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Transparency of purpose and methods in a grass-roots agency :a program evaluation of the Unitas Therapeutic Community Inc.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the transparency of purpose and methods in a grass

roots agency in the South Bronx. This agency Unitas Therapeutic Community Inc. was

studied to distinguish if the agencies methods, mission statement and purpose are clear

and congruent between its board of directors, current staff members and consumers.

There was limited diversity between the twelve participants who included twelve

participants (4 board members, 4 staff members and 4 former consumers). These

participants were separated into cohorts and were asked nine open ended qualitative open

ended questions.

The major findings of this study were that the board and the consumers had very

contrasting feelings about what the agencies mission, purpose and effectiveness was. The

staff showed to be the cohort with the most discrepancy in regard to the same mission,

purpose and effectiveness. Second, the cohorts showed correlation in regard to the

agencies need to make connections between and within the cohorts, and the need to

support themselves stronger if they are to ever become more helpful to the community it

aims to serve.

TRANSPARENCY OF PURPOSE AND METHODS

IN A GRASS-ROOTS AGENCY:

A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF THE UNITAS THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITY

INC.

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2007

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I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Elaine Kersten, for the guidance, structure and excitement she brought to the study over the past two months. I would like to thank all of the incredible people who have been apart of the Unitas family for the past forty years, especially those who took their time and effort to take part in this study. Your positive footprint on the South Bronx is deeper than you will ever realize.

A special thanks to my natural family for teaching me how to love, my Unitas family for showing me how to live and my Smith family for showing me how to believe in myself. These things will stay with me always as foundations of my life… I will never forget.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Knowing and understanding an agency's purpose is essential to making the

organizational decisions you'll need to make. An agency's purpose drives its fundraising

efforts and governs its program planning decisions. Without a clearly stated purpose,

agencies will have a difficult time explaining why the organization exists, a fundamental

requirement when asking for money recruiting board members, hiring and motivating

staff, and publicizing its activities (Hutton & Phillips, 2001, p.34). The purpose of an

organization is stated in its mission, and a mission statement is central to a nonprofit

organization. In fact it is the reason why an organization exists (Hutton & Phillips, 2001,

p.34).

In this study, evaluation research methods were used. The purpose of evaluation

research is to measure the effects of a program against the goals it sets out to accomplish

as a means of contributing to subsequent decision making about the program and

improving future programming (Weiss, 1972, p.4)). Evaluations serve different purposes,

and can be applied at various stages in the life of programs. In the conduct of ongoing

and new programs, evaluations help to determine the degree to which the program is

effective—that is, how successfully the program provides the benefits envisioned by its

sponsors and designers (Rossi& Freeman, 1993, p.3).

For these reasons gaining an understanding of agency purposes and mission is

important for any social work agency. Unitas, a not for profit youth and family services

agency located in Bronx, New York, is the agency of focus in this study. No program

evaluation has been conducted to date with the exception of a four week Fordham

University evaluation that took place over one summer session (will be discussed in lit

review). Yet, there exists a question within the program about its effectiveness in serving

It's target population. Thus, an applied study, in the form of a program evaluation, is

indicated. Therefore, this study is developed to evaluate the extent to which the Unitas

Board of Directors, staff and consumers share a common understanding of the purpose,

mission and efficacy of the program's services.

Unitas Therapeutic Community has been a grass roots community mental health

agency in the South Bronx for over 40 years. Unitas currently serves over 650 children

and families per year using a unique form of community mental health that is grounded in

social work principles.

The organization was founded in the South Bronx as part of the national

community mental health movement forty years ago. This movement was generated to

provide services to individuals whose mental health needs were unmet through traditional

mental health services available at that time.

During its entire forty year history, Unitas has collected limited records and

statistics that demonstrate evidence of the success of the programs. In addition, there

appears to be a lack of internal consistency of understanding of its purpose and mission.

As a result, no efforts have been made to establish a consistent understanding about the

agency's focus and effectiveness across board members, the consumers and its staff. As

noted by Weiss, Hutton, Phillips, and Rossi, consistent understanding of agency mission

and values is a major factor in providing strong clinical outcomes. The lack of consistent

understanding of Unitas' purpose across the key program components has major implications to the viability of this organization and its function in the Bronx community it serves.

The intent of this study, therefore, is to gather information about perspectives regarding focus, purpose, and effectiveness of this particular agency from three cohorts, all of whom are highly invested in the agencies purpose, meaning and utility. The three cohorts include: The Consumers who receive the service, the Staff in charge of delivering the service and the Board of Directors in charge of overseeing and funding the service.

Conceptualized as a program evaluation, this study will examine consistency of understanding of agency purpose by asking the following questions: (1) What is the agency mission and purpose of the agency, (2) What are Unitas perceived/experienced program outcomes, (3) Do they believe that the agency has been successful and why, and most of all, (4)What connections, both programmatically and personally, if any, do consumers maintain over time?

Through the results of this study, the agency will learn valuable information regarding the utility of its services and gain insight into the implications of its organizational structure and program modalities. The aim of this study is to discover the extent to which there is a congruence of understanding about its mission, purpose, goals, and utility and the nature of its influence on the community and, most importantly, on its consumers.

This study is important to clinical social work practice because many clinical social workers are employed in agencies with a community context. These agencies, either large or small, come with their range of dysfunction and lack of clarity. A lack of a

transparent purpose or mission impacts the clinician's ability to help its consumers

receive the best care possible is the intent of any agency, program or individual in the

social work field.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Unitas Therapeutic Community is a grass roots community mental health agency that has been serving the South Bronx for over 40 years and is generally considered a success due to its longevity in an ever changing community. However, Unitas has collected limited records and statistics regarding the history of its service, and has not evaluated the "helpfulness" or "success" of their programs. Because of this, there continues to be a question regarding how transparent the agency's focus and effectiveness are to both Unitas itself and the consumers it serves.

This chapter examines existing literature relevant to the study, first with a brief explanation, history and evaluation of the community mental health movement, and Unitas. This is important to the study because to evaluate Unitas we need to first see where it came from and under what circumstances. He who does not understand the past is doomed to repeat it. (Barton & Sanborn, 1975, p.35) Then a review of program evaluation literature will be addressed to set a backdrop for the study.

The intent of this research is then to collect records from Unitas, and to demonstrate the importance of self evaluation as a means to better understanding of its treatment effective as an effort to make lasting positive change within the program.

What is the Community Mental Health Movement

Unitas was founded using community mental health principles and based on that, , it is important to include information about the history of the Community Mental Health (CMH) movement. Barton & Sanborn (1975) speak about how CMH is a;

> commitment to a population, the community mental health approach indicates that an organization (the center) is responsible for all who live in a given community (catchments area). Commitment to the population means a sense of responsibility for all citizens in the community- children, adults and families. It also includes those who have been underserved in the past- the disadvantaged and ethnic minorities (Barton and Sanborn, 1975, p. 37-38).

Community mental health principles are active today and started possibly as long as 500 years ago and remains in practice today through clinically based community practice. Clinically based community practice "refers to the location of mental health services beyond the walls of formal, medicalized clinics in settings where other kinds of services by other professionals are delivered, in the neighborhoods of the client population whom clinicians are serving" (Sessions, Lightburn 2006, p.3).

Historical Context of the Community Mental Health Movement

According to Barton and Sanborn (1975) the origins of CMH can be traced back to a community "of chronic patients was developed in Belgium over 500 years ago (Barton & Sanborn, 1975, p.36). This started a timetable of events, programs, politics and people who all contributed to the movement. These events, including world wars brought attention to the amount of people that were suffering from mental illness. The amount of illness that was detected could not be served under traditional mental health services due to the numbers of people requiring treatment.

6

World Wars I and II raised concern because of the need to get soldiers back into service promptly and the large number of military discharges with the diagnosis of mental illness. To assess the need of the public epidemiologic surveys pointed to the larger portion of citizens suffering from mental illness (Barton & Sanborn, 1975, p.36-37).

These two events brought attention to mental illness and set the stage for a national study. The American Psychiatric Association, the National Association for Mental Health and other groups influenced Congress to pass the Mental Health Act in 1955 which established a Joint Commission for the Study of mental illness and mental health (Barton & Sanborn, 1975, p.37). The commission made recommendations to establish community mental health centers for the early detection, treatment and prevention of mental illness. All of this gave rise to the community mental health movement of the 1960's which was "a desire to provide services and supports within communities for deinstitutionalized psychiatric patents and a commitment to extend services to underprivileged people in poorer communities as part of the more general goal of reducing social inequality" (Drake et al., 2003; Lourie, 2003). -7 This movement sought to apply a public health framework to mental health problems and services.

Several issues formulated the foundation of Community Mental Health. For example a rise in trends indicating;

> An increased severity of psychosocial problems and psychiatric symptomology among children and youth is reported by parents and teacher in creased dramatically between 1973 and 1993. Some evidence of this include the rise violence among this "the rate of suicide in American youth has risen 200% over the past 20 years. At the same time, the demographics of the U.S. population, particularly among young families with children, show a marked growth in racial

and cultural diversity which will continue to increase dramatically in the future (Sessions, Lightburn, 2006, p.5).

Other needs/issues that brought about the rise of the Community Mental Health movement included dissatisfaction with the limitations of office based clinical practice in engaging vulnerable populations. This is reflected in Edward Eismann's formulation of Unitas discussed in the next section.

Evaluation of the Community Mental Health Movement

As a part of my study, I evaluated aspects of Unitas that are considered to be helpful and not helpful and an overall question of its success. Here we look at these questions relating to the entire Community mental health movement. Sessions and Lightburn (2006) note that;

> while the community mental health movement "marked some success, including enormous expansion of the mental health professions (Cutler et al., 2003), the goals of the original visionaries, however, have been only minimally fulfilled." The equality goals of brining the resources of mental health knowledge and applying them to underscored communities to prevent the development of emotional problems in at-risk populations have been repeatedly challenged and undermined."Full realization of the goals of community mental health encountered the roadblocks or erratic and parsimonious funding" among other factors (p.7).

In an evaluation of the Lincoln Community Mental Health Center, Jack F. Wilder, MD supervisor of this program, discussed the strengths of the CMH movement in the Bronx, which is also where my study takes place. In his study The Bronx (1.6 million people), was described as the poorest county in the state of New York. Here he conducted an evaluation of this center using a four point scale; Very good, good, poor, and very poor. He assigned the value of good in regard to CMH's ability to assume responsibility

for a community and inclusion of Community Participation however he discussed some

areas receiving the marks of poor and very poor including an issue around clarity of

purpose and roles.

> There was also a lack of staff clarity about the nature of their jobs, many
> did not receive sufficient training and given the consultation ad education
> ideology of urban programs, here was less clarity in roles a more opportunity to
> disagree of the proper purposes of the centers. Teams were faced with the
> questions of "Who leads?", "How are decisions made?", "Who does what", "Who
> is responsible for the patient?", and "How are members accountable? (Barton &
> Sanborn, 1975, p.13)

Wilder goes on to discuss how this lack of clarity has driven many excellent

professionals from centers, and has wasted a lot of time, both issues that will be discussed

later in this study. Now that we have looked at the community mental health movement

in perspective we are going to narrow it down to the program in question, Unitas.

