

COMING HOME

Evaluation Summary

2018

Creating a loving community for hope, healing, and empowerment.



SEARCH

For a Houston without Homelessness

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Coming Home Evaluation Summary 2018

Background/Introduction

The Coming Home program is a 24-week program that is designed to provide a bridge towards community and connection for individuals who have experienced chronic homelessness. The first iteration of this program was offered from April 2018 to September 2018. The graduation celebration for the first four graduates was on September 24th. 2018.

The Coming Home program is modeled after an emerging evidence-informed Faith-Based Restorative Community Program implemented and evaluated by Drs. Anita Lightburn and Amanda Sisselman from Fordham University's Beck Institute for Religion and Poverty. This model was adapted from a local model developed and sustained over 20 years ago for the homeless in New York City, with an emphasis on homeless individuals who were formerly incarcerated or who have survived domestic violence (Lightburn & Sisselman, 2013; 2014). This model utilizes a Life Skills Empowerment Program (LSEP) that is delivered in a weekly group format, mentorship, and partnership with local congregations to provide a weekly meal in a community context. This model includes the following core components:

- 1) Community Meals, Inspirational Reflections, Networking, Celebrating
- 2) Mentoring (7-8 sessions)
- 3) Case Management (already offered by SEARCH Homeless Services)
- 4) Life Skills Empowerment Workshops
- 5) Life Story Development
- 6) Goal Setting
- 7) Small Intensive Group Experience for 10-12 Participants
- 8) Stipend to Support Participation or Transportation

The program also focuses on integrating Restorative Life Practices throughout the program by integrating concepts of mindfulness, trauma-informed interactions, solution-focused problem-solving, empowerment and forgiveness/reconciliation. In the context of the Small Intensive Group, there is a specific focus on Critical Relational Skills (with oneself and others), Concrete Life Skills (preparing for work, financial literacy, advocacy for justice, time management and education), Mentor Collaboration focused on goal-setting, and Story Development and Sharing. The story is told in group, and some participants share their story at the graduation. The Critical Relational aspect of the group focuses on Empowerment for Change, Introduction to the S.E.L.F (Safety, Emotion, Loss and Future) curriculum, how to develop a support system and healthy lifestyles. The specific topics and emphasis in the group is defined by members of the group and their perceived needs.

Dr. Lightburn and Sue Groman provided a two-day in-person training hosted by SEARCH Homeless Services on August 21-23, 2017, and a draft copy of their manual titled, "Restorative Community 2018 Guide" that provided guidance for the implementation of the Coming Home Program.

Evaluation Approach

This evaluation is modeled after the mixed-methods study conducted by Dr. Lightburn and colleagues at Fordham University. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data help to assess both change over time and provide a fuller picture of the unique experiences of all participants in the Coming Home Program over time. The primary questions guiding the overall program evaluation include:

1. Do clients participating in the Coming Home program increase their perceived coping ability, reduce trauma symptoms, and increase perceived social support, spirituality, personal empowerment, and hope 3 months into the program and at 6 months post-test?
2. Does criminogenic thinking moderate the impact of the Coming Home program on these aforementioned outcomes at 3- and 6-months?
3. Do clients perceive their Coming Home group, mentor and peers as supportive and empowering as measured by the Relational Health Indices subscales half-way through the program (3 months) and at post-test (6 months)?
4. What are the employment, educational and housing outcomes of participants in the Coming Home at 12 month follow up?
5. How do mentors perceive their relationships with Coming Home clients, as well as their participation in the program?
6. How do Coming Home program staff, congregations, volunteers perceive their experience with the Coming Home program?

The data collection plan is provided below in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Mixed Methods Data Collection Plan

Sample for Data Collection	Baseline	Program Mid-Point (3 months)	Posttest (6 months)	12 months
Participants in program (10-14 participants per group)	Assessment Instrument: 1) Demographic/Background Information 2) Sense of Coherence Scale (Coping) 3) PTSD Checklist – Civilian Version 4) Social Support Scale 5) Spirituality Scale 6) Empowerment Scale 7) Adult Hope Scale 8) TCU Criminogenic Thinking Form	Assessment Instrument: 1) Sense of Coherence Scale (Coping) 2) PCL-5 (Trauma Symptoms) 3) Social Support Scale 4) Spirituality Scale 5) Empowerment Scale 6) Adult Hope Scale 7) Relational Health Indices Scale (measures three conceptual dimensions quality relationships – engagement, authenticity and empowerment – across peers, mentors and community relationships)	Assessment Instrument: 1) Sense of Coherence Scale (Coping) 2) PCL-5 (Trauma Symptoms) 3) Social Support Scale 4) Spirituality Scale 5) Empowerment Scale 6) Adult Hope Scale 7) Relational Health Indices Scale Focus Groups: 1) Feedback on intervention using semi-structured questionnaire	HMIS Database: *Housing – stability, violations, etc. *Income – source, amount *Employment – income, job search, obtained employment *Education – seeking training/education, completed training/education Program Data (Judge’s Office): *Criminal Data - Charges
Mentors		Online Survey: Mentor Strength of Relationship Scale	Online Survey: Mentor Strength of Relationship Scale Focus Groups	
Congregation Volunteers		Online Survey	Online Survey	
Coming Home Program Staff			Focus Groups	

Data Collected by Coming Home Participants. The quantitative outcome data to answer *Research Question 1* was collected from participants at baseline, 3 months and 6 months. Primary outcome variables were measured using validated scales assessing coping skills, trauma symptoms, spirituality, personal empowerment and hope. Each scale is listed above in Figure 1. Coping skills were measured using the Sense of Coherence Scale (Antonovsky, 1987). Trauma was measured using the PTSD Checklist – Civilian Version (PCL-C) (Weathers, Litz, Huska, & Keane, National Center for PTSD). The Social Support Scale measures perceived emotional/informational support, tangible, affectionate and spiritual support (Levine, Vong, & Yoo, 2015). The Daily Spirituality Scale (Underwood & Teresi, 2002) was used to assess daily spiritual experiences and how they are an everyday part of an individual’s life. The Empowerment Scale, which was adapted from the Personal Progress Scale-Revised (Hunter, Jason, & Keyes, 2013; Johnson, Worrell, & Chandler, 2005), assessed the outcome of empowerment in the context of substance abuse recover. The Adult State Hope Scale was used to measure present-focused goal directed thinking (Snyder et al, 1996).

To answer *Research Question 2*, the TCU Criminogenic Thinking Form (Knight, Garner, Simpson, Morey, & Flynn, 2006) was used at pretest to assess whether higher levels of criminogenic thinking impacted program success. The rationale for this was that this program was designed initially for individuals participating in the 1185 Mental Health Jail Diversion program.

Research Question 3 focused on assessing the perception of Coming Home participants of the broader Coming Home community – their group peers, their mentor and the Coming Home program as a whole using the Relational Health Indices Scale (Liang et al, 2002). This aspect of the evaluation assesses whether the environment is perceived as empowering and supportive at each of these levels.

Qualitative data was collected by Coming Home participants at the end of the program (6 months) using a focus group to answer *Research Question 6*. Data from HMIS on income, housing stability and employment will be collected at 12 months and reported in a subsequent report. This will help to answer *Research Question 4*.

Coming Home Mentors. An adapted Mentor Strength of Relationship scale (Rhodes, Schwartz, Willis, & Wu, 2017) and some open-ended questions were used to assess the strength of the relationship from the mentor perspective at 3- and 6-months. After the conclusion of the program, a focus group was conducted with the Coming Home mentors on October 23, 2018. This data was used to answer *Research Question 5*.

Research Question 6 was answered with the following information collected from Congregational Volunteers and Coming Home Staff.

Congregational Volunteers. While the original plan was to collect data from the volunteers at the end of the study, we realized the need to assess volunteers' experience earlier, especially for volunteers who may only attend one or a few times. Consequently, we began to solicit feedback from volunteers on a monthly basis. Volunteers received an anonymous online questionnaire which asked them 4 closed-ended Likert questions about their experience as a volunteer, as well as five open-ended questions that facilitated feedback about their experience and how it impacted them. They were also asked two questions about their volunteer role and with which congregation or organization they were affiliated.

Coming Home Staff. Individual semi-structured qualitative interviews with Coming Home staff were conducted in December 2018 to assess their experience and observations of the Coming Home program.

This brief summary report provides highlights from the first iteration of the Coming Home program from April to September 2018.

Results

Participant Outcomes and Views of Coming Home

Coming Home enrolled 10 participants, but only 9 participants officially began the program. Of the 9 participants, five did not complete the program. One participant left the program within the first two months due to finding full-time employment. This participant provided feedback on the program, expressing high satisfaction and attempted to attend the dinners despite a difficult work schedule. In the end, he was unable to continue to attend.

Of the remaining 8 participants, 4 did not continue due to health, mental health or substance use issues. Given the small sample size of 4 for the 3- and 6-month analysis, there is very little power to detect changes over time or to make any definitive conclusions about the impact of the program on the outcome measures collected. As such, Questions 1 and 2 cannot yet be answered in light of the limitations of the data. However, Table 1 descriptively displays the means and standard deviations on each of the scales. While it was not anticipated that we would have adequate sample size to detect a difference, we did see significant improvement in Hope from baseline to 3-month follow up ($p=.046$). Interestingly, this score trended lower at 6 months.

Table. 1 Means and Standard Deviations of Main Outcome Variables at Baseline, Three Months and Six Months

Instrument	Baseline N=4 <i>M (SD)</i>	3 Months N=4 <i>M (SD)</i>	6 Months N=4 <i>M (SD)</i>
PCL-C Trauma Score	36.25 (7.41)	39.75 (16.07)	33.75 (12.66)
Coping (SOC)	129.25 (19.69)	135.75 (28.38)	137.25 (29.58)
Social Support Scale	67.25 (14.24)	64.75 (16.82)	67.75 (15.22)
Spirituality Scale	81.25 (13.40)	84.25 (10.90)	79.25 (2.50)
Empowerment Scale	77.00 (15.08)	76.75 (15.99)	81.00 (15.41)
Adult State Hope Scale	42.00 (3.37)	45.00 (2.94)*	43.25 (3.59)

*Significant improvement from baseline to 3 month follow up ($p=.046$).

With regard to employment and educational outcomes, one participant is actively pursuing his GED, one is returning as a Coming Home mentor, one is actively pursuing employment and the fourth participant was able to reconnect with family, increase his income and reduce barriers associated with maintaining this income security.

The fourth research question focused on assessing the presence of growth fostering relationships and community among participants in the program at 3-months and 6-months with their group

peers, mentors and the larger Coming Home community. Specifically, the Relational Health Indices (Liang, Tracy, Taylor, Williams, Jordan, & Miller, 2002) was utilized to assess the quality of these relationships with regard to empowerment, engagement and authenticity. While the sample size is not large enough to assess change over time, it is possible to report the responses descriptively. These results are provided below in Tables 2-4. For each item, the responses are provided at both 3 and 6 months.

Table 2. Peer Relational Health Indices Responses at Three and Six Months

	NEVER	SELDOM	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
EVEN WHEN I HAVE DIFFICULT THINGS TO SHARE, I CAN BE HONEST AND REAL WITH MY GROUP PEERS. (3 MONTHS)	0	0	1 (20%)	0	4 (80%)
EVEN WHEN I HAVE DIFFICULT THINGS TO SHARE, I CAN BE HONEST AND REAL WITH MY GROUP PEERS. (6 MONTHS)	0	0	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	2 (50%)
AFTER A CONVERSATION WITH MY GROUP PEERS, I FEEL UPLIFTED (3 MONTHS)	0	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	0	3 (60%)
AFTER A CONVERSATION WITH MY GROUP PEERS, I FEEL UPLIFTED (6 MONTHS)	0	0	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	2 (50%)
THE MORE TIME I SPEND WITH MY GROUP PEERS, I FEEL UPLIFTED (3 MONTHS)	0	0	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)
THE MORE TIME I SPEND WITH MY GROUP PEERS, I FEEL UPLIFTED (6 MONTHS)	0	0	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	2 (50%)
I FEEL UNDERSTOOD BY MY GROUP PEERS (3 MONTHS)	1 (20%)	0	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	2 (40%)
I FEEL UNDERSTOOD BY MY GROUP PEERS (6 MONTHS)	0	0	2 (50%)	0	2 (50%)
IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO MAKE OUR FRIENDSHIPS GROW IN THE GROUP (3 MONTHS)	0	0	2 (40%)	1 (20%)	2 (40%)
IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO MAKE OUR FRIENDSHIPS GROW IN THE GROUP (6 MONTHS)	0	0	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	2 (50%)
I TALK TO MY GROUP