Assessing National Student Partnerships’ Satellite Office at the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center

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Overview

This paper reflects research conducted while working with National Student Partnerships (NSP), to reestablish their satellite office at the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center for the homeless (VWFRC). NSP’s goal is to provide better assistance to a greater number of VWFRC’s clientele who are in need of social services and resources. NSP has not been able to establish a stable and continuous presence at the VWFRC for a number of reasons including the following:

1. Few people at the VWFRC, clients and staff members, know that NSP has a work station in the center.

2. People are unaware that NSP provides services to clients at the VWFRC who need more assistance or do not qualify to receive services from the VWFRC.

3. It is unclear what the needs of NSP’s clients at the VWFRC are and if NSP has or can develop these services and resources.

4. NSP is unaware of other service providers in Washington D.C.

NSP would like to increase its clientele at the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center by assessing the needs of its clients, creating greater awareness of NSP’s services within the VWFRC, and identifying the best ways to access the resources that its clients need. NSP’s presence at the VWFRC and its help in assisting homeless families who come to the intake center can potentially help NSP to develop a symbiotic and more consistent relationship with the VWFRC, in which both agencies can communicate and refer clients.
in a manner that is more effective for clients in gaining help and that is beneficial to the functioning of the organizations.

Research Question:

The purpose of this study is to determine what services NSP provides to its clients at the VWFRC and the Perry School offices, to establish what resources NSP has, and to understand which NSP service(s) meets the needs expressed by NSP clients.

**Sub problem 1:** What are the needs of NSP’s clients at the VWFRC?

**Sub problem 2:** What resources and services can NSP provide to support its clients at the VWFRC?

**Sub Problem 3:** What service(s) is NSP D.C. best at providing?

The three sub questions address the needs of NSP D.C.’s clients and the resources NSP has to serve them. The clients’ “needs” are the resources or support the clients are seeking, and “resources” are assets such as other organizations, assistance programs, and the service provided by the NSP staff which NSP has and uses to address these needs. In order to collect data to determine what needs the clients have, I will be using the NSP general intake form on which clients mark which services they would like to receive. The resources and services NSP provides to its clients will be determined by surveying NSP’s staff.

NSP

National Student Partnerships was established in 1998 to serve low income and impoverished people in need of social services such as housing, employment, governmental assistance programs, and child care, and to empower its clients, making them aware of the steps they need to take and the resources available which can lead them to self sufficiency (National Student Partnerships, 2006). The D.C. office is run by an AmeriCorps*VISTA volunteer, who serves a one year term as director of the NSP office. The remaining staff is comprised of student volunteers from local universities (Georgetown University, American University, and The George Washington University). Each university has a designated Local Director who has past experience working for NSP and serves as an on campus recruiter for new volunteers and an advisor and contact person for current volunteers. Volunteers work with individual clients in a case management style.

NSP seeks to address its clients’ needs through helping clients identify the services they want to receive and then assisting them in locating and accessing the resources that are available to them within the community. All clients fill out a general intake form, identifying the services they want to receive. The needs on the intake form include: housing, employment, education/job training, child care, food, transportation, health care (including disability, addiction, mental health services), legal services, clothing, budgeting, immigration, public benefits, listening and support, and any other needs specifically expressed by the client.
The Washington D.C. office of NSP works out of the Perry School Community Services Center building in North West Washington; however, NSP believes that it has the resources to serve residents in other communities and who have a different set of needs from those of the single males who make up the majority of NSP D.C.’s clientele population at the Perry School. Therefore, NSP is working to establish an office at the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center to assist homeless families. Since the majority of the NSP clients at the Perry School office are low income, not homeless, gaining some background knowledge about homelessness and the homeless population is essential to the success of the satellite office at the VWFRC since all of these NSP clients will be homeless. While low-income individuals and homeless families seek some of the same resources such as employment, stable housing, and governmental assistance programs, homeless families’ needs also include services such as child care and governmental program assistance or housing assistance specific to families.

**Homelessness and the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center**

In the past homelessness was typically associated with males living on “skid row” who had shelter but were considered homeless because they “lived outside normal family life.” Over time, however, homelessness has become more connected with the issue of housing as the definition of homelessness is more centered on being without shelter (Shlay and Rossi, 1992, p. 132). The composition of the homeless population has also changed as a large portion (43% as of 1993) is now comprised of families, ninety percent of which are female headed (Anderson and Koblinsky, 1995, p. 13). The majority of clients that NSP serves at the Perry School are single males; however, through setting up
a satellite office at the VWFRC, NSP will be able to focus on serving mostly female headed households. Homeless families frequently lose their support network because of their “neediness.” As they reach out for help, living doubled-up with family or needing financial assistance they weaken relationships and thus lose their support network over time. According to Ziefert and Brown (1991) homeless female heads of households “are more likely to have been physically and or sexually abused as children, to be substance abusers, mobile, and to be mentally ill than are female heads of households with housing” (Ziefert and Brown, 1991, p. 212-214). Consideration of all of these characteristics and needs attributed to homeless families, especially female headed homeless families, will be important when assisting NSP clients at the VWFRC and when analyzing what services they request.

The homeless population in Washington, D.C. has been increasing for five years and has experienced a 17% increase since 2001 (Otto, 2005, p. 1 and D.C. Action for Children, 2004). This rise has been accompanied by a high rate of unemployment, which was 6.4% in 2005, an increase in the cost of housing, and a decrease in the number of public housing units in the District of Columbia, the city which “has the widest income gap between rich and poor of any city in the country” (Economic Policy Institute, 2005 and “Facts on Homelessness in Washington, D.C.; Overview,” 2006, p. 2). According to the Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, 16,000 people annually experience homelessness in Washington D.C., “which is approximately 3.2% of the total population, the highest rate in the county.” (The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, 2003 retrieved from “Facts on Homelessness in Washington, D.C.; Overview,” 2006, p. 1) A 2001 survey conducted by the same agency
concluded that 20.2% of the D.C. population was living in poverty (The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, 2001). The increase in many of these statistics has been affected by cuts in the funding of the Department of Human Service over the last fifteen years which “have resulted in a reduction in the homeless services funding, including a decline of more than 80% in the number of apartment-style shelter units for homeless families with children, elimination of a program that provided emergency assistance to 13,000 families and individuals, and a 40% reduction in the value of cash assistance for families with children” (D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute, 2005 retrieved from “Facts on Homelessness in Washington, D.C.; Overview,” 2006, p. 2).

There are currently 163 emergency shelter units for families, for which the wait is six months. According to D.C. Action for Children, between 2000 and 2004, the number of homeless families in need of shelter rose form 1,276 to 3,326 (D.C. Department of Human Services, 2005 and D.C. Action for Children, 2004). In 2005, 15,000 people in D.C. used some form of homeless services, 6,623 of whom where members of families (The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, 2005). According to the D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute, “as of March 2005, 43,000 households were on the wait list for government-subsidized housing vouchers in D.C., and more than 28,000 on the wait list for public housing.” (D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute, 2005 retrieved from “Facts on Homelessness in Washington, D.C.; Overview,” 2006, p. 4)

In addition to housing, homeless families and individuals often face a surplus of other serious challenges. In 2005 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development conducted a survey that sampled 5,518 homeless individuals and found that 32.1% of the individuals were chronically homeless, 15.1% severely mentally ill, 18.2% experienced
chronic substance abuse, 7.8% were veterans, 3.3% had HIV/AIDS, 6.1% were victims of domestic violence, and 1.1% were under the age of 18 (The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, 2001).