<u>What is Unitas</u>

This section of the literature review discusses what the programs are, its origins

and to what extent has it has been evaluated. The literature describes Unitas as an agency

with deep connection to both the community mental health movement and the specific

culture of the South Bronx.

> Unitas took clinical thinking and practice from the office setting and applied it to
> the open setting of community life, developing therapeutic linkages between older
> and younger neighborhood youth in a network of social support. It did (does) this
> through developing, maintaining and supervising a large cadre of older youth who
> bought the idea that they could serve as special friends or parent figures to
> troubled neighborhood children in a new kind of family focused on mutual
> helpfulness. Using the language of "symbolic kin" and "symbolic families," an
> alternative system of mental health care was born, one where youth became
> (become) engaged in learning to have a collective prosocial influence on each
> other and the younger children as they might experience in real functional family
> life where life was not as chaotic. (Sessions, Lightburn 2006, p. 193).

To understand any organization we must first look at the mission statement. Based on their current web site the agencies mission currently reads:

"Unitas is a community social service organization that promotes and sustains the social and emotional well-being of families by empowering youth to become change agents, and create self-sustaining communities."

The Unitas website tells us that the aim of Unitas is to use traditional community mental health concepts to meet the aim of the clients' needs. Unitas uses social support networks alive in the consumer's life including; neighborhood, peer, school and family systems. Here the goal is to enlist the influence of as many people in a child's natural network to be a part of the healing and helping process. By focusing on the existing healing powers of the community rather than the traditional mental health model which sees the therapist as the professional/expert and the primary agent of change, Unitas aims to facilitate the community to help themselves instead of having to look for help from strangers or professionals. Unitas provides this modality of treatment in two main ways through their family therapy component and the symbolic family caretaker network.

The Caretaker network refers to neighborhood youth "caretaking" younger youth in a network of social support. This is done through a large volunteer network of young neighborhood teens (30 current caretakers) recruited and trained to serve as caretakers, helpers, role models, to their own neighborhood children. Each one of the caretakers in Unitas is assigned one to three children (75 current children) who are a younger member of their existing community. Groups of these caretakers are led by older mature caretakers and together they act as a symbolic family.

The symbolic family is not intended to take the place of the children's existing network but rather to add an extra familial support to the children's lives. Here all participants in the symbolic family share some of the same attributes they are missing from their current family situation including, caring brothers and sisters, empathetic parents, and stern but fair familial conflict resolution. Within these symbolic families children can begin to experience a sense of belonging, acceptance, and connection that is important in winning their cooperation, developing their social feeling and identifying with pro-social attitudes and behavior. This means that neighborhood children and their specific caretakers become special groups or "families" where they can be coached to exert a collective and positive influence on each other.

While the symbolic family systems attract an extraordinary response from neighborhood youth, a small percentage of youth and families do respond to more traditional mental health services. For such clients, individual, group and family therapies are provided by experienced clinicians whose modality of treatment is consistent with the Unitas model. Here in addition to traditional diagnostic psychosocial assessment procedures and treatment planning, emphasis is placed on mobilization of all natural social network influences found to bear on problem resolution by involving individuals who are significant in the child's life such as teachers, close neighbors, relatives and caretakers in the treatment process. This study will investigate if there is congruence between the participants regarding the helpfulness, efficacy, vision and success of this program (retrieved on June 6th 2007, http://unitastc.com/).

Unitas is a community that promotes the empowerment of individuals through the use of each other. If communities can understand and solve their own problems, they will create better circumstances for their livelihood.

Historical Context of Unitas

The programs founder, Eismanntor Edward Eismann (or Eismann as the community calls him), started his work at the Bronx Community mental health center. Through this experience, Eismann gained an understanding of what can be done to reach community members therapeutically. He started to shape the Unitas program with social work and community mental health concepts. In what was called "the community mental health revolution" of the 1960's stressed agency accountability for service utilization in a particular catchments area and encouraged the development of human resources among the client population, rather than relying solely on outside professional expertise *(*Farber & Rogler, 1982, p.*79).*

Eismann noticed that only a very small population of community members went to the center's services, and a handful of clients in his first eight months there. As a result of this Eismann decided to go out to the street, to stop waiting for clients to come to him for consultation. Sessions and Lightburn (2006) reference this dissatisfaction with the limitations of office based clinical practice in engaging vulnerable populations in there evaluation of Community Based Clinical Practice. Here they discuss how cultural and economic phenomenon's effect attendance in therapy. There is strong evidence that traditional office- or clinic-based mental health interventions do not succeed in serving a substantial percentage of the population in need of services. -6 (Cutler,Bevilacqua, &

Mcfarland, 2003; Drake , Green, Mueser, & Goldman, 2003; Lourie, 2003) At- risk populations with multiple challenges are less likely to view mental health interventions as potentially useful and may avoid clinics.- 6 (Harrison, Mckay, & Bannon, 2004; Madsen, 1999).

Once leaving the office behind, Eismann was able to make contacts with a junior high school where he cultivated a relationship with a child and his friends, family members, and teachers. This would have been impossible if he had remained waiting in his office. At this time he also made connections with the (boys) he met on the street. Eismann held daily groups and individual sessions with these boys that summer, but they spent virtually no time in the outpatient office. Meetings occurred on tenant stoops, fire escapes, at the local candy store, in the school yard—wherever and whenever it made sense to talk according to the needs of the boys and not the needs of the clinic It was not long after this that Eismann chose the name Unitas derives from Biblical Psalm 133, *"How good and noble it is for all people to live together in unity."* To Eismann, mental health difficulties involve broken, unresolved relationships….If peoples' heads are together, then you can be a community. Unity (Unitas) then is projected as the goal for humans in their personal lives and their relationships with others. (Farber & Rogler, 1982, p. 82-83*).*

Eismann started using this model in his community mental health clinic, but stated that it failed largely because the staff workers lacked training and commitment to work effectively with the children, community members selected to be mental health workers did not have the skills necessary to understand or treat psychoanalytically the

children's problems. Parents also added this up because they wanted their children to be seen from "Professionals", not by their neighbors (Farber & Rogler, 1982, p. 82-84*).

In the winter of 1970, Eismann decided to train teachers, administrators, and counselors to handle problems of the children without automatically referring them an outside professional. Eismann soon "realized that teenagers could help. In 1972, he started using the teenagers he was working with to become change agents themselves. This was the start of the caretaker network mentioned earlier. Eismann proposed to establish a therapeutic community in the very place where people lived and not in an institutional setting. He decided to implement this plan in the spring of 1974 by inviting all the groups of children with whom he had been working, to meeting. About 25 teenagers came to this first meeting. He realized that the children attended this meeting solely because of the relationship he had with them and he realized that his job was now, "to help them become bonded with each other. It was during that summer that teenagers began to be called mothers and fathers rather than counselors. (Farber & Rogler, 1982, p. 87).

Just around this time (1975) "the community mental health center began to experience difficulties. They required Eismann to stay in the office more which frustrated him, and inspired him to conduct a study to prove a point: "From April 1976 to October 1976, Eismann found that the mean intake …was scandalsly low, with only 1.8 children per month seen per worker. He wrote:

> It seems incredible that the catchment with the largest children's population and
> the most serous needs….should be so untouched by essential sours of community
> psychiatric help, It seems obvious that the approach of having youth come to a

14

psychiatric facility is neither popular nor serviceable in terms of what they need (Farber & Rogler, 1982, p. 88).

In 1977, Eismann severed all ties with the mental health center and organized A board of Directors, consisting primarily of South Bronx community leaders who had been involved in Unitas and older Unitas participants. Ironically, the features which make Unitas's approach to community therapy unique have worked against its chances of being funded. The agency has proven its viability and, through its popularity and success, Unitas has not, however, been willing to modify its program to allow it to fit into the traditionally oriented mental health establishment making it difficult to gain notoriety and funding (Farber & Rogler, 1982, p. 91).

<u>Evaluation of Unitas</u>

In the Unitas archives there is only one piece of program evaluation, a research study conducted by the Hispanic Research Center at Fordham University, in 1985. Findings from that study that are relative to my study include what aspects of Unitas's programming were found to be helpful and to what level the program was deemed a success. The study focused on a pre and post test that rated social support networks and amount of connection sustained in the Unitas summer program in comparison to other youth programs in the same area; such as the PAL (Police Athletic League).

This study found the following gains associated with children's participation in the Unitas summer Program to be helpful. The most clear-cut and robust finding regarding the helpfulness of Unitas was that its participants' social support specifically their satisfaction with the support provided to them by other Unitas participants increased

significantly" The Unitas program, was designed as a therapeutic community with its extended family circle and the unique symbolic family linkages between children and neighborhood teens effect a feeling of social support attributable to this aspect of its design and to the special types of social linkages that it provides (Procidano & Glenwick, 1985,p. 74). Another aspect the study found helpful was its maintenance of children that may otherwise not experience these social supports. "Unitas has accomplished the maintenance of a group of children at substantial psychological risk who otherwise might deteriorate" (Procidan & Glenwick, 1985, p.76). These aspects of the study, when compared with the PAL, found that Unitas was helpful in creating and maintaining these connections to a higher extent than other youth agencies in the same neighborhood.

The study found that Unitas was indeed successful because Unitas is not exclusively a matter of bringing about psychological change in the children. Such change is but one measure of success. Thus, if success is measured by the consistency of purpose and the congruence between the theoretical model and the social structure, then, Unitas is, indeed, successful (Procidan & Glenwick, 1985, p.119). Here the study discussed how Unitas is successful due to a consistency of purpose and how that leads to success.

As a structure, Unitas provides its participants with safe and carefully organized after school and summer activities. The value of this function should not be taken lightly when we consider that Unitas does its work in the South Bronx, an area which has come to symbolize urban decay in the United States (Procidan & Glenwick, 1985, p.120).

Since there has been little done in recent years to continue the process of evaluating this program, a current evaluation is indicated. This study is designed to evaluate the current status of Unitas' mission, purpose and program efficacy.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative, exploratory research method was selected to guide a study designed to study the understanding of agency purpose from individuals in the three major agency components, including staff, board of directors, and consumers. The research question examined the extent to which the agency purpose was consistently understood from the perspective of individuals in each of the three major agency components. The hypothesis of this study held that a consistent understanding of agency purpose will relate to positive, enduring outcomes for consumers of this service. The exploratory study design was selected in order to access direct perceptions about the agency purpose from individuals in each of the three components and compare them. Though Unitas has been a functioning Community Mental health agency in the South Bronx for over 40 years, the agency had limited records and statistics that show the effectiveness or understanding of its purpose in regard to its consumers and employees.

The intent of the proposed study, therefore, is to gather information about perspectives regarding focus, purpose, and effectiveness of this particular agency from the following cohorts, Flexible method narrative interviews were used for the study. The open ended questions resulted in thematically organized analysis from each of the participants and cohorts.

Twelve members of the Unitas Community were interviewed in April and May of 2007; four board members, four staff members, and four former consumers. The sample cohort was composed of Unitas consumers who live in the South Bronx, NY neighborhoods of Longwood and Hunts Point. In order to qualify for inclusion in the study, consumers participated in the Unitas Program for at least one year and were at least 18 years of age. The second cohort, the staff, had to have been working at Unitas for at least three months. The third cohort, the board of directors, qualified by serving on the board for at least six months time. The demographic information was limited to the participants average amount of time associated with the agency, which was between 1-40 ($M = 17$, $SD = 14.2$). Their length of affiliation varied through the cohorts.

The second demographic question was about their gender, The sample group was gathered was limited because for several reasons. There were only 10 members of the board to choose from, and there were only 7 Unitas staff to choose from. The consumers where chosen starting first with easily accessible former consumers that I knew from the neighborhood. From there a snowball technique was used, in which consumer participants r suggested other potential consumer participants.

Data Collection

Face to face interviews were conducted for 20 and 45 minutes per participant. Data was collected consisting of two demographic questions and 9 questions. The interview questions focused on Unitas methodology, effectiveness and suggested change agents (see Interview Guide, Attachment A). The participants were asked opened ended questions to capture individual perceptions about the agency and to make suggestions of

18

improved service and modality. They were not given the questions before hand because much of the research was to see what the participants thought without looking up information such as question number one; What is our mission statement?

After the proposed interview instrument was approved by the Smith College Human Subjects Review Board (see appendix on page 60) I conducted 9 of the 12 interviews in the Unitas office because that is where the participant wanted to meet. One was over the phone, and two took place in the homes of the participant, also because this is where they asked to meet.

I called to summarize the purpose and structure of the interviews before the interview date. Each participant received the Informed Consent Form (see appendix C) in person before going over the key points together directly before the interview started. All consumer participants agreed to the audio taping procedure.

Additional questions to prompt further discussion, Interviews were conducted in such a way to avoid influencing responses. I asked the question in identical order to keep the conversations as lateral as possible Following every participants were asked to reflect on what we had already spoken about or if they wanted to add anything that was not covered but vital to the topic. All interviews were transcribed within 48 hours to assure accuracy and completeness. Although transcribing the interviews was a lengthy process I wanted to personally transcribe the interviews for my own personal reflection on the material being presented and found it vital to my personal writing and reflecting process.

All of the participants were assigned a folder number which matched the folder of the digital audio tape it was recorded on. When transcribed the only identifying information was a code stating what cohort the response was from and the folder number

previously mentioned. After the audio tape was transcribed, the information was deleted from the audio file to protect the participant's identity.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

The units of measure guiding data analysis were words and phrases across study participants. Narrative words and phrases were analyzed across each of the study questions and placed on a large draft board to assist in the analysis process. In doing this, I could look at all of the verbatim material at once and as a complete story. Here I highlighted different recurring themes that ran throughout the responses using different colors for each key theme. It became clear that some of my questions could be major themes but other questions led to the major themes of support and connections. I counted each questions response both overall and within the three cohorts in an effort to compare and contrast the responses which was the purpose of this study; to find the overall opinions of the "Unitas community" and the similarities or differences both within and between the cohorts. Each questions response was reorganized then based on these themes and by cohort before being intergraded into the findings section of this study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The intent of this study was to gather information and perspectives regarding focus, purpose, and effectiveness of Unitas Therapeutic Community, a grass roots community mental health agency located in the South Bronx. The research question explored was: Transparency of purpose and methods in a grass-roots agency: An impact evaluation of the Unitas Therapeutic Community Inc.? The agency has collected limited records and statistics that explore the effectiveness or understanding of its purpose. Furthermore it remains unclear how the agency's focus and effectiveness is to both the consumers and the people in charge of providing the service. Therefore, data was collected, to provide feedback about the agency's status from agency staff, consumer alumni and board members, because they are highly invested in the meaning and utility. The aim of this study was to evaluate circumstances across key program cohorts about the understanding of agency purpose and mission to discover if there is a congruence of understanding regarding Unitas mission, purpose, and goals, the three cohorts included board members, staff and consumers. The researcher used a qualitative, exploratory research method. Flexible method narrative interviews were used with open ended questions to bring about the most freedom and reflection in the participants reflections. The open ended questions resulted in thematically organized analysis from each of the participants with added insight between and within the cohorts.

In this chapter demographic information about each of the components are provided followed by cohort analysis of the mission and purpose of the agency. Third, the evaluation section will be discussed using a thematic analysis of "key themes". Participant suggestions for future success will be provided in each section to give insight to each cohort's perceived vision of helpful change.

<u>Demographic Data</u>

Out of the twelve participants, five participants were female and seven male. In the cohorts three of the four board participants were female, two of the four consumers where male and all of the staff participants were male.

On average, as a total group, the time associated with the agency ranged from one year to 40 years. Three of the participants have been affiliated for the entire forty years that Unitas has been open. The mean amount of time spent at the agency formal participants was 17 years with a standard deviation of 14.2.

<u>Transparency of Agency Mission Statement</u>

Formulating connections and symbolic family support is at the heart of Unitas mission statement. However to this day it is unclear as if the board, its staff or the consumers understand or conceptualize Unitas Mission statement. The purpose of this section is to investigate how transparent and consistent the Unitas mission statement is between and within its cohorts. This was investigated by identifying if the three cohorts are consistent in their understanding of the Unitas mission statement.

Here are some of the responses presented by the Unitas Board of Directors when answering the research question, "What do you think the Unitas mission statement is?" None of the board members were able to recite the mission statement as it currently is

stated. The confusion over the mission statement is evidenced here by a board member

who spoke frankly about the in clarity of the mission statement.

> That's hard, because it is not clear, it is not clear to me what their statement is even though we just put a new statement together, mission statement together, that is still not clear to me. Um, I am thinking that Unitas for what I have learned, personally, in the past three years now, um, that they want to help our teens…. don't know…. to be honest I don't know.

While none of the board members could recite the mission statement, two sub

themes arose from their answers, these sub themes included empowerment and the use of

the term social service agency.

Two of the board members made use of the term social service agency as a

description of Unitas service or mission as evidenced here by a board member who

speaks of the expanding services of the agency.

> I think the mission statement has been broadened to not only include our mental health work but to state that we are a social service agency in expanding our caretakers network practices to programs that might occur in schools and in other agencies in the south Bronx, we are now known as a south Bronx agency. We are a social service agency we work primarily with child the extended family of the child and the relationships of the child in terms of his teacher maybe his clergy, etc, his friends to help the child solve problems that may be occurring that may be preventing him from doing what he wants to do, and I think that his a very broad way in saying we exist to help the child to help themselves.

Most of the Board members (N=3) mentioned that Unitas aims to help the

community to help themselves as mentioned above and here by another Board Participant

who uses the word empowerment to describe the service.

> The mission statement to help youth to empower them, I am using my own words, to help the community to take care of itself that is that the oldest in the idea of the symbolic family that the oldest children would be caretakers or symbolic fathers

23

or mothers for the younger children and then the adults would eventually be involved.

Here are some of the responses presented by the Unitas Staff when answering the research question, "What do you think the Unitas mission statement is?" None of the staff members were able to recite the mission statement as it currently is stated. The confusion over the mission statement is evidenced here by a staff member who spoke frankly about the in clarity of the mission statement.

> I am trying to remember, trying to say something more from my head than through my heart. I wish I could just read it, all I know is that is when we say for instance when *Unitas* address the children every week they say that Unitas is a wonderful community of children of young men and women and some older men and women who come together each week to met this way each week to play together and then to talk together about better ways to get along with each other and ways to solve problems peacefully.

While none of the staff members could recite the mission statement, the same two sub themes arose from their answers, these sub themes included empowerment and the use of the term social service agency.

Two of the staff members made use of the term social service agency as a description of Unitas service or mission as evidenced here by a board member who speaks of the expanding services of the agency.

> The mission is to um, recruit, train, and sustain family values, through our interventions. It's a social service organization that promotes and sustains the social wellbeing of youth and their families.

Half of the staff members (N=2) mentioned that Unitas aims to empower its consumers as evidenced here by a staff participant.

The key purpose of Unitas is to prevent um, drug abuse and other sorts of antisocial behavior um including violence or aggression um, domestic violence mental health problems that appear antisocial, emotional deregulation and criminal behavior, I would say that Unitas ultimately aims at promoting problem solving in the context of the community setting so that as human relationships are problematic um, just as any relationship has its problems or that conflicts do arise it tries to equip and *empower* particularly youth to have skills to develop into adults who can effectively trouble shoot interpersonal problems.

There is some discrepancy within the staff cohort shown here by two participants who give their own interpretations of the mission statement first evidenced here by a staff participant who sees empowerment as a key component of the mission.

The mission is to um, recruit train, and sustain family values, through our interventions. It's a social service organization that promotes and sustains the social wellbeing of youth and their families. It (the agencies purpose) serves pretty much as an *empowerment*, as a tenant of empowerment for children and families in this area, Unitas is one of the only free prevention services in this neighborhood which is not aliened with any kind of treatment agencies. So we become one of those agencies that people feel free to participate in because of our availability to them and our openness and our un attachment with any political or treatment environment that would normally cast a type on them.

In contrast here a staff discusses how the current mission statement is not correct in his eyes while commenting on the use of the terms social service agency and empowerment. While speaking of a real gap between the mission statement and the actual service he reflected on the vagueness of the mission and its purpose:

Yeah the present mission statement really says nothing about the purpose of what Unitas does the present mission statement really doesn't say anything about what Unitas does first of all it really doesn't define Unitas any more than one would define any concrete service, social service agency, if one would come to any typical grass roots agency in the area. In saying that Unitas is a community based social service organization it dose not say anything, not that it is right or wrong, it just does not say anything, and that it works towards the social and emotional wellbeing of families through empowering youth and creating self sustaining communities, I don't quite see how that is all connected with helping youngsters to tab their own particular family life nurtured and if they come from dysfunctional families, how is this addressed, it just says that we empower youth

to become change agent for each other and to create self sustaining agencies but I don't know what is the purpose of Unitas which is really not to strengthen families because we are not addressing strengthening families because if families need to be strengthened this means that they are really ok, so it should really say correcting, rehabilitating, remediation, correcting or brining therapy to dysfunctional families, to takes those families that may be on the verge of problems and to address them in a preventive capacity or to treat them if they really are dysfunctional to the point of symptomatic behaviors in children so it has nothing to do with what Unitas actually does.

The consumers had very different answers when discussing this topic. Most of the consumers mentioned the agency being the change agent is some capacity, only one consumer mentioned that Unitas serves to help the community to help themselves. None of the consumers mentioned the word social service agency or empowerment when discussing this question.

Overall there were some strong similarities between the cohorts in regard to the mission and its purpose. The most evident was that over all, 0 % of the participants were able to state the mission statement exactly how it is worded.

Four participants (33% of the participants) used the term empowerment and social service agency when describing the mission statement. However these four came from the staff and the board exclusively. None of the consumers used this terminology when discussing the purpose and mission.

Perceived Purpose of the Agency?

As with the mission statement, it is unclear as if the board, its staff or the consumers understand or conceptualize Unitas overall purpose. To answer the question why do we exist, the purpose of this section is to investigate how transparent and consistent the purpose is between and within its cohorts. This was investigated by identifying if the three cohorts consistent in their understanding of the Unitas purpose.

26

While many participants discussed purpose along with the mission statement question, other key suggestions relative to connections, purpose and the need for support arose here.

Here are some of the responses presented by the Unitas Board of Directors when answering the research question, "What purpose, would you say, does the agency serve?" Here a consumer discusses community connections when answering the research question. "What purpose, would you say, does the agency serve?"

> Alright, the Unitas mission statement is to build a better community connections by having um, people in the around the community effect the lives of younger people so that when they grow up to be older they will have the same powers to do that to other kids in the neighborhood to improve the crime rate and to improve the world of everybody.

Building connections was the main theme that arose from this question. When coupled with the next research question *"Would you say that the consumers have been able to keep lasting connections with the people they met through the agency?* it provided the most response from the participants. Overall 9 of the 12 participants (75%) discussed connections at some point within these two questions when addressing the purpose of the agency. Connections and Support became the major themes of the study as relative responses ran throughout the study.

Most of the Board participants (N=3) discussed how Unitas purpose is to build connections. While four of the board members discussed connections within the agency purpose only three of them feel like this is happening. The only exception felt like this happens at times as evidenced by.

> Yes some of them have, some of them have not, what helps them keep connections is loving and caring for each other though careful nurturing of one another.

While there was a range of answers in all groups it was the staff that had the most

discrepancy within its own cohort, both in percentages and range of answers. Two staff

interviewed (50%) feel that lasting connections are a reality in the Unitas program related

to its purpose. This is evidenced by one staff who discusses this with a lot of confidence;

> I think over the years there has been a very strong achievement of the agency that
> so many, now what percentage I cant say, I have no hard data on this, all I know
> is over the years 30-40 years since Unitas became more strongly entrenched in the
> community the connections that have been made among so many of the children
> of that time, of the teens of that time, the children with each other has been
> maintained to this day.

> Here demonstrating the discrepancy within this cohort another staff member

speaks just as strongly for the opposite response;

> I think that the connections that one would expect from an agency that has been as
> effective as this is pretty much below what our expectations are, people just do
> not communicate with each other anymore, people who have benefited from the
> agency have moved on and I have not seen any substantial types of connections
> for example Unitas has been here 40 years and I can only identify 4 people who
> we are connected with over these 40 years that have come back to the agency and
> say this is been people who's lives were saved, um, that is pitiful needless to say
> sad.

Further demonstrating the difference both within and between the cohorts, only

one consumer (25%) of the four participants feels that lasting connections are maintained

through our purpose. Three of the four spoke about partial connections but a need for

improvement. One consumer here spoke of long time friendships formed at Unitas along

with the possibility of loosing members;

> Some kids look at the model of Unitas and they follow it but some kids are lost in
> the wind and they just get taken away and they do other bad things they are not
> suppose to and those are kids you have to try to prevent to get to that spot, getting
> there, but at times it does work alright, my friends that I went to Unitas with, most

of them I hang out with all of the time, I play baseball with them, I conversate with them, I hang out with them and they are long time friends.

All of the consumers stated that there was missing connections even if they answered yes to the question, some of them had a concern for missing children who are not tracked by a system, some expressed sorrow of being left herself. Another had very strong views about the current connections compared to the way it was when they were in the program.

(lasting connections?) Defiantly, me myself is a big example, started out as a kid in the program and I became really close to a lot of people, who at the time where counselors, and it made such a dramatic impact in my life that to this day I finally got back in touch with them again and it was a great feeling, it felt to me that it was something that I had to do, I did not think that this person knew what a dramatic change they had on me. It was a counselor who I wouldn't think would take their time to stay with me, to teach me to show me things that I think that my own family wouldn't have shown me, it makes me feel good that I've myself made that dramatic impact on kids that I took care of in Unitas as well. I just bumped into one of my kids that was in my family, I constantly see here, I am proud of her because she is going to college now as a early childhood program, basically what Unitas do starting out with the kids again this person changed me, I know that I changed a lot of the kids as well, and I became a role model to a lot of the kids. However if we are trying to compare times of today with times in the past, I really don't think so. I admit that I started going to the program as a young one because I really didn't want to go home and I wanted to be there to just have fun with the other peers, to basically quote on quote use the program, but as time progressed, I became intrigued with the program. I really didn't see the reason why but there was something that was catching me on, I guess I didn't want to accept the fact that I had to work, but it was catching me on that I knew that I could change some kids life." So as I see Unitas as today it's not what it was before that we had all this trust amongst each other and I know, we knew how to work with each other, how to deal with each other, now it seems more like a hang out spot, where there is nothing to do so I go there to play sports or to hang out, flirt, what young kids are doing now a days, they do not see the purpose of why they are there, what they could be doing, they don't realize that they can do what I did, to make an impact on a lot of these kids who really need them, in all kinds of ways to have somebody to talk with to just listen to them, to enjoy time together even time in the weekends, like they used to do with me and what I did with kids as well.

29

<u>Overall</u>

Seven out of the twelve participants (58%) felt that consumers have been able to keep lasting connections with the people they met through the agency, three (25%) did not feel like this happens while four participants (33%) had mixed thoughts with responses such as; "to a degree", "somewhat", "not on a large level", or "yes but below expectations". The three cohorts had a difference in opinion within their own group as well.

While overall there was a sense of connections being maintained within the consumers, however there was some (a) discrepancy between the cohorts as evidenced by a range in percentages feeling that our purpose is being fulfilled and connections are being made; board (75%), Staff (50%) and Consumers (25%).

<u>Reasons/ Suggestions Regarding Connections and Support</u>

The participants gave a range of reasons for the amount of connections and support within the program including, community history, high staff turnover, positive trainings, however most of all six (50%) thought that participation/ tracking age stopping at early adulthood was a key element of programming that has to change.

Three of the four staff mentioned a need for programs exceeding the current age limit of 21.

> What I saw it seems like a lot of the kids were immediately linked to their mentors or each other but as soon as somebody would leave Unitas it is not often that we hear back from them. It seems like a lot of the kids once they hit a certain age or if they get to a certain behavior level they are lost to care and the agency does not have any kind of follow up um, which is a little troublesome because

then you have kids that become adults and then they loose their support network and it doesn't seem from what I heard they don't build their own.

One board member feels that they keep lasting connections but that programmatically something needs to be in place to assure this continues.

I don't think there is a structure built into the program that was were our social worker s are really given time to see the former clients or the clients who have passed through it, programs that they currently run. I think that something has to be built in that continues the connections and other phase of Unitas has to be built that really follows people you know onward.

Three (75%) of the consumers (the same three who cited a lack of connection) spoke about personal reasons for wanting a continued lifespan program. Here a consumer had the same thoughts about a need for an older program and the positive effect it could have.

Um, like I said, make another program for the older teens 18-and up so that they can get something out of it and to prevent them from going to the other roads like I was saying before, to prevent them from making that detour and to do other bad things that they are not suppose to do, other programs that will prevent them from doing that. Also an older role model system, if the caretakers would last for like a long time, an older role model will look like a teacher, teaching the students the right way to learn and you know if that teacher is always going to tell them to do the right thing they will probably will pick up from that teacher and will probably do what the teacher said. That would be good because for me personally the older teachers in my school really had high hopes for me and everything and I loved the how do you call that, the counseling they gave me to be successful in the outside world after I left my high school, that is why the teachers are a good role model to tell these things to a younger kid, it has more effect.

Here the participants discussed some reasons and suggestions in regard to how to build connections. Next we are going to look at an broader overall evaluation of the program.

Effectiveness of the Program

In the final section of the findings chapter the aim was to investigate the beliefs about the overall effectiveness of Unitas programming. So far we have investigated the major themes of agencies mission and overall purpose and a sub theme within purpose relating to connections. In this section we get to see if the positive and negative aspects of these themes lead to a helpful and successful agency. So therefore in this section two main subtopics were explored, (1) helpfulness and (2) success. Three sub questions were asked in each of these topics and will be demonstrated by the participants overall responses.

In regard to helpfulness three questions were asked the participants; "Is there any aspect of Unitas that you think is particularly helpful?", "Is there any aspect of Unitas that you would say is not particularly helpful?" and finally "What changes, if any, do you think would help the agency be more helpful in the future?"

Helpfulness

Four of the participants (33%) described the positive culture of Unitas as being the most helpful aspect of the organization, two board members and two consumers gave these responses. This is exampled here by two consumers who discusses the feeling she has when coming to the agency.

Consumer:

When you come out from school or work and you don't want to go home right away, you say oh, you are stressed out, and you need to relax, calm down, it is relaxing, you have people telling you hi, how are you doing, how was your day, we have talks that make you feel comfortable, like you are wanted or needed, and helps you relax.

Consumer:

It is helpful to me because its like a coming place to go and to socialize with people and you know that these people are good role models and stuff, and they can help you with any problems that you have and you could have confidence to speak to these people any time.

Three of the participants (25%) discussed the prevention work or the caretaker network as a key aspect of helpfulness within the agency. This was a point of consistency between the cohorts, one from each cohort had this point of view, as evidenced here by a consumer who speaks here about what he has learned working as a caretaker for children while in the program and how this has affected his parent rearing perspective.

I guess everything that I have been learned, everything that I learned is being helpful for me in the future. Like instead of me, when I have my own kids, instead of me grounding them, hitting them OD, I know other steps, another way to solve it to make it like more strict and more like organized like I can just, well I will teach them the strike system, once I do this they will know what to do, if they act up I will go to strike one and they really know that I am serous so when I go to strike 3 they know that there is a consequence to pay. Each different training I learned in Unitas I take it as preparation for the future, it is preparing me to be a real parent, and instead of doing a negative way like how I was raised, if I was not home on time I would get wiped, so it teaches me a better way instead of hitting the kid to just speak to them, to just communicate with the kids.

Three of the participants (25%) mentioned the other major modality of treatment at Unitas, the family/individual counseling component. This answer was also consistent, with one participant from each cohort represented this response. Here a staff member discusses the uniqueness of the family therapy component and his belief that it is the most helpful aspect of the agency.

The family counseling component is by far the most effective, unique if not effective type of interventions that we do that is most successful if it is applied to the extent where it should. It is one that captures the bear essence of family work and getting families to take responsibility and to hold each others responsible for every member of the family and I think that is probably one of the most effective things that we do. It is unique in the since of having gone through the training of what family therapy should be the design of Unitas practice fits that articulation

of family therapy yet in most agencies if you see how family therapy is practiced it is somewhat disjointed, focusing one component of their need, not the entire component of need so it is probably the only one that I have seen in the past 20 Years that utilizes the biological families support structures within the families and other natural supports that the family has in the community for their care.

Some of the other aspects the participants found helpful was the building of community connections, the conflict resolution trainings and the psycho educational teen trainings focusing on world issues in a community context.

<u>Not Helpful</u>

Five of the participants (42%) referenced problems within the staff as not being helpful to the goals of the organization. Three of the staff members (75%) and two of the board members (50%) discussed these issues. One example here is given by a board member who speaks about the need for a more diplomatic structure with more correlation to what Unitas attempts to do with its clients.

I would like to see more teamwork developed instead of authority vs. non authority or instead of one or two persons dominating I would like to see a more of a team approach. I think that it is very important for anyone who is working I an organization who is trying to reach the people of that area and trying to empower them to carry on by their own, it has to be reflected in the staff and the board and that the effort should be made in that direction. I don't think that this is happening now, I don't think that people feel or dialogue enough. From my perspective this is one of the things that has needed attention for a long time.

Four of the participants (33%) stated that the agency needs more programming, including a need for an alumni program (referenced in the support section), more program days outside of the two primary days that the prevention work is being done currently. Other examples given included lack of support from the board in terms of funding (24%), lack of visibility in the community (24%), as well as high staff turnover,

lack of prevention workers authority, lack of teen motivation, no Unitas community

center, more parent involvement and vague and inconsistent programming models all of

which one participant (8%) discussed. Three out of the four consumers thought that

everything was helpful.

Suggestions for More Helpfulness

Three of the four consumers (75%) thought that more alumni intervention and the

adaptation of retreats for caretaker training would be key to the agencies helpfulness as it

was discussed in the support section of this study. Here one consumer speaks of the

retreats in the past and how they had an effect on the connections and helpfulness of the

agency.

> I would, actually um, I know that from my experience some of these teenagers
> have wanted to go on these retreats, and I know the reason why they cant go on
> these retreats but I would give them the benefit of the doubt, a little taste of what
> it would be like, but with older caretakers, people that have been on them before,
> and I know that they would change, that they would bond, because this is the one
> thing that we had when we were here that was really bonding. Back then when I
> was here, it did not matter how old you were, later you had to be a little older but
> we starting including with the teenagers and we would that we could really bond
> as a family, one thing is that you could feel that you could go at somebody's
> thought, but nobody would fight. It was not the way that it is right now.

Four of the participants (33%) spoke of a need for different programming both

internal and external to the office. These respondents consisted of two staff members and

two board members or half of the people officially attached to the agency. This is

evidenced here by two participants who think a change in training and service providing

would help the agency to be more helpful in the future.

> Staff:
> Programmatically in terms of applying the philosophy if there was a broader
> orientation, formal training especially for staff that was intense and brief at first to

try to introduce staff members to the basic philosophy of Unitas, how it is applied and then follow up trainings from there, that would probably be helpful for staff. On a developmental level for staff for a lot of us who come from formality educated backgrounds that teach a very different perspective about mental health and about care and cure and generally how to be which is much more focused in dialectics on, kind of it is or it isn't and competing with the opposition where Unitas is so gray, instead of having it feed opposition we are taught at Unitas to reduce harm and to learn acceptance while maintaining change for the better

Staff:
I would also like to see this model to be extended to other components of critical care prevention which is like ACS prevention because right now the school based prevention programs that we have focus on the catholic school, what are we trying to do prevent alter boys from going bad, I think it is total bullshit, we needs to be in goals that are high risk, public school systems that are here and we need to utilize that and we need to put the stereo typing away, the fear of what ever we have away, so that we can effectively treat these kids who are more at risk than the kids who attend our catholic school.

Success?

In some people's minds helpfulness is correlated with success, but in others it is not. In the final subsection in this, the final section of the findings the participants were asked maybe the most important question of all; "Do you believe the agency has been successful? Follow up questions included, "What would you say are some reasons for this? And "What changes, if any, do you think would contribute to the agencies future success?, in a hope to dig deeper into this issue and to establish key questions including. (1) Is Unitas a success, and what are the (2) reasons for amount of perceived success? Finally (3) suggestions for future success will be included after each key theme.

Overall

Seven of the participants (58%) in the study fells that Unitas has been a strong success as evidenced by statements including; "Without a doubt", "absolutely", and "The success has remained and will remain for years to come". This included 4 board

members, two staff and 1 consumer. Here, one staff member speaks about his conviction about the agencies success.

> Well if after virtually 40 years of the agency still exist, unbroken, in 40 years ago, there is something very powerful in that reality, because the bulk of that 40 years I have seen in this community agency come and go, staff has come and gone, purposes which have changed, agencies, churches that have been closed down, lack of customers to come to a service, lack of petitioners to a church, all we can say about Unitas is that there will never be a deficit of children and parents who say I want my child to come here because something is happening here that is making a difference. Many of the agencies or churches that have closed down do so because they don't have any customers. We have more customers than we can adequately handle, for me what else can be said about our success, this is my heart response to this question.

A consumer here speaks about her personal experience in Unitas and why she considers it a success.

> Yes, I am a perfect example, you taught young kids to young adults to adults, young adults that become a more mature adult and it is just the impact that I said before and to continue because I would always keep Unitas at heart no matter what. I think that this is a success from there. Because even when I moved out of state I would always talking about Unitas and thought about starting something similar over their and um, I have got a lot of support over there like life did not let me go through there. So not only myself but just a lot of community would say that they have been a major success, I am surprised that it is still going on, you know like I said it just, I think that Unitas is equal to major impact change, community action, I bet not only myself but a lot of other people that would be affiliated with Unitas have done something of that was associated with Unitas and makes them like the person that they are, successful.

Three of the participants (25%) fell that it is somewhat a success as evidenced by statements including; "Yes in some ways", "It has been successful but I think that they could do a lot more" and "to a degree yes." Some of the suggestions they gave to have future success included adding adult programs, working with the elderly, and consistent fundraising.

Two of the participants (17%) feel that it has not been a success, including one

staff member and one consumer. They gave reasons for this including

> If I say no it is an indication of my effectiveness, if I say yes I would not be entirely be telling you the truth. I don't believe that our work has shown any kind of concrete success, I don't think the caretaker program, the youth training program is effective. I don't think that it is being managed effectively, I don't think the prevention component of Unitas should be as effective as, is as effective as it should be. I feel that the direction of that program needs to be revamped and re energized.

When asked if he had a concrete reason why it was not a success he spoke of a

lack of supervision support and staff motivation/effectiveness as a place to improve upon

within his own cohort.

> One of the concrete reasons is the staff, I don't think the direction that the staff is receiving through supervision is as adequate as it should be and that it is rather inconsistent, it is more personal agenda rather than a altruistic type of supervision that the staff should be receiving , that I don't see as effective, I think that we need to shift and take more responsibility for teaching rather than preaching, I also fell that the staff diligence have waned down, I don't think the staff is as effective as they were when they were first hired. To make changes I would terminate staff and administration and restart the whole thing.

Suggestions

The research question was asked, "What changes, if any, do you think would

contribute to the agencies future success. Five of the participants (42%) felt that the key

change that needs to take place is better fundraising, this included three staff, one board

member and one consumer. Three participants (25%) feel that the agency has to grow to

include more programs; including alumni, elderly and more school based programs for

both teens and children. Other responses from individual participants included, more

communication, caretaker programming based on teamwork and bonding, and better

direction. One staff thought that we talk too much about our purpose and mission, while another staff thought that we do not talk enough about our staff mission and purpose.

This is a small example how the cohorts showed a great discrepancy here when suggesting ways to help Unitas to become more successful in the future. While making suggestions they also agreed on a few key themes that ran throughout this study; the need for better support (83% 10 of 12), the need for better and more connections (9 of 12 75%) mentioned independent of support (connections discussed in purpose section), and finally a true lack of a united purpose or a clear mission running throughout the program. These key themes may be best represented here by a participant who comments collectively on these themes.

> I would just like to see in terms of that everybody work together in harmonious relationships in a holistic way rather than having what sometimes in the agency can look like disparities of program, where everybody is doing their own thing. That there could be, because from that nobody really gets the emotional support they deserve and need. There needs to be more built in to the system, more social support availability of people with each other. I just don't mean staff people, that needs as a sub support system is essential to, but that board of directors people and agency people, staff people, and caretakers would come together on a regular basis and would really share each others stories and what they want from each other in fact staff members really need more to talk to about what they need from each other, not just what is expected from them but how they can support each other, how can this feel less like a loan ranger and more exhilarating, and to share their common frustrations so they don't feel so alone, everybody from the top person from the very bottom. The human spirit, the emotional support, this very emotional support that people need to listening ears, empathy, the feeling that they are not alone, that people are understanding, they really need more of this relationship with each other, otherwise this agency can be everybody including the board members just doing their own thing. So what does the board know about the purpose of the agency, what does the agency people know about the board of directors, does anybody care, is what it gets down to. What I am saying applies equally to me so the question is not so much what people should do but rather what am I doing to contribute to the problem or contribute to the solution.

The question was asked, "What would your Utopia of Unitas look like, if everything was just the way it should be how would it look to you? There was no evident correlation between the cohorts here but some within the cohorts. Three (75%) of the consumers mentioned a need to work with themselves more before working with the children. As exampled here by a consumer who spoke about the caretaker network.

> The counselors of the kids because they need to work more with themselves before they can ever work with children because how can they not have a trust or a bond with each other and then without having that, to work with kids, so I think that the first thing that needs worked on is trusting each other, working with each other, know how to work with each other, then teach them more about how to work with the kids. Because again, when I was participating in Unitas we knew how to work with each other because of course we grew up together so we knew each other like the back of our hands. That is really what I don't see with the Unitas participants now. I see a separation of what you call clicks, and that doesn't seem like a go very well with me because there is not way that if a kid has a situation that they want to put upon with the caretakers and the caretakers can even, don't even know how to because they don't even know how to work with each other first, so I believe that there should be more activates with the caretakers that rather than putting them with the kids first.

Three of the four staff members (75%) spoke about the need for more structure, supervision and consistency in effort from the staff. As evidenced here by a staff member who speaks here about he need for more support, guidance and structure.

> For them to have a clear freaking view of what is to be done and to see that it is being executed. By them I mean supervisors and administrators, to see what our purpose is at different sites, not just, oh just go do something, I mean that is cool but when you start doing something, I guess I see the vision at the end, it is blurred, because you do not have the support because nobody is on the same page.

The Board exampled the most discrepancies when answering this question, each of the four gave a different response including the need for better staff meetings, the need to build a facility to hold programs, more training for the teens focused on realistic life goals and this example given about managing a sustained community.

> I would have moved to hunts point a long time ago if Unitas had established a commune and even houses, or a couple of blocks together where everybody worked for the community in some capacity, where teachers and social workers and cops and fireman, an actual community ran by Unitas. The agency could own or manage the homes, ownership is not part of the commune, it would be community ownership in a sense. Where all of the products came from the area, people did their own manufacturing, weather it is a barter system or if it is a capitalistic system. To explore or to facilitate or to create a self sustaining commune where you would have their own medical services and your own mayor of the block, to set up rules and guidelines for the community, it could expand or, it could be one block, it could be a group of blocks, you know, management of the apartments, just general management of the area and maybe people vote for the mayor, and the managing people and the counsel and the whole thing.

Support

Overall

Ten of the twelve participants (83%) discussed a need for more support between and within cohorts. This was the most common theme in the study. It included three main subtopics; the need fore more support (a) within cohorts, the need for more support (b) between cohorts and most of all the need for further (c) connections as a foundation for this support. The amount of material gathered about connections merits its own sections of discussion which will come immediately after this section on support within and between the cohorts.

B*oard of Directors*

Three of the board members spoke of support in some way while demonstrating discrepancy in their responses, either by discussing the need for interagency

41

collaboration, one spoke of the need for the board to support each other and the agency

being on the same page while another spoke of our need to collaborate and have support

from other social service agencies in the South Bronx as exampled here.

> I would like to see more teamwork developed instead of authority vs. non authority or instead of one or two persons dominating I would like to see a more of a team approach. I think that it is very important for anyone who is working I an organization who is trying to reach the people of that area and trying to empower them to carryon by their own, it has to be reflected in the staff and the board and that the effort should be made in that direction. I don't think that this is happening now, I don't think that people feel or dialogue enough. From my perspective this is one of the things that has needed attention for a long time. If they recognize that there is as need for teamwork, and that he caring aspect has to be on every level s are not for just clients but for each other the staff as well and if people realize that others have potential and power and they should be helped to realize that.

> Board:

> Uh, I think we have to really branch out into the neighborhood to build collaborative support sot each other and more importantly to get known. I feel that we have been under shadow for 40 years concentrating on one school and the rest of the world does not know that we exist. We need to get known.

Staff

Four of the staff members (100% of cohort) discussed the need for support from

other cohorts through discussing a need to support each other more in their everyday

work.

> The organizational structure is very chaotic it seems that there is a very large focus on method and principal and the philosophy in general but in terms of applying the principals to a formal organization um, it didn't feel like there was a lot of structure, there was not appropriate supervision or real good direction in terms of what to do with yourself other than to learn the philosophy of Unitas and it seems to me as though that the way that it was taught was, learn the philosophy, plug it in, and it works and if it doesn't work you need to examine what it is that you did with it which maybe that is true maybe it is not, from a supervision standpoint it didn't feel very supportive, and it was pretty lonely.

Staff:
With such a limited staff it is like they are going out as lone rangers trying to accomplish these things as themselves, so they come back worn out an burned out and they do not get the help they need because of the lack of available people, and then when there is time to be together there is so much to cover in staff time, the information people need to keep their job going, there is not enough time to use to nurture each other. No time for ourselves to create a support system, to do with ourselves what we propose we do with developing a support systems for clients, we need to develop here a strong social support system where people are truly available to each other.

Consumers

While three of the consumers discussed a need for support from other cohorts, including added programs, staff discipline and fundraising efforts, the primary focus of the cohorts was on the need of support from alumni consumers in the current Unitas system of caretakers. The need for support is described here from one recent alumnus whom speaks of his participation in the program and how he experienced the lack of consumer alumni support.

They (consumer alumni) just come maybe one day a year, and it happens to be a bad day for us, and they see it and say all these guys are not serous and they try to take over and they just start talking different shit that we don't want to hear like, oh back in the days we did not do this shit why are you doing it now it is reckless, so they make fun of it and put us down instead of putting positive things on it. We are inviting you to our home, this was your home but we would like you to give us advice not in a bad way but on a good way, if you see something that you are doing wrong teach us how you did it, not coming out nasty or disrespectful or cursing to us, where is the respect or the bond for the home. You are making yourself look retarded telling us what to do while you are cursing at us, it makes us feel stupid.

Another consumer speaks here about the need for older caretakers (consumer alumni) to take an active role with the youth currently in the agency.

I feel that peer pressure from the outside community makes
them (consumers) do things they don't want to do because most friends form the
outside community they don't follow good traits for everybody, they just do what
ever they feel is um, you know like friendly or peer pressure, they follow what
their friends do and sometimes it is not the right thing to do they need an older
role model, older adult to let them know that these are the right things to do, these
are the wrong things to do, because if you follow a kid your age you are not going
to have a clear road to follow, your road is going to be in three ways or four ways
lost, you don't know where to follow. An older role model to follow and then to
listen to because since they are older they will listen to them more instead of a
younger person.

This demonstration of a need for support came mostly out of the research question

linked to connections. Connections was the second largest discussed topic, where 9

(75%) of the 12 participants discussed the need for more connections within their own

cohort and/or between the cohorts including questions asked outside of the consumers

ability to keep lasting connections.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this program evaluation was to examine information about perspectives regarding focus, purpose, and effectiveness of Unitas from three cohorts (Board of Directors, Staff and Consumers), all of whom are highly invested in the agencies purpose, meaning and utility. The purpose of evaluation research is to measure the effects of a program against the goals it set out to accomplish as a means of contributing to subsequent decision making about the program and improving future programming. (Weiss, 1972, p. 4) The lack of consistent understanding of Unitas' purpose across the key program components has major implications to the viability of this organization and its function in the Bronx community it serves. Additionally the aim of this study was to discover to what extent there is a congruence of understanding about the agency's mission, purpose, goals, across the key program partners.

Major Findings

The study found that there is a lack of understanding of the agency's mission, inconsistent views of its purpose and discrepancy between the cohorts in regards to whether Unitas should be considered successful or not. First we will discuss the agency's mission and purpose, the key "driver' of its, programs, team moral, clarity, and fundraising.

Mission:

It is important to have a consistent, clear, and focused mission statement that is used in practice on a daily basis. Without this clarity the agencies purpose can (and often does) become easily be misinterpreted causing less desirable outcomes. Hutton and Phillips (2001) state that "The purpose of your organization is stated in its mission, and a mission statement is central to a nonprofit organization. In fact it is the reason why an organization exists" (p.34). It is important to have a clear understanding of the agency's mission across the key groups in this study, the Board, the Staff and the Consumers. The study showed that the mission statement is not being used as a tool of vision and guidance.

The study showed clearly that the board, its staff or the consumers don't understand or conceptualize Unitas mission statement. A key finding in this study was that none (0%) of the study participants were able to recite the mission statement in its current conception. Two main examples were given for a lack of clarity within the mission statement. The lack of its daily use (not part of daily discussions in regard to how it drives programming), and how the mission has been giving mixed directions because of the frequently of which it is changed.

To start to understand this lack of transparency we must first look at the Unitas mission statement as it has evolved during the life of the agency.

Mission statement in its original conception (1967):

Unitas is a not for profit corporation that aims to treat and combat juvenile delinquency and other emotional social problems of youth through, social therapeutic and other professional social work methodologies.

Mission statement leading up to 2007:

Unitas is a community mental health organization that promotes and sustains the mental, emotional and social growth of youth through directly strengthening their family life and /or creating alternative family-like structures for them from community members.

Mission statement as it is read today:

Unitas is a community social service organization that promotes and sustains the social and emotional well-being of families by empowering youth to become change agents, and create self-sustaining communities.

There are three main themes to these mission statements (1) what type of organization is Unitas, (2) what does it aim to do and finally (3) how does it plan on accomplishing it aim. It is clear to see why the participants had a hard time identifying the mission statement. In describing the type of agency that Unitas is it gives three very different answers; not for profit agency, community mental health agency and finally in its most recent reincarnation social service organization. The use of social service agency over community mental health agency played out within findings. Four participants (two board, two staff) used the term social service organization when describing the agency. However none of the consumers described the agency in this way. This may be due to two things. One, the mission statement has recently been changed and it was referred to as a community mental health organization before this year and two.

Furthermore when describing their aim we again see different responses; aims to treat and combat juvenile delinquency and other emotional social problems of youth, second, to promote and sustain the mental and social growth of youth, and lastly to promote and sustain the social and emotional well being of families.

The confusion is further made clear when examining the three different definitions of the modality of treatment; though, social therapeutic and other professional

47

social work methodologies, through directly strengthening their family life and /or creating alternative family-like structures for them from community members and finally by empowering youth to become change agents, and create self-sustaining communities. This brings us to the second part of the program evaluation, the cohort's assumptions about the purpose of the agency.

Purpose:

It is important to have a clear outlined purpose for the agency because without a clear purpose the different cohorts of an agency will pull themselves in different directions thus limiting the extent that the agency can achieve its mission. If there is not a consistent clear viewpoint of an agency's purpose then programmatic goals will show limited results and overall success rates will be down. Without clear program understanding the Board may generate funding for programs that are not effective. Staff may misinterpret vague programmatic goals and produce a tainted product to the consumers and the consumers may not generate the type of helpfulness to each other that is expected by the staff and board.

The research looked at how clear the agency's program goals were between and within the cohorts. The study showed that most of the participants (N=9, 75%) agreed on the agencies overall purpose, making connections and support systems within community members.

While the three cohorts agreed on the overall purpose of the agency, only 50% of them feel that this goal is being achieved. This is further telling when investigating each cohort's assumptions about this very important topic. Most of the Board members (75%),

half of the staff and only one consumer feel that consumers have been able to keep lasting connections with the people they met through the agency.

The participants give a range of reasons for a lack of connection and key suggestions in regard to increasing support. Half of the participants (N=6) feel that the key problem with building lasting connections is that the program ends for most participants at the age of 21. This was evident in the study where four staff members (100%) and three consumers spoke strongly about the need for a young adult program that happens after graduating from high school.

Overall five of the participants (42%) felt that the key element that had to change is better fundraising. Here there was a discrepancy between the cohorts, only one board member felt this was a problem while three staff commented on the restrictions it puts on their work with the consumers. Currently Unitas only has one funding source Office of Alcohol and Abuse Services (OASAS). Having only a single funding source for the agency renders Unitas vulnerable to loosing that funding. It also may lead the agency to fit its services into what the funding source requests whether it is part of Unitas mission or not.

The staff largely discussed a need for more structure within the agency and between the cohorts. Three of the four staff members (75%) spoke about the need for more structure, supervision and consistency in effort from the administration. Four of the staff members (100% of cohort) discussed the need for support from other cohorts through discussing a need to support each other more in their everyday work. While three of the consumers discussed a need for support from other cohorts, including added programs, staff discipline and fundraising efforts, the primary focus of the cohorts was on

the need of support from alumni consumers in the current Unitas system of caretakers.

Efficacy:

Rossi and Freeman (1993) discuss the impact of efficiency assessments: Unless programs have a demonstrable impact, it is hard to defend implementing or maintain them- hence the need for impact assessments"(p.37). It is important to have a clear understanding about the agency's efficacy across the three cohorts because without clear understanding and transparency from the top down the system is working on assumptions. If the board does not understand the perceived effectiveness of the programs consumers they will direct funding and programming efforts in a direction that is not associated with specific need to the population they are intending to help. Without this understanding the staff will be caught between the Board and the consumers, trying to achieve program goals that are not specific to the needs of the community and without accurate program models and resources to do so.

The research looked at how the program is helpful and not helpful to the cohorts. Three major categories of responses came from this section. The participants overall agreed that the program had three strong areas of helpfulness; positive culture, prevention community programs and family counseling.

The research looked at what was not helpful about the agency. Here the staff and the board felt that they are not supported by their peers and receive unclear roles and responsibilities to carry out their goals. Overall most of the responses given in this section by all participants were related to lack of support of one another, lack of time for support and self care, lastly, some members discussed the amount of planning time that is taken up by one or two dominating figures within the agency. In the final and most

reflective piece of program evaluation the simple question was asked. Is the Unitas program a success?

Next we are going to look at the final question, is Unitas a success and why? Overall seven of the participants thought that Unitas was a strong success, three of the participants thought that it was somewhat a success and only two participants felt that it was not a success. The percentage breakdown and discussion follows.

The study showed interesting results in relation to questions pertaining to the success of the program. The three cohorts agreed on a definition for success, specifically citing "success" as defined as staff facilitating consumers to build connections and support for each other and for those who have graduated the program.

A major discrepancy came out of the study in regard to the cohort's interpretation of Unitas Success. While most of the participants feel that Unitas has had some measure of success the number of positive responses were varied through the cohorts. Most of the board feels that Unitas is a success while the other cohorts had mixed reactions. Most notably most of the consumers who did not see the program as a success.

The cohorts agreed again when discussing what would make the agency more of a success. Most of the participants feel that a lack of support both within and between the cohorts is needed to help the staff facilitate these connections. This demonstration of a need for support came mostly out of the research question linked to connections. Connections was the second largest discussed topic, where 9 (75%) of the 12 participants discussed the need for more connections within their own cohort and/or between the cohorts including questions asked outside of the consumers ability to keep lasting connections. Some of the major findings associated with this included consumers wishing

for more alumni support, staff wishing for more peer and board support. The board spoke

mostly about wanting more support from other board members, other social service

agencies and the alumni consumers of the program.

Through all of their suggestions involving how to help Unitas to become more

successful one key theme arose; The need for more support. Ten of the twelve

participants (83%) discussed a need for more support between and within cohorts. This

was the most common theme in the study and reflected the unclear nature of the agencies

mission, purpose and overall focus.

With a thought out and consistent mission statement everyone's purpose could be

clearly defended creating concrete roles and responsibilities for all members of the Unitas

community. With these defined roles better programs and proper funding could be

created and maintained. Program officials should consider appointing focus groups

across the three cohorts to develop actions that can be taken to address the issues surfaced

in this study. The constancy of these programs, and better support to and from everybody,

would be more helpful to the consumers. Changes can and must be made to assure that

the agency creates lasting connections and social supports within the community and

thus, can achieve higher levels of service and connections between the generations.

<div align="center">Research Implications</div>

This program evaluation was intended to explore the inner workings of a small

not for profit community mental health agency in the South Bronx, with the hope that it

would guide larger systemic evaluations at this and other agencies in regard to clarity of

mission, purpose and an evaluation including not only staff and board members but the

consumers they aim to treat as well. Future research might benefit from a larger

<div align="center">52</div>

quantitative measure at Unitas with the same research questions in mind. Also since

much of the unplanned themes revolved around support and connections it would be

equally beneficial to focus on these issues not only with current Unitas participants but

alumnus of the program as well including former staff, former board members, and

former consumers. Additionally this study could be used in any social work setting be it a

school, community program or counseling center (to name a few). The questions raised

here about clear mission, purpose, helpfulness, connection and support are areas that

stretch to every work site in and out of the field of social work. It would also be most

important to study those who have left the program due to an array of reasons. Follow up

information from those who choose to remain in the program would be different from

those who choose to stay. Where did Unitas fail them, what would have kept them

involved, did they keep any connections privately after loosing touch formally with the

agency? All of which would be a fascinating and reveal an other side of this story.

Finally, would the same results come if the researcher was not an acting member of their

community, a person they know and converse with on a daily basis? A third party

researcher at Unitas would probably receive somewhat if not conclusionary results.

<u>Social Work Implications</u>

This study is important to clinical social work practice because many clinical

social workers are employed in agencies with a community context. These agencies,

either large or small, come with their range of dysfunction and lack of clarity. A lack of a

transparent purpose or mission impacts the clinician's ability to help its consumers

receive the best care possible which is the intent of any agency, program or individual in

the social work field.

The specific social work community of Unitas reported that they had a low amount of support, time and resources do to the demands of the practice with such little funding support (that would be used to hire more staff). The inability of Unitas board to support their staff is reflected in the caretaker's inability to work with their children in a way that would bring about lasting connections within the agency's consumers. Therefore, it is essential for social work agencies to pay close attention to the parallel process between its board-staff relationship and the staff-consumer relationship. It is also important for a staff to take responsibility for providing its own self care and peer support when not getting these needs met by their governing body the board of directors. If the consumers in a social work setting see that workers support and care for each other by themselves then they (the consumers) will begin to act this way as well. Lastly, it is important to pay close attention to the message the agency is attempting to instill in its consumers. In the field of social work, we often preach self care, support systems and working as a collective team for an overall good. All too often, we do not practice what we preach. These messages are relayed to the consumers whether they are verbal or not. These principals are not just for our consumers but for our selves as well, if we follow suit the consumers will follow.

Limitations

Limitations to the findings generated by this qualitative study include a limited sample size, participant bias, researcher bias and the fact that the researcher knew all of the participants personally in a professional setting. Also all of the participants were self selecting and were invested in the agency in question. Out of the seven board members asked to participate only four took part in the study. It is unclear as to why the others did

not attempt to contact the researcher back about the study. They may have felt that they had little to contribute, or that there job may have been in someway in jeopardy or that it was a conflict of interest. Because many of them only come to Unitas four times a year they may not have had the time. If a quantitative study was performed, efforts to increase participation would be helpful.

Overall 5 participants (41.7%) described themselves as female while 7 described themselves as male (58.3%). The gender of each cohort varied, the consumers interviewed were 50% (2 out of four) female. The staff was 100% male (4 out of 4) and the board members were 75% female (3 out of 4). The high number of male staff interviewed was largely due to the fact that there are no full time female staff members at Unitas. The other percentages were based simply on who wished to take part in the study.

Another limitation of this program evaluation is due to the bias of the researcher. I have been employed at the agency in question for five years and have a clear personal view of the inter workings, both positive and negative, about the agency. I attempted to design the research interview guide to be as flexible and unleading as possible. Sticking strictly with this guide when conducting my interviews was essential to keep as much bias out of the study although I am aware that a certain amount must have impacted the study in some way whether it was conscious or not.

<u>Conclusions</u>

I found that doing this project was enjoyable and fulfilling. It was helpful to look at the thesis process, in regard to this type of study, as a program evaluation. The only interruption in the thesis process came when trying to find board members to take part in

my study. This impeded my process for three weeks when all other transcriptions and research was completed.

I believe that the findings section of this work was most valuable in gathering the core issue of the agency much like a biopsychosocial does when working with a client. The clinical maladaptive pattern of the agency became clearer to me through this process than at any point working there full time though the past five years. It is clear that the three cohorts do not give each other enough support which leads to poor connections and ending product. The study also made clear that there is major discrepancy between the cohorts in a few areas. While the staff had the most discrepancy between themselves, the strongest difference was between the Board and the Consumers. Especially in terms of feeling that connections were being made, that more programs are needed and most importantly that Unitas is a success.

My intent is to take this information back with me to Unitas as I continue my post Smith Masters work there. The information I collected, recorded and analyzed will serve as a starting point of an agency evaluation movement in an attempt to get an established and seemingly beneficial agency on track to be successful for the next 40 years. I feel that this research is only the beginning and it has shown me how much I enjoy program evaluation, so much that I plan on looking into it for possible doctoral work in a few years. My hope is that this information will be received by the Unitas Board, Staff and Consumers as a starting point in our work together to make Units a better place for everyone within its community. I also have a firm belief that any program evaluation and programming that takes place from now on should include all three facets of the program, Board, Staff and the Consumers. Each cohort gave valuable and diverse feedback,

without their dynamic, honest and heartfelt responses this evaluation would have been soulless compared to the rich content I received. I feel that it raised key questions for future study, key concerns to be immediately addressed and a much needed perspective on the past. The ending of this thesis is only the beginning of a new and better Unitas.

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Interview Instrument:

Section 1: Demographics

1. How many years have you been affiliated with the agency?

2. How do you identify your gender?

Section 2: Methodology

1. What do you think the Unitas mission statement is?

2. What purpose, would you say, does the agency serve?

3. Would you say that the consumers have been able to keep lasting connections with the people they met through the agency?

4. Is there any aspect of Unitas that you think is particularly helpful?

5. Is there any aspect of Unitas that you would say is not particularly helpful?

6. What changes, if any, do you think would help the agency be more helpful in the future?

7. Do you believe that the agency has been successful?

8. What would you say are some reasons for this?

9. What changes, if any, do you think would contribute to the agencies future success?

April 4, 2007

John Gill
940 Garrison Avenue
Bronx, NY 10474

Dear John,

Your revised materials have been reviewed and you have done an excellent job
explaining your role and also reassuring all of your potential participants. All of the other
requested revisions have been well handled and we are therefore now happy to give final
approval to your study.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain signed consent documents for at least three (3) years past
completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures,
consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is
active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee
when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion
of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your interesting project.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Dominique Steinberg, Research Advisor

Human Subjects Review Application

Investigator Name: John Gill

Project Title

Transparency of purpose and methods in a grass-roots agency: An exploratory study of the Unitas Therapeutic Community Inc.

Contact Address:
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Project Purpose and Design

Unitas Therapeutic Community has been a grass roots community mental health agency in the South Bronx for over 40 years. Through this time, the agency has collected limited records and statistics that show the effectiveness or understanding of its purpose in regard to its consumers and employees. To this day, however, it is unclear how transparent the agency's focus and effectiveness is to both the consumers and its staff.

The intent of the proposed study, therefore, is to gather information about perspectives regarding focus, purpose, and effectiveness of this particular agency from the following cohorts, all of whom are highly invested in its meaning and utility: staff, consumer alumni, board members and program directors. The purposes of this research are to fulfill my Masters thesis requirements for school and also for possible future publication.

Conceptualized as a small piece of program evaluation, this study will look at some key concepts:

1. Does the staff and the program's consumers know the mission and purpose of the agency?

2. In what ways is Unitas perceived/experienced as helpful?

61

3. Are there any aspects of the agency that are perceived as not particularly helpful?

4. What connections (both programmatically and personally) if any, do consumers maintain with the agency after they leave?

Through the data collected by this study, the agency will begin to gather evidence regarding the utility of its services and gain some insight into the implications of its organizational structure and program modalities. The program has not changed in over 40 years, and there is no research to date on any aspect of its existence. The aim of this study is to discover if there is a congruence of understanding as to its mission, purpose, goals, and utility and the nature of its influence on the community and, most importantly, on its consumers.

Findings will be disseminated both to Unitas staff and to the Smith community where the Unitas principles are disseminated through yearly lectures in community practice courses.

The Characteristics of the Participants

The sample will be composed of Unitas consumers or consumer "alumni" who live in the South Bronx, NY neighborhoods of Longwood and Hunts Point. In order to qualify for inclusion in the study, consumers or alumni have to have participated in the Unitas Program for at least one year in the past 40 years, they also must be over 18 years of age.

The staff sub-sample will consist of staff members who are affiliated with the main office of Unitas located in the Hunts Point, NY community, as well as board members. At present, staff includes seven full-time members, three part-time members and four masters-level interns, and there are ten board members. To qualify for participation, staff will have to have been either working at Unitas for at least three months or have served on the Board of Directors for at least six months. The proposed study will seek a minimum sample of 12 participants (4 staff members, 4 alumni consumers, 4 current board members).

The Recruitment Process

To recruit participants for the proposed study, I will approach people who qualify to explain the purpose of my study (either in person, or by telephone, this contact information is available from the Unitas contact directory; here all contact information is voluntarily listed by the consumers/staff/board, listing your contact information here is because you wish to be contacted by the agency and its staff); invite them to participate in the study; and if they agree and sign an Informed Consent (see Appendix A), we will then schedule an interview at a mutually-convenient place. Should it become impossible to schedule a face-to-face interview, I will ask potential participants if I can interview them by telephone. If they agree, we will schedule a time that is convenient to carry out a telephone interview during which I will take notes.

I will select consumers from different time periods in the program for a screening process. During this screening process I will contact them on the phone personally, inform them about the purpose of my study, reaffirm that participation is voluntary and will have no effect on their relationship with me, the agency, or their services. Once this is clearly understood I will also ask to make sure that they are the right age, that they indeed participated for over one year and that they can give a clear honest critique. All of which will determine if they are suitable for a participant. Demographic information will be obtained through the voluntary contact information mentioned above. The voluntary contact information intakes have demographic information including age, race and country of origin. This will be utilized in an attempt to achieve diversity, though the four participants will be a small sample to do so. Staff has existing characteristics, and inasmuch as it is a small staff, I will need to interview everyone who qualifies rather than seek diversity. However, in my report their diversity or lack thereof will be noted.

No particular recruitment materials will be developed for this study. I will contact each potential participant in person or by telephone to explain the purpose of the study, invite the person to participate, and if he or she agrees, set up an interview.

The Nature of Participation

Interviews will be 30 to 45 minutes long. I will be the sole interviewer and use a loosely

structured Interview Guide (see Appendix B attached) that requests both demographic

information and responses to the substantive research question. Interviews with consumers or

consumer alumni will take place at a mutually convenient place that is public, but also has the

capacity for quiet and privacy, such as a quiet room at the agency or at a public library.

Interviews with staff will take place either in the office or at their home, whichever they prefer.

In-person interviews will be audio recorded with participants' permission as noted on the

Informed Consent (see Appendix A). I will be the sole handler of paper materials, audio tapes,

and interview transcripts. All research materials will be kept secure under lock and key for a

period of three years as required by federal law, after which they will be destroyed.

Risks of Participation

There is minimal risk in participating in this study. However, it is possible that consumer

alumni may feel some discomfort with the nature of the questions asked and/or that they

experience anxiety about identifying parts of the agency programs that they find/found less than

useful or that they do not feel that they know how to answer. It is also possible that staff may feel

anxious about responding to certain questions that disagree with feelings, ideas, attitudes, or

opinions of other staff, particularly their superiors in the agency hierarchy. Finally, it is possible

that some participants, such as board members, may feel uncomfortable if they feel they cannot

respond to the questions about the agency on the board of which they sit or if they have negative

feelings they are concerned about sharing with me. To respond to any potential discomfort, the

Informed Consent (see Appendix A) includes a list of referral sources that are appropriate for all

subsamples. In order to ensure confidentiality, none of the referral sources include Unitas

services. Furthermore, all names and identifying characteristics will be held in confidence during

this project. I will be the sole handler of all the materials related to the proposed study and will

take the necessary precautions to see that all levels of confidentiality are upheld.

<u>Benefits of Participation</u>

Participants will benefit from the study in a number of ways. They will have an

opportunity to reflect on their time in the program or their current work within the program. This

will give them insight to what they have learned or gained from that experience. Staff will have

an opportunity to compare their own feelings, ideas, opinions, and perspectives with those of

others (in a general non-identified way) and with the purported mission of the agency.

Consumers and consumer alumni may feel satisfied at their ability to contribute to a study that

seeks to evaluate and ultimately, improve services. An invitation to the Unitas "Anniversary

Gala" will be extended to all participants, an invitation that has monetary value of $40. No

money will be offered for participating, however, even if the participant refuses the invitation,

and this invitation will be extended to all participants regardless of the length of the interview

(should they decide to withdraw before it is completed, for example) or regardless of the nature of

their answers.

<u>Informed Consent Procedures</u>

Informed Consent (see Attachment A) will be discussed and obtained in person at the time of

the interview. During this interview, both the interviewer and the subject will review the form in

detail. After the consent is discussed and signed, the interview will start. There will be no minors

participating in the study, so no parental guardian consents will need to be obtained before the

minor is approached. Everyone in the study will have the opportunity to refuse to participate at

any time before or during the interview.

Precautions Taken to Safeguard Confidentiality and Identifiable Information

All names and identifying characteristics will be held in confidence during this project. I will be the sole handler of all the materials related to the proposed study. I will use codes to identify the transcripts and de-identify all written material that results from this study, such as the thesis report, so that no one participant can be identified. My thesis advisor will have access to the data after all identifying information is removed. All of the signed Informed Consent forms will be kept separate from the interview guide. Further, as previously noted because the staff of Unitas is so small, data will be reported in either generalized amalgam form or in a manner that does not connote the rank, role, or status of the respondent.

All participation in this study is voluntary. If participants withdraw from the study by April 26th, the all materials pertaining to them will be immediately destroyed. Participants may also decide to refuse to answer any questions at any time.

It is impossible to guarantee anonymity because all current Unitas Staff members will be taking part in the study. The small office atmosphere will make it impossible for them not to know who participated in the study. This increases the need to keep the information confidential. No information will be tabulated or worked on in the office area. Codes and other confidentiality techniques listed above will further the effort to keep material purely confidential.

All information will be disseminated both at selected Smith College community practice courses and at a Unitas staff meeting. All presentations and publications will also be de-identified. All information will be processed as a group, e.g. board members' views on mission statement. All quoted comments and vignettes will be disguised, at no time will any identifying information be disclosed.

I will be the sole handler of paper materials, audio tapes, and interview transcripts. All research materials will be kept secure under lock and key for a period of three years as required

by federal law, after which they will be destroyed, if I need the data beyond the minimum of

three years, I will keep it secure until I no longer need it, at which time I will destroy it.

All participants who take part are English speaking.

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Advisor's Signature: _____ Date: _____

<u>**Informed Consent**</u>

Dear Participant,

My name is John Gill. I have been a program director at Unitas Therapeutic Community for over four years and am a current master's student at the Smith College School for Social Work. As part of my academic work, I am conducting a research study aimed at gathering information about Unitas with the intent of discovering the various perspectives about the focus, purpose, and effectiveness of the Unitas program.

As a program director at Unitas, I have been working closely with the caretaker system, recruiting, training, and nurturing the Caretakers' leadership within our symbolic family system. It was a love for this work that influenced me to seek out graduate school so that I could better serve the Unitas system. My interest here is to better serve the Unitas system by looking at how clear the board of directors, the staff and the consumers are in working toward the same goal. I am looking for others who share that passion to help positive change. Participation in this study will in not in any way affect their relationship with me personally, the agency, or the services they may receive. I am solely looking for a way to better Unitas so I want to be clear that I am looking for an honest critique whether you are a board member, a staff or a former consumer. This honest critique will be helpful to the agency no matter the content. Your identity will be concealed and your situation at Unitas will not be jeopardized in anyway, should you express critical opinions about the agency.

The information collected in this study will be primarily used in writing my MSW thesis. However, it will also be used to give feedback in general form to the agency and may be used by me in further study and publications as well as presentations to my school.

I will be conducting interviews using an interview guide with each participant for 30 to 45 minutes at a mutually convenient place that is both private and quiet. Some of the questions will include, but are not limited to, your demographic data, your understanding of the agency's purpose, ways in which the agency is helpful, aspects that may be perceived as less than helpful, and informal or collateral contacts.

I will audio tape each interview, and will be the sole handler of all research materials. I will also be transcribing the audio tapes personally. After I transcribe the tapes (excluding any identifying data, my thesis advisor will have access the data collected for her review)   They will be kept secure after the study for a period of three years as required by federal law, at which time they will be destroyed. The participants being asked to take part in this study are current agency consumers, consumer alumni, staff, and board members. To be able to take part in the study, the alumni will have to have participated in the Unitas Program for at least one year in the past 40 years and currently live or work in the Hunts Point area of the South Bronx. Others include staff and board members affiliated with the main office of Unitas in the Hunts Point, NY community. To qualify for participation, staff will have to have been either working at Unitas for at least three months or have served on the Board of Directors for at least six months.

There are some potential risks involved in participating in this study. You may feel some discomfort with the nature of the questions asked or experience anxiety about identifying parts of the agency programs that you have found less than useful or that you feel that you do not know how to answer. You may also feel anxious about responding to certain questions that disagree with what you know to be the feelings, ideas, attitudes, or opinions of others. Should you experience such discomfort, you will have a list of counseling services available to you at the end of your copy of the Informed Consent. You can contact one of these professionals if you would like to talk about any thoughts or feelings elicited by the interview.

I believe that if you participate you will benefit in a number of ways. You will have a chance to reflect on your time with and relationship to the agency, giving you potentially useful insight into what you have learned or gained from that relationship. You may also benefit from knowing that you have contributed to a study that seeks to evaluate and ultimately improve services. Finally, if you participate, you will receive an invitation to the 40th anniversary celebration of Unitas, an invitation that is worth $40. No other compensation will be extended for participating, nor will you be offered the monetary value of the invitation.

All participants' names and identifying characteristics will be held in confidence during this project. I will be the sole handler of all the materials related to the study. I will not be using any identifying characteristics or names to identify the participants. All of the findings will be reported in a generalized manner that does not connote the rank, role, or status of the respondent. No data related to the study will be tabulated or worked on in the office area, and I will use codes to keep material de-identified. Quotes or vignettes will be carefully disguised in a manner to protect the source, and I will be the sole handler of all materials. All research materials will be kept secure under lock and key for a period of three years as required by federal law, after which they will be destroyed, if I need the materials after this time, they will remain locked until they are used and destroyed.   Findings will be disseminated both at Smith College School of Social Work Community and at a Unitas staff meeting.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from participation at any point before, during or after the study without penalty until April 26th, 2007, when I will begin to write my report. You may also withdraw from the interview at any time and refuse to answer any question during the interview process.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

_____   _____
Participant   **Date**

_____   _____

Researcher   **Date**

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING!

If you have any questions or if you wish to withdraw from the study, feel free to call me at 718-589-0551 or email me at unitasjg@yahoo.com.

Agency Approval Letter

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:10px;">
AGENCY LETTERHEAD MIGHT BE PLACED HERE
</div>

Date

Dr. Jean LaTerz,
Smith College School for Social Work
Lilly Hall
Northampton, MA 01063

Dear Dr. LaTerz:

Unitas Therapeutic Community Inc. gives permission to John Gill to locate his/her research in this agency. We do not have a Human Subjects Review Board and, therefore, request that Smith College School for Social Work's (SSW) Human Subject Review Committee (HSR) performs a review of the research proposed by John Gill. Unitas Therapeutic Community will abide by the standards related to the protection of all participants in the research approved by SSW HSR Committee.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ian Amritt, Unitas Executive Director
Unitas Therapeutic Community Inc.