campus was mentioned, as students in

recovery currently expressed a lack of recovery services and support, or a “recovery desert” on campus. Results suggest that increased support services would be beneficial to students in recovery.

To answer Research Question #2, “What kind of preparation or training would benefit “Students for Recovery” members as they work toward building their three organizational pillars of Awareness, Fun, and Service?,” the results suggest that additional resources in the form of money and collaboration with other departments would be beneficial. “Awareness,” “reducing stigma” toward those in recovery, and “social support” were listed as idealized states of the group. For my future work, these results suggest that collaboration on services and help with awareness-raising would be beneficial to the group.

The limitations of this research were that there were only three participants from whom data was gathered. Additionally, because “Students for Recovery” was a newly formed organization at the time of the interviews, some of the questions that the students had been grappling with were still in the process of being determined (for example, whether this group would be open to all students in recovery - i.e., from eating disorders or gambling - or whether the group would only allow those in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction). In time, I believe that the group will have answers to questions such as these, solidifying their stance on what resources to bring awareness to (“awareness” being one of their organizational pillars).

Conclusions and Implications

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References

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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Students Members of the ASU-based organization “Students for Recovery”

1. What is the function of the group, Students for Recovery? What is the mission and vision of this group?
2. What is the future of this group? Where will Students for Recovery be in several years?
3. What kind of preparation do you need to work effectively and serve other ASU students?
4. What are the strengths of the group?
5. What are the barriers that might prevent the group from achieving its full potential?