The Communities Housing NSP

NSP and the VWFRC both operate out of small offices which serve all of the District of Columbia, the city with the fifth highest poverty rate in the United States; therefore they do not serve only the neighborhoods in which they are located (Connelly, 2005). It is helpful, however, to look at the neighborhoods where the offices are to examine the types of families and economic make up of these areas to gain a better sense of the communities which might use the services provided by NSP and the VWFRC.

In looking at the population around the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center it can be noted that the area (Tract 60.02) is comprised of a low income population. The needs of the community that the VWFRC is located in can provide information about the needs of the low income population of D.C. in general and the pressing needs that the VWFRC faces in working with its clients. In comparing the percentage of the population that received public assistance income in Tract 60.02, all of Washington D.C., and the United States (see Table 1), one can see that percentage of households with public assistance income in Tract 60.02 is about 5 times higher than the percentage of the U.S. population, and 12 times higher than the D.C. percentage (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). This breakdown only demonstrates one aspect of the needs of the community in which the VWFRC exists and which it serves.
Table 1:

Public Assistance Income in 1999 for Households in Tract # 60.02, Washington D.C., and the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P64. PUBLIC ASSISTANCE INCOME IN 1999 FOR HOUSEHOLDS [3] - Universe: Households</th>
<th>Tract # 60.02</th>
<th>Percent tract</th>
<th>D.C. city Population</th>
<th>D.C. city percent</th>
<th>U.S. population</th>
<th>U.S. percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Households</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>248,590</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>105,539,122</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With public assistance income</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>13,664</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3,629,732</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No public assistance income</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>234,926</td>
<td>96.6</td>
<td>101,909,390</td>
<td>94.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Literature Review

Needs of the Homeless Population

Forty three percent of the homeless population is comprised of families, the majority of which are female headed (Kissman, 1999, p. 241). Of the homeless families in D.C., 40% have experienced homelessness more than once (Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999). The homeless population does not simply struggle with the issue of housing; in addition, homeless individuals and families require other services including child care, employment assistance, food and clothing distribution, health care, education, and job training. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the reported needs of homeless families are job and housing services, followed by financial assistance with housing payments (So Others Might Eat, 2005). In 2005, over 15,000 D.C. residents were understood to have used homeless services, “including 8,764 individuals and 6,623 individuals in families.” (The Community Partnership for the Prevention of
Services provided by agencies have typically been based on assumptions about the needs of the homeless population rather than the self-stated needs of the homeless population (Acosta and Toro, 2000, p. 344). The homeless families who make up the clientele at the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center, the sole intake center for homeless families in D.C., encounter all of the aforementioned problems. It is unclear whether the needs of the homeless population, and in the case of this study, specifically homeless families, are being met. This study will see if the needs expressed by National Student Partnerships’ clients at the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center coincide with the needs of homeless families studied in previous research which included the desire for more emergency shelters and transitional housing programs, employment, child care, and food assistance.

Acosta and Toro (2001) in the article “Let’s ask the Homeless People Themselves: A Needs Assessment Based on a Probability Sample of Adults”, argue that “conducting needs assessment research is a rational way to examine the effectiveness of social programs.” They go on to explain that “homeless service agencies have rarely relied on systematic needs assessment but, rather, have traditionally provided assistance to homeless persons according to what they intuitively believe are the basic needs of this population.”(Acosta and Toro, 2000, p. 344)

The goal of the current study is to utilize a needs assessment approach to evaluate the functioning of National Student Partnerships’ satellite office at the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center. The needs assessment will determine if differences exist.
between what the clients request and what services NSP provides through looking at the self stated needs of the homeless family clients, the resources NSP has, and the services NSP provides to its clients. This study will ultimately help to determine if National Student Partnerships has the resources to provide the services requested by the clients and the means to run the satellite office.

**Theory: Needs Assessment**

The current study utilizes a Needs Assessment Theory, looking at the needs of the NSP clients at the VWFRC, NSP’s resources, and the services NSP provides, to understand if NSP’s satellite office can function effectively and provide the services requested by the population it is serving. In their book, “Planning and Conducting Needs Assessment,” Belle Ruth Witkin and James W. Altschuld explain that “an NA [needs assessment] is conducted to derive information and perceptions of values as a guide to making policy and program decisions that will benefit specific groups of people.” (Witkin and Altschuld, 1995, p. 5) Within the current study the needs assessment will examine the current state of the satellite office in relation to NSP’s clients.

Homeless families exist within a system which often provides pre-established services and can fail to see if the services coincide with the needs expressed by the clients. Since NSP provides multiple services, utilizing the theory of needs assessment will help it to gain a better understanding of what homeless families identify as the services they would like to receive, and if NSP can provide these services. An element of Needs Assessment Theory is action; therefore, if there is a discrepancy between the needs being expressed and the services being provided, this research will help to determine
what the next steps are in providing the appropriate resources to clients and if the satellite office can be maintained (Witkin and Altschuld, 1995, p. 5).

**Needs and Assets of Organizations: In Relation to NSP**

National Student Partnerships is a nation wide, student run, volunteer organization which serves mostly low income or homeless individuals who seek help with employment, housing, financial assistance, health care, and child care, among other needs. NSP also aims to help people to become empowered, self sufficient and involved members in their community. NSP has an intake office located at the Perry School but has made several attempts to work collaboratively with the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center through establishing a satellite office at the intake center. In a speech given by Mel Martinez as Secretary of HUD, he stressed that interagency cooperation is an effective method to create better resources for clients and social workers when dealing with issues regarding homelessness (Martinez, 2001). The goal of the cooperation between NSP and the VWFRC is ultimately to provide better services to a greater number of clients.

Previous studies have discussed the needs of the homeless population, however, Acosta and Toro’s 2000 study found that housing, although a frequently mentioned need, was not the most requested service, as is typically thought. Rather physical safety and education were determined to be the most desired services while housing was grouped in importance with “transportation, medical/dental treatment, health care information, and job training” (Acosta and Toro, 2000, p. 358). Acosta and Toro’s study of the homeless population in Buffalo New York provides a model for the current study of the NSP
clients at the VWFRC where the clients will be asked to determine what needs they have. This study will also look at the breakdown of requested services at National Student Partnerships’ office at the Perry School. Through the information provided by NSP’s clients and staff and the analysis of the requested services, this study will determine exactly what services NSP’s clients are asking for and identify as their needs.

The purpose of this study and the methods used to collect the data recognize that clients can be key members in the process of creating better functioning social service organizations, an idea proposed by Dione Hills in her 1998 article “Engaging New Social Movements” (Hills, 1998, p. 3). One theory regarding the improved involvement of clients suggests three reasons for an increase in participation: first “programs have become more ‘empowerment’ and ‘civil rights’ oriented”; second “the move towards ‘consumer involvement’ in public sector activities”; and finally “the growing political voice of user organizations”(Hills, 1998, pg. 4). This theory of client participation is relevant to NSP’s mission, as one of NSP’s goals is client empowerment, promoting self sufficiency through providing clients with resources, opportunities, and tools that will make them aware of the services available to help them support themselves. With this assistance, clients will be able to work to become independent and self supporting.

Needs and Assets of Organizations: In Relation to the VWFRC

The Virginia Williams Family Resource Center is Washington, D.C.’s sole intake center for homeless families and is where all families must go in order to be deemed eligible to receive services for homeless families. The center’s case workers serve as intake officers assessing whether people qualify to be recognized as a homeless family
and, if they are eligible, they make sure that the individuals have the necessary documentation, which includes birth certificates of the children in the family and proof that the family has no permanent place of residency. The eligibility criteria used by the VWFRC was established by the Department of Human Services and has requirements including that the applicant have no “possessory interest in housing accommodation,” no financial ability to obtain immediate housing, is unable to establish temporary sleeping arrangements with family or friends, has registered for income taxes in D.C., has not been evicted due to drug related issues within the last year, and is over eighteen years in age (U.S. Department of Human Services 1992, p. 3-4). Once the family has been registered as homeless they are qualified to apply for and receive services specific to homeless families, and are allowed to use the network of organizations who only serve families working with Virginia Williams Family Resource Center case managers. Many of D.C.’s homeless shelters or transitional housing programs for families only take referrals from VWFRC.

When developing policies or designing programs for homeless families, policy makers should strive to maintain the healthy family dynamic. It would be beneficial to minimize the number of organizations which handle a family’s needs as this could potentially simplify the processes the family must go through to receive benefits or obtain housing or employment services (Anderson and Koblinsky, 1995, p. 15). Since homeless families do not have a regular residence or permanent contact information, working with fewer organizations might be less stressful for the families and more effective in service delivery. Working with a small group of people families could form more consistent and trusting relationships with their service providers than they would if they were working
with more agencies. Programs should be created with the intention of helping the family as a unit, not as individuals (Anderson and Koblinsky, 1995, p. 15).

**Needs of Homeless Families**

Looking at the population of homeless families helps gain a better idea of what needs and assets the current population has and what NSP could experience in working with homeless families at the VWFRC. Homeless families can face a variety of problems that affect the needs they have such as stress from lack of personal space, mental problems, “domestic violence, substance abuse and lack of family support” (Kissman, 1999, p. 242). Within homeless families the major concern becomes day to day living which can lead to the neglect of employment, child care, and education (Anderson and Koblinsky, 1995, p. 15). A 1999 study was done to assess the service needs of the homeless in which homeless families could attend camp for several days in a more relaxing environment. The study at the camp found that “while housing services, high school equivalency programs, life skills classes and substance abuse treatment are provided by some of the shelters, service gaps include treatment for childhood sexual abuse and individual interventions that prepare women to take advantage of support groups available in the community.” (Kissman, 1999, p. 247)

Homeless families also face smaller obstacles such as following the rules established by shelters or their case managers. Organizations and shelters should understand that some rules and requirements can have a negative impact on people’s maintenance of social ties as some programs do not allow contact between people of different sexes or ages (Anderson and Koblinsky, 1995, p. 15). Suggestions that will help
social workers to work more effectively with homeless families include not scheduling meetings when the clients are trying to find housing or employment and providing clinics or group sessions to address the emotional, psychological, and mental needs of the clients. Another assessment of client services suggested that personal attention and support are needed to help homeless families utilize available services (Kissman, 1999, p. 247).

Looking at the economic status of homeless people in 60 local and national surveys, it was found that the majority of individuals were unemployed (Shlay and Rossi, 1992, p. 136). Acosta and Toro’s article “Let’s Ask the Homeless People Themselves: A Needs Assessment Based on a Probability Sample of Adults” found that “nonwhites (mostly African-Americans)” thought that tangible services (“job placement, affordable housing, job training, and transportation”) and family services were the most important to them and that family services were the hardest to get (Acosta and Toro, 2000, p. 360). This is very important to remember when looking at the needs of the NSP clients at the VWFRC as the majority of them are African American families.

Acosta and Toro’s 2000 study observed that the resources used to serve the needs of clients are not always obtainable (Acosta and Toro, 2000, p. 345). Acosta and Toro explain “our findings suggest that if additional resources were more readily available to homeless adults (particularly those related to education/training, employment, medical/dental treatment) they would openly accept the services and, as a result, might become more resistant to future episodes of homelessness.” (Acosta and Toro, 2000, p. 363) While the same needs might not pertain to the homeless population in the current study, the availability of more resources to homeless families who go to the Virginia...
Williams Family Resource Center through the presence of another service organization (NSP) on the same site can provide the benefits Acosta and Toro’s study claims homeless adults need.

Previous studies have also identified decreases in support networks, lack of knowledge of social services, and decreases in the availability of services to be problems encountered by homeless families. A 1996 study assessed 207, primarily African American, homeless and low-income mothers with preschool children in a Head Start Program in the D.C. Area. This study found that the homeless women thought they had a smaller network of support than housed women, although all of the women in the study mentioned that they had support from their male partner (Letiecq, Anderson, and Koblinsky, 1996, p. 270). A study looking at homeless clients in New York, found that many of the individuals interviewed did not know what social services were available to them and had problems gaining certain benefits because of small formalities in their cases (Conley, 1996, p. 34). A study conducted in the late 1980’s in Nashville, Tennessee, looked at the demographics of the homeless population and their social problems and determined that a decrease in low-income housing was a major contributing factor to the growing homeless population (Lee, 1989, p. 324).

Educational history is also something that needs to be kept in mind when homeless or low income clients are looking for jobs or ways to move up in a career path as 50% of homeless mothers never completed high school (Kissman, 1999, p. 244). Some of the NSP clients at the Perry School have been able to find educational opportunities to get either a GED or enter college programs. Many homeless mothers are
looking for work so it would be beneficial to them to know that such educational programs exist and are accessible.

The Issue of Housing

With a growing homeless population there is also an increased need for shelters and programs to help this population. One such program is transitional housing which is aimed at providing up to twelve months of housing for individuals while teaching them the skills they need to become self-sufficient (Washington, 2002, p. 3). A three-tiered strategy for helping the homeless with housing problems has been developed, the first tier being provision of emergency and temporary shelters, the second creating more transitional housing, and the third establishing permanent housing opportunities for the homeless (Shlay and Rossi, 1992, p. 149-50). This strategy is relevant to the current study with VWFRC clients since housing for the homeless population in D.C. is scarce because there is a two to three year waiting list for Housing Choice Vouchers (also known as Section 8), little transitional housing availability, and many shelters are full, especially in the winter. Housing is an issue common to all clients at the VWFRC as not having shelter is a stipulation of the clients’ presence at the center. It will be helpful to keep in mind the previously mentioned three-tiered strategy to see if it coincides with the needs expressed by NSP’s clients at the VWFRC. If housing is the clients’ main concern it is important to observe throughout this research what difficulties they experience when trying to find accommodations. Subsidized housing is another solution to housing problems faced by the homeless population but is less effective because of long waiting lists (Shlay and Rossi, 1992, p. 150). An interview from Weekend Edition called
“Homeless Situation in Washington, DC, is Reaching a Critical Point” mentions the Central Intake Center (VWFRC), interviewing the coordinator and discussing how crowded it is and how there are not enough places for homeless families to find shelter (Seabrook, 2002). The crisis in housing availability continues to grow because housing is a need shared by all members of the homeless population. Because the VWFRC is where homeless families go in order to gain eligibility for many family shelters the most common need that is expressed among first time clients is housing. The VWFRC is the only location that can provide certain registration and contact services for clients as they gain eligibility for family services such as TANF (Temporary and Needy Families Fund) and the VWFRC has relationships with shelters and temporary housing facilities that will only accept referrals from the VWFRC (Hunter, 2006).

Research and Methodology in Previous Studies

The evaluation of the Estival Place, a transitional housing program in Memphis, Tennessee, was completed through person to person, in-depth interviews of individuals who had completed the program and were self sufficient for six to twelve months. The group of individuals was chosen through a convenience sample of the first ten willing participants (Washington, 2002, p. 186). After interviewing was completed the researchers analyzed the data for “major categories” and “central themes” as their goal “was to allow patterns and common issues shared among the participants to emerge” (Washington, 2002, p. 187). The current study uses coding to find general themes showing what services clients request from NSP at the VWFRC and what services NSP provides most frequently at the NSP Perry School Office; therefore, the study at Estival
Place is a good example of the methods used throughout this research. The study at Estival Place also found that the interviewees who had been successful in becoming self-sufficient thought that the most important things they learned were in the fields of budgeting, job training, and leadership (Washington, 2002, p. 187).

**Things for Researchers to Know**

I represent NSP at the VWFRC and I am conducting this research with the purpose of understanding how NSP may more effectively set up and run a satellite office. Throughout the study, it is important for me to be aware of the VWFRC and its staff and to make them aware of my research since I am working directly with them while completing this study for NSP. Organizations want to know how they will benefit from being involved in a research project. To work more successfully with an organization, a researcher can show the agency how the outcome of the research will contribute to the goals and mission of the organization (Volker, 2002, p. 3). Researchers entering into organizations need to keep in mind that the workers at the agency are there for the clients and that the agency already has a developed routine and norms that the researchers must learn and respect in order to have a successful working relationship with the agency. Evaluating an organization can also make the workers feel as if their work is being judged, especially if it is top down because it could appear as if their employers are checking their work; therefore, it is important for the ones doing the research to address the concerns of the workers (Volker, 2002, p. 4). Respect is a key component of a successful relationship between a researcher and the employees of the. “It is imperative to co-create a context with the agency in which the researchers can find answers to their
research questions and the agency can improve their clinical services.” (Volker, 2002, p. 7) Once the workers and administrators get involved in the planning of a report they begin to feel more comfortable with the study (Volker, 2002, p. 8).

**Hypothesis:**

The literature provides a good overview of the function of and services provided by organizations such as NSP and the VWFRC, ideas regarding how NSP can successfully work with the VWFRC, what services the homeless population needs with specific emphasis on homeless families, a brief history of homeless services, and examples of previous studies that have used research methodology similar to that which is used in this study. The literature on homelessness, specifically homeless families, shows that homeless populations in different studies and environments place varying degrees of urgency on health care, job assistance, housing, child care, transportation, safety, and food, but the majority of the literature suggests that basic services such as shelters and job training must be increased and one article, “Let’s Ask the Homeless People Themselves: A Needs Assessment Based on a Probability Sample of Adults,” suggests that the services which are most requested are the most difficult to obtain (Acosta and Toro, 2000, p. 345).

The purpose of this research is to determine what services NSP provides to its clients at the VWFRC and the Perry School offices, what resources NSP has, and which NSP service(s) meets the needs expressed by NSP clients.

The study will also address the following sub problems:
1) **Sub problem 1:** What are the needs of NSP’s clients at the VWFRC?

*Hypothesis for Sub problem 1:* The literature suggests that the majority of the families going through intake at the NSP office at the VWFRC will be female headed households with economic issues, facing problems with housing, child care, and obtaining general social services. Other studies have shown that housing, employment, and food were the most immediate needs expressed by the homeless; therefore I expect that this will hold true for many of the NSP clients at the VWFRC (Acosta and Toro, 2000, p. 343). Some studies have shown that homeless families also have concerns about privacy, being victims of sexual or drug abuse, mental health, and lack of familial or friend support; however, since NSP does not offer counseling I do not foresee that these issues will arise much throughout the study unless they enter into the conversation between client and NSP staff member (Kissman, 1999, p. 242). I expect that the needs of NSP’s clients at the VWFRC will be focused on the issue of housing as it is a concern for homeless families and the VWFRC is the jumping off point for homeless families when starting their search for all family services.

2) **Sub problem 2:** What resources and services can NSP provide to support its clients at the VWFRC?

*Hypothesis for Sub problem 2:* Based on the literature, I expect that NSP will be convenient and helpful to its clients at the VWFRC because it is an organization which provides many of the services that have been requested by homeless families in previous studies from employment and child care to budgeting and food assistance. The literature has led me to understand that housing will still be hard to provide to
clients at the VWFRC as the overall need for more shelter and transitional housing programs is apparent throughout many of the studies. I expect to find the assets of NSP D.C. to be the broad range of services it provides, as homeless and low income individuals and families often find it more helpful and less stressful to work with fewer social service providers in obtaining various services that they need. I also predict that some family services may be more difficult to provide than individual services, an idea promoted by Acosta and Toro’s 2000 study (Acosta and Toro, 2000, p. 360).

3) **Sub Problem 3**: What service(s) is NSP D.C. best at providing?

   **Hypothesis for Sub problem 3**: The literature suggests that homeless families request housing, child care, employment, job training, and food assistance, among the other needs previously discussed, from various social service providers. Therefore, since NSP assists with all of these services, I predict that they will be able to use their resources to provide all of the services the clients ask for, with the exception of housing, since low income housing is scarce in D.C. and many shelters only take referrals from the VWFRC.

**Data and Methods**

The purpose of this research at the VWFRC is to see if and how NSP can establish a satellite office at another organization’s center which serves the needs of homeless families. The study also looks at the needs of NSP’s clients at the Perry School and the services that they as an organization provide. The findings of this study help to determine if NSP has the assets to run a satellite office. Within the context of NSP’s
work at the VWFRC, a research question and sub questions have been developed to examine what services NSP provides to its clients and the needs of NSP’s clients at the VWFRC.

Research Methodology

Measures and Procedures

Two surveys were used to collect information for this study. One was the general client intake form for new NSP clients (see appendix A) and the other was a questionnaire created for this study and given to NSP staff (see appendix B). All participants were informed that they had the right to refuse participation. All participants received an oral or typed overview of their survey before filling it out. If the individual agreed to participate they signed an informed consent form.

NSP Client Needs Assessment

The intake form was used to determine what needs NSP clients at the VWFRC had. The number of NSP clients at the VWFRC who took part in the study was determined by the number of clients NSP received at the VWFRC and within this number, the number of people willing to participate in the study. It was explained to the clients that the survey was to assess what services they hoped to obtain. Clients were told that their willingness or unwillingness to participate in the study would not affect the service they received from NSP. The interviewer discussed the voluntary nature of the study and then asked the participant to sign the consent form. It took approximately five minutes for clients to fill out the general intake form. The information on the intake form
was used to answer sub-problem #1: What are the needs of NSP’s clients at the VWFRC?

The intake form is structured so every client answers the same questions. The sections on the form that were used in this study focus on the need(s) that caused the subjects to go to the NSP office at the VWFRC and the goals the subjects had in obtaining services. The forms were filled out when the client met privately with the NSP staff member. For purposes of analysis, after the intake form was completed it was copied, excluding the identification and contact information of the subject.

**NSP Staff Survey**

Members of the NSP D.C. leadership staff, which consisted of the AmeriCorps*VISTA and local directors, were asked to complete the staff questionnaire. Since the staff population was small, approximately six people, previous local directors who served within the last two years and who were familiar with the NSP office were also asked to participate in the staff surveys.

The questionnaire given to NSP Washington D.C. staff was used to determine what resources and services NSP had, what resources and services NSP could provide to support its clients at the VWFRC, and why NSP should establish the satellite office at the VWFRC. NSP D.C. leadership staff members were contacted through an e-mail message which gave a brief overview of the project explaining that the purpose of the questionnaire was to collect information about the types of services that NSP provided, what accessible resources NSP had to help it serve its clients, what they considered to be the benefits of NSP’s presence at the VWFRC, and what they saw as the most useful resources that NSP already had.
I estimated that it would take the staff members between 10 and 20 minutes to complete the survey. The questionnaire was e-mailed to the NSP staff member who then filled out the questionnaire and e-mailed it back to the researcher. The names were deleted from the e-mailed responses before they were analyzed in order to maintain confidentiality, and the confidentiality agreements, which were also e-mailed and had an electronic signature, were kept separate from the completed questionnaires.

The surveying process was completed by the middle of March, 2006. To determine what services NSP was best at providing, a breakdown of NSP’s overall service provisions was obtained showing what clients requested and what services were rendered at NSP’s Perry School Office between November, 2005 and the middle of March, 2006, which is the period when the NSP office at the VWFRC was operating.

Research Participants

The clients used for this study were chosen to participate through convenience sampling as each NSP client at the VWFRC was told about the research, informed that they were not required to participate in the study, and then asked if they were willing to take part in the study. The research was conducted from December, 2005 through the middle of March, 2006. Fifteen people chose to participate. Of the fifteen, only one survey was collected in December, 2005 when the NSP office at the VWFRC was open every Wednesday afternoon from 1:30 P.M. to 5:00. The remaining fourteen surveys were collected between January and March, 2006 when the NSP office at the VWFRC was open every Wednesday morning, opening between 10:00 and 10:30 A.M. and
operating until sometime between 12:30 and 2:00 P.M. No NSP clients refused to participate in the study; however, due to time restraints dealing with rides, child care hours, or previously scheduled appointments, some clients left the NSP office without signing the consent form, and therefore, their information was not used and they are not included among the fifteen.

Not all of the clients completed the intake form in its entirety; therefore not all clients provided information for all of the sections on the form that were used in this study. Twelve clients completed the intake form. This analysis is strictly of services requested, not services provided, by the National Student Partnership clients at the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center. The services requested were not always provided due to time constraints or limited resources, which happened often when clients requested help with housing. It is important to understand that some women expressed several needs, therefore, the calculations show the percentage of the women who asked for a certain service out of the total number of women seen. The services requested by NSP’s clients at the VWFRC were determined by the information on the general client intake form. All of the clients who were seen at the NSP office at the VWFRC were women. Twelve of the fifteen women identified themselves as “Black” or “African American” and the remaining three did not fill out the section of the intake form asking about the race of the participant but were identified by the researcher as African American. No information was collected regarding the marital status of the clients. The majority of women in the study, 46.67%, had two children, 33.33% had one child, 13.33% had four children, and 6.67% had three children.
The survey for NSP staff was e-mailed to eight people and only four NSP staff members chose to participate, all of whom were previous local directors. Three of the local directors had held their positions from January 2005 to January 2006; the fourth participant had been local director from January 2004 to January 2005. All of the staff participants were women.

Data Analysis

The results of this study were analyzed through coding the needs expressed by NSP’s clients at the VWFRC and through analysis of the responses of the NSP staff members and the breakdown of NSP services at the Perry School office, which were already coded. The client intake form provided categories for the types of services offered to clients; therefore these previously distinguished categories were used as the coding categories for the clients’ needs and the services NSP provides.

NSP’s monthly breakdown of the services provided to clients at the Perry School was already divided into categories such as “Child Care,” “Food,” and “Transportation.” The services that NSP was best at providing, were based on the “Services Rendered” section of the monthly service reports at the Perry School office. The coding allowed for general categories which helped to determine the types of services people sought and what needs and services were the most common. There were not enough respondents who completed the staff survey for the implementation of coding categories; therefore, the answers given on the surveys have been analyzed as they were.

The data analysis consisted of coding the manifest content, “the visible surface content” (Babbie, 2004, p. 319). Since some of the results of this study were based on
the responses given by the NSP clients and staff when filling out their questionnaires, the truthfulness of the answers to the questions was completely reliant on the subjects of the study. Therefore, the validity of the results of this study was only supported by the answers given by the participants. Since the surveys were identical within each population, internal consistency was used.

**Results**

The findings of this study have been broken down to correlate with the sub problems within the research question.

**Restated Research Question:** The purpose of this study is to determine what services NSP provides to its clients at the VWFRC and the Perry School offices, to establish what resources NSP has, and to understand which NSP service(s) meets the needs expressed by NSP clients.

**Sub problem 1:** What are the needs of NSP’s clients at the VWFRC?

The results are shown in Table 2. Fifteen women participated in the study and requested a total of fifty-two services. The most frequently requested service was “Housing” as 66.6% of the clients indicated that they needed assistance with housing. “Housing” made up 19.23% of all of the services requested from clients within the study. “Employment” was the second most requested service, which 60% of the clients requested. “Employment” made up 17.31% of all of the requests by NSP clients at the VWFRC. The third most frequently requested service was ”Clothing” which 53.30% of clients in the study asked for, and which made up 15.39% of the services requested. “Child Care” was the fourth most requested need as 46.60% of clients asked for child
care services, and “Child Care” made up 13.46% of all of the services requested. “Food,” “Transportation,” and “Education/Job Training” were the fifth, sixth, and seventh most frequently requested services, asked for by 40%, 33.3%, and 26.6% of the clients. These services made up 11.54%, 9.62%, and 7.69%, respectively, of all of the services requested in the study. “Listening and Support,” “Budgeting,” and “Public Benefits” had the lowest request rates as each of these services was requested by 6.60% of the study’s participants, and comprised 1.92% of all of the service requests made during the study. “Immigration,” “Legal Services,” “Health Care,” and “Other” were all listed on the intake form but were not requested by any of the participants in the study. None of the clients added additional categories.

Table 2:

Analysis of NSP Client Services at the NSP VWFRC office Between December 2005 and March 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs Requested by Clients on General Intake Form</th>
<th>Number of Clients Who Requested This Service</th>
<th>Percentage of Clients Who Requested This Service</th>
<th>Percentage of All Requests Made</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>66.60%</td>
<td>19.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>17.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53.30%</td>
<td>15.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46.60%</td>
<td>13.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>11.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.30%</td>
<td>9.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/Job Training</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.60%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening and Support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.60%</td>
<td>1.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.60%</td>
<td>1.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Benefits</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.60%</td>
<td>1.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Services</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care (including disability, addiction, mental health services)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Services Requested</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of Results for Sub problem 1:

As predicted by previous studies of the needs of homeless individuals and families and identified in my hypothesis as a need the clients at VWFRC would probably have, “Housing” was the service most requested by clients at the NSP satellite office in the VWFRC. The office received clients with varying needs from those looking for emergency shelter for one night to those who wanted to enter transitional housing programs or find apartments of their own. Housing assistance was very difficult to provide as many shelters were full during the winter, and many of the shelters or housing programs which I called only took referrals from the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center. This greatly limited my ability to place clients in programs. Housing is a need that most of the clients have and continue to have which does not necessarily reflect the ability of NSP or other service providers to place homeless individuals and families in housing programs, but indicates the lack of affordable housing opportunities in D.C. While many studies stated that transitional housing would help the homeless, there are not enough transitional housing programs in the District of Columbia to meet the needs of the increasing homeless population. I also found it to be more difficult to place families as many programs had specific criteria such as only accepting women and children, had age restrictions, or rules about martial status which prohibited many homeless families from entering into programs as a unit.

“Employment,” another service the hypothesis predicted would be requested at the satellite office, had the second highest request rate. Of the thirteen clients who filled out the employment section of the intake form, ten were unemployed. Homelessness often results from financial instability and therefore it is understandable that help finding
employment and a steady income is a frequently requested service among the NSP clients at the VWFRC. Previous studies also said that the majority of homeless families are female headed, which causes these mothers to need employment in order to support their children; therefore, since all of the clients in the study were homeless women with children, it is understandable why employment was a service requested by many of them. I was able to direct clients where to look for job advertisements, how to conduct job searches, and how to apply to jobs on-line, but no clients had electronic versions of their resumes with them, which if we were dealing with time restrictions limited my ability to help the client complete and submit a job application. I was not able to monitor the success rate of these employment services as I did not see a client more than once. However, I predict that many more jobs would have been applied for if clients had known before they got the VWFRC that NSP was open and provided employment services. If the clients had knowledge of NSP’s presence and services they could bring their resumes or set aside the time to create a resume and e-mail account while at the NSP office so they could apply for jobs on-line. In order for NSP to better help clients in need of employment services, I think two staff members on site would be helpful, so that one staff member could devote all of their time to work on resumes and complete on-line job applications, which I, as the only staff member, with a time restriction due to office hours or multiple clients, was not able to do.

Some of the needs of the homeless families who came to NSP were easily met as food and clothing distributors were easy to identify and locate. I referred the clients to service providers whose availability and supplies were consistent as these agencies kept regular hours. The ability to connect clients with child care programs varied depending
on the availability of openings for children of different ages within the programs; however, I had some success with placing children in child care or was at least able to give clients contact numbers for agencies.

To answer the next sub problem, the National Student Partnerships’ Washington D.C. staff survey was used. Only four people completed the survey. Some of the respondents were still volunteers at NSP and others were working with different agencies. Although there was a small number of participants and only face validity could be used, the individuals surveyed were familiar with NSP’s services and capabilities as well as the purpose of the satellite office at the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center.

**Sub problem 2:** What resources and services can NSP provide to support its clients at the VWFC?

In order to answer this question I utilized information from the completed NSP staff surveys. Because only four questionnaires were completed, I was unable to develop a coding system which would include all of the responses given. Therefore responses given by the former local directors to specific questions were analyzed and used to determine what resources and services NSP could provide to its clients. I utilized the responses to question number three which reads “What assets does NSP provide to the community it serves?”, question number four which asks “What assets does NSP have that you think will be important in serving the clients at the VWFC?”, and question
number five which reads “Why should NSP set up an office at the VWFRC?”. I have
broken down the results by question.

For question number three: “What assets does NSP provide to the community it
serves?” the respondents’ answers varied from naming specific assets, such as a
computer, that the NSP office has to the social environment the office provides. Three of
the respondents mentioned particular services, including employment services,
specifically job searches and resume help. Two of the local directors listed housing
assistance as an asset NSP had to provide to its clients. One respondent said, “NSP
serves as a resource to connect clients with the services they need.” Computers were
listed by one respondent as an asset. Two respondents said that volunteers were assets,
one writing “Great people skills, such as listening and understanding the people they
serve.” Two responses identified “listening” as an asset. One said that “NSP is a positive
and stable environment and NSP volunteers are expected to be positive and supportive of
their clients.” One local director emphasized that NSP’s services were free. Another
answer pointed out that NSP was a “resource to connect clients with services they need.”

Question number four on the staff survey asked the local directors what assets
NSP had that would help clients at the VWFRC. The staff gave a variety of answers
ranging from “hope and idealism” to “healthcare” and other specific services. The
specific services mentioned included “employment” which was mentioned by two of the
four local directors. “Housing” was also mentioned by two of the four participants;
however, the two who mentioned housing doubted NSP’s ability to provide this service.
The following services came up only once in the answers on the questionnaire; “child
care,” “healthcare,” “computers access,” and “government programs” (food stamps).
Three of the responses mentioned characteristics of NSP and capabilities of the volunteers as assets. One explained, “NSP has a powerful opportunity simply by the fact that we don’t turn clients away. We have time that case-workers at VWC [VWFRC] don’t and therefore can be more thorough in the services we provide our clients.” One said NSP could help to alleviate other problems through providing their services as “NSP can provide the hope and idealism that is too often missing at VWC [VWFRC].” The two other local directors who talked about characteristics of the volunteers as assets described volunteers as “available and willing,” and as people “who will treat clients [as] more than just more paper work”.

The answers to question number five; “Why should NSP set up an office at the VWFRC?,” ranged from expansion of the NSP client base to helping with the large population of clients the VWFRC works with. Two of the four completed surveys’ responses included expansion of the NSP client base to families and throughout D.C. as a reason for establishing the satellite office. Helping the VWFRC deal with the large client body was a reason for setting up the office mentioned by two of the respondents, one citing “the high volume of low-income individuals that flow through VWC [VWFRC] and their guaranteed need for our service.” Another respondent explained that “an alternative presence in VWC [VWFRC] is a great opportunity for clients.”

**Analysis of Results for Sub problem 2:**

Based on the responses to questions three through five provided by the four completed NSP staff surveys, employment services, which three of the four respondents included in their answers, was seen as the most agreed upon asset which NSP provides to
its community. “Employment” is the most requested service at the NSP Perry School Office, which all of the local directors have spent time working in; therefore, it is understandable that they saw employment as one of the greatest assets of NSP. “Employment” was the second most requested service at the NSP satellite office, showing that both populations (the clients and staff), although very small, placed importance on this service. As predicted in the hypothesis, housing assistance was an asset mentioned by two of the four local directors in their answers to questions three and four. In question four, the respondents expressed doubt about NSP’s ability to help their clients at the VWFRC with housing, which was also predicted in the hypothesis as previous studies found housing to be a difficult service to provide. The NSP staff is aware through their experiences that housing is a difficult service for many agencies in D.C. to provide, which explains their failure to emphasize housing assistance as an asset.

The rest of the services mentioned included “listening”, which was only requested by one client at the NSP VWFRC office, “computer access,” “child care,” “healthcare,” and “government programs.” Out of these services, child care is the only one that clients requested (seven of fifteen clients in the study). The rest of the responses to the three questions discussed NSP’s positive volunteers and environment as asset as well as the help that NSP’s presence provides to the VWFRC and their large client population. This focus on the benefits of NSP’s organizational structure and service delivery was not predicted in the hypothesis, as tangible services were the main focus.
**Sub Problem 3:** What service(s) is NSP D.C. best at providing?

In order to answer this last sub problem I utilized National Student Partnerships’ monthly service reports from November, 2005 through March 15, 2006, focusing on the “Services Rendered” section under each service category. It is impossible to give an accurate success rate as all clients did not report back whether or not they successfully received the services they requested from NSP. I chose to look at the service reports for these months as this period coincides with the time in which the research was conducted at the VWFRC. The breakdown of services during this period can be seen in Table 3.

The most commonly requested service at the NSP Perry School Office was “Employment” which comprised 63.98% of all of the services requested by clients. The second most requested service was “Other” which made up 25.7% of the requested services. The third most requested service was “Housing” which made up 4.95% of the client service requests. “Public Benefits” was the fourth most frequently asked for service and comprised 2.68% of the total number of requests. The rest of the service categories made up less than one percent of the total service requests made by clients between November, 2005 and March 15, 2006. Clients requested “Employment” most frequently, which had 620 client requests. “Other,” which included faxing and computer use, was second with 249 requests. This is probably because the Perry School clientele population consists of mostly low-income single men who see their immediate need as employment rather than finding shelter.
Table 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Service</th>
<th>Total services rendered</th>
<th>Percentage of All Service Rendered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>63.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>25.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Benefits</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/Job Training</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening and Support</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care (includes disability, addiction, mental health)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Services</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number or Service Rendered</td>
<td>969</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of Results for Sub problem 3:

“Employment” was overwhelmingly the most requested service by NSP clients at the Perry School between November and March. The third most sought after service was “Housing,” which was the most requested service at the VWFRC office. It must be noted when comparing the services requested at both offices that the number of clients in each office varied significantly as 969 clients received services from the Perry School office and only fifteen people participated in the study at the VWFRC office. Another difference between the client populations which should be noted is that the majority of clients at the Perry School were low-income, single men and all of the clients at the NSP satellite office were homeless mothers. “Clothing,” “Child Care,” and “Food” and were the third, fourth, and fifth most requested services at the satellite office. “Clothing” was
the sixth most requested service at the NSP Perry School Office, which was still only requested by four out of 969 people, “Food” was requested by three of the 969 people, and “Child Care” was requested by none of the NSP clients at the Perry School.

Based on the breakdown of “Services Rendered” at the NSP Perry School Office, it can be noted that employment services are the most frequently supplied services by NSP Washington, D.C. Since ”Employment” was requested by nine of the fifteen NSP clients at the VWFRC, in the future more emphasis should be placed on employment assistance at the satellite office as it is a service NSP frequently provides and one which clients at the VWFRC request.

**Observations: NSP’s Relationship with the VWFRC**

Through my analysis of the data collected during this study and taking into consideration observations which I made throughout my work at National Student Partnerships’ office at the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center, I have determined that there are many elements that contribute to the success of this satellite office, some of which were not gathered from the client needs assessments or staff evaluations. The following factors could contribute to the successful functioning of NSP’s office at the VWFRC.

If National Student Partnerships’ satellite office at the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center is to be helpful and maintain a steady flow of clients, NSP must established office hours during a time when the VWFRC consistently has clients. During the early stages of this project, between November and December, the NSP office at VWFRC did not receive many clients because the office was open in the afternoon when
client intake generally slowed down at the center, and when the VWFRC case workers focused on paper work. The office hours were also based around my schedule and that of another student volunteer, as we were the only NSP staff who worked at the VWFRC office. The hours of operation were established during the only time we could both commit to going to the office. From January through the middle of March, the office was open on Wednesday mornings between 10:00 and 10:30 A.M. to between 12:30 and 2:00 P.M because the VWFRC staff said the office had high numbers of clients during this time and therefore NSP’s presence would be most useful to the VWFRC. These hours were also a time when I, the NSP staff member, could be present to run the office. The increase in client intake after the hours of operation were changed is reflected in the fact that only one of the fifteen clients who participated in this study went through intake before January, when the office was open in the afternoon; the remaining fourteen participants went through intake during the morning hours. Hours of operation of the NSP office at the VWFRC is one of the potential barriers to the success of the satellite office, which NSP will have to renegotiate each semester when coordinating the volunteers’ availability with the hours at the VWFRC when client intake is high and when it would be most helpful to the center to have the presence of another service provider.

Another element which affects the success of the NSP office at the VWFRC is the relationship between the two service providers, and more importantly between the NSP staff member(s) running the office and the VWFRC staff members present when the NSP office is open. As the study progressed, I noticed a change in the dynamic of the relationship that I had with the VWFRC. From the beginning of November when the
research commenced until the middle of January, I did not receive many clients at the NSP VWFRC office. I went in the middle of the afternoon when the VWFRC staff was busy with paperwork and there were not many clients; therefore, most of the interaction I had was with the receptionist and I was reliant on her to convey to the staff that I was there to take client referrals. Once the hours changed in January, I made an effort to have more communication with all of the staff members to show them my dedication to client service and the partnership between the agencies. I took food every morning and walked around offering it to the staff members whom I could find, letting them know that I was in the office and available to see clients. I also passed out fliers to the staff with basic NSP contact information and hours, which also explained what services NSP offered. Until the beginning of March, I was still not receiving many referrals from the case workers which I deduced was probably for one of two reasons; the first being that even if case workers were referring clients to NSP, clients could not afford to return to the office if they were not there when the NSP office was open, and the second was that the case workers were still unfamiliar with NSP’s services and hours of operation. Once I had established my presence, around the end of February, the administration verbally acknowledged the importance of the relationship between our agencies and reinforced their commitment to the cooperation through promising to better monitor the VWFRC case workers’ referral system to NSP. If the VWFRC case workers used NSP’s presence to their advantage, it would provide them with more time for intake and would help their clients obtain all of the services they were seeking. Over time, the case workers began to recognize me, understand my services, and refer some clients to my office. The number of clients seeking assistance from the NSP office at the VWFRC will continue to increase
if the VWFRC staff is familiar with the NSP staff member(s) and knows when NSP will be at the center so that they may notify their clients of what services NSP provides and what times to come back to receive further help. Better advertisement of NSP’s presence within the center would also help to alert clients about what services they can receive from NSP and when NSP’s office is open so that they may prepare for intake.

**Observations: Difficulty Meeting the Needs of Clients in D.C.**

While the population in this study was small and specific, the findings can be useful to NSP in determining what services their clients want and what they as an organization have to offer. The findings could also potentially be helpful to other agencies similar to the VWFRC or NSP who serve homeless families in metropolitan areas. As stated in previous studies, the most requested services could be the hardest to obtain, a concept supported by the findings of my research as “Housing” was the most requested service and was the most difficult to acquire, which I experienced in searching for housing opportunities and noted in the answers given by some NSP staff in their surveys (Acosta and Toro, 2000, p. 345).

A study which surveyed homeless clients in New York found that many of the individuals had problems gaining certain benefits because of small formalities in their cases (Conley, 1996, p. 34). I also found this to be true as many housing programs that I encountered did not accept women with more than one child, people who were not married, only individuals in a certain age group, or only people who suffered from specific abuse or addiction problems. In order for housing to reach more homeless and low income individuals and in order for housing programs and shelters to better serve the
steadily growing homeless population in D.C. I have several suggestions which I developed after experiencing difficulty locating and placing clients in housing programs. First, more shelters must be established, as D.C. General, the central shelter for homeless families, is over-crowded in the winter when people cannot sleep on the streets and when hypothermia laws go into effect, which allow for anyone who is homeless to receive shelter when the temperature is below freezing. Between 2005 and 2006 two shelters closed in D.C., which will only cause greater need for housing (“Facts on Homelessness in Washington, D.C.; Overview,” 2006, p. 1). Second, more transitional housing programs must be created for families and to help those who are not in need of special abuse or drug recovery program, as I found that most of my clients did not suffer from these specific issues and were therefore not eligible for many of the programs I contacted. These suggestions coincide with the three-tiered strategy designed to address the need for increased shelter opportunities for homeless families which is discussed by Shlay and Rossi in their 1992 article, “Social Science Research and Contemporary Studies of Homelessness” which calls for more emergency and temporary shelters, transitional housing, and permanent housing opportunities (Shlay and Rossi, 1992, p. 149-50).

To improvement the provision of services, I suggest the development of a better network between service providers so that clients who seek a particular service can be referred to organizations that are familiar with and specifically deal with their needs. Therefore, agencies need to have better knowledge of other service provider so that they may offer clients more holistic help rather than knowledge of one aspect of services, since these clients are in need of multiple services.
Conclusion

Through the analysis of the service requests at the NSP satellite office at the VWFRC, it was determined that out of the fifteen NSP clients who participated in the study the most frequently requested service was “Housing” followed by “Employment,” “Clothing,” “Child Care,” and “Food.” These findings coincide with the results of previous studies and are understandable as the subjects were members of homeless families seeking resources and services which could support entire families, whose needs extend beyond those of an individual. However, since the number of participants in this research is small, it would be beneficial to the functioning of this satellite office to continue to keep track of the services requested, so that the staff may focus their attention on the provision of the most frequently requested services.

The resources and services which NSP can provide to its clients at the VWFRC were determined by the assets attributed to National Student Partnerships by the NSP local directors who participated in the study. These resources included assistance with specific services such as “housing,” “employment,” “health care,” and “computers” as well as the benefits of NSP volunteers and their willingness and ability to help. The NSP staff also assessed that the reason for establishing the satellite office at the VWFRC was to extend their services, with emphasis on offering employment and housing assistance to the large population of homeless families at the VWFRC.

There was somewhat of a disconnect between the clients’ and staffs’ assessment of what NSP could help its clients with at the VWFRC as all of the clients’ responses focused on direct services while the staff mentioned direct services but also emphasized the structure of NSP, mentioning its freedom from eligibility requirements and its free
services, as well as the abilities and commitment of the volunteers. These differences most likely occurred in some part due to the format differences of the two surveys used in this study, the intake form for clients and open ended survey given to staff. The clients did not embellish on what they hoped to receive from NSP as the service options were already listed for them on the intake form. The staff mentioned some direct services but also stressed the personal and positive service NSP provides.

The answers to the third sub problem which asked what service(s) NSP was best at providing were taken from the NSP Perry School Office’s database of service reports looking specifically at the “Services Rendered” between November and Mid March. “Employment” was the most requested service and “Housing” was the third most frequently requested services; however, “Child Care,” “Food,” and “Clothing” contributed to less than 1% of the needs expressed by the clients at the Perry School. The difference in service requests between the NSP office at the VWFRC and the Perry School should be noted and probably results form the difference in client population as the VWFRC’s clients are families and the NSP Perry School Office works mostly with individuals.

In conclusion, National Student Partnerships is an asset to its clients at the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center as it can provide most of the services requested by its clients. Housing is an issue that all homeless individuals and families struggle with and is difficult for many service agencies to locate in D.C.; it does not reflect NSP capabilities as a service provider. Employment assistance which was assessed by NSP as an asset to the VWFRC clients was the second most requested service by the clients. “Clothing” and “Food,” although not specifically mentioned by
NSP staff as an asset for the VWFRC are easy for NSP to provide as NSP staff can easily locate distributors of these services. “Child Care” is something that NSP has the referral list for, yet still depends on availability. Therefore, NSP has the ability to meet the needs of its clients at the VWFRC; however, if the NSP satellite office is to be maintained, the relationship between NSP and the VWFRC must be preserved with consistent communication, and the office must be open at a time that is beneficial to the NSP workers, the VWFRC, and the clients at the VWFRC.
References


Appendix A: NSP Client Intake form

National Student Partnerships

CLIENT INTAKE FORM

Name:_____________________________________________ Date:____/_____/____

Last                First                  M.I.

Phone:_______________________ Date of Birth: _____/_____ /_____ Gender: M    F

Complete
Address:_____________________________________________________________

Street     Apartment #

_________________________________________________             _____

City   State   Zip Code

Emergency
Contact:_____________________________________________________________

Name   Phone #  Relationship

How did you hear about
NSP?_____________________________________________________

Agency Referral? Yes   No    If so, Name of Agency:_________________________

What is your primary need? ______________________________________________

What are your strengths?_____________________________________________

Family

How many children or other dependents do you have?____

Age(s):_____________________ Are they living with you?____ Anyone else in your

household?______________________________

Please check the needs that you have and leave blank those areas that are not needs.

☐ Housing     ☐ Employment     ☐ Education/Job Training     ☐ Children’s Services

☐ Food     ☐ Transportation     ☐ Health Care (includes disability, addiction, mental

health)

☐ Legal Services     ☐ Clothing     ☐ Budgeting     ☐ Immigration     ☐ Public Benefits

☐ Listening and Support     ☐ Other (please list):_____ _______________________

What are your strengths?__________________________________________________________________
Housing
Where are you currently living? □ Shelter or Transitional Housing  □ Public Housing  □ Section 8 Apartment  □ Apartment paying market rate rent  □ Homeowner  □ Living doubled up with family or friends temporarily  □ Other:________________________________
How long do you plan to stay where you’re living?______________________________
What kind of housing are you looking for? (if any)______________________________

Employment
What is your employment status? □ Unemployed (Since:_____________________________)
□ Employed (Full or part-time?) Position:
_________________ Employer:_________________
What kind of work are you looking for (if any)?

Do you have a resume? Yes  No  Would you like our help making or updating one? Yes  No

What is your monthly household income? $_______ Source(s): □ Employment □ TANF  □ Unemployment  □ Food Stamps  □ WIC  □ SSI/SSDI □ Child Support □ Other:________

Education
What is the highest level of education you have completed and where?_____________________
Are you currently in school or training? Yes  No  If so, where?
_________________________
What are your career goals?_____________________________________________________
What kind of education/training are you looking for (if any)?_________________________

Immigration
Are you fluent in English? Yes  No  If not, what is your primary language?______________
Optional: Are you a U.S. Citizen? Yes No If not, country of citizenship: ____________________

Optional: Do you have U.S. working papers? Yes No Immigration Status: ________________________________________________

Other Information
What specific services are you receiving from what other agencies?

Do you and your family have health insurance? Yes No Are you a veteran? Yes No

Optional: What is your race/ethnicity? ____________________________________________

Is there any additional information we should know to help you reach your goals?

________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for completing this form! We look forward to working with you!

Volunteer Name: ______________________________________________ (Form Revised 9/08/04)
Appendix B: Questions for the NSP Staff and Local Directors

1. What is your job title at NSP?

2. What tasks do you perform for your job?

3. What resources does NSP provide to the community it serves?

4. What is the service that the largest number of clients request? What other services do clients typically ask for?

5. What services does NSP best provide to its clients?

6. What resources does NSP have that you think will be important in serving its clients at the VWFRC?

7. Do you know what services NSP provides at the VWFRC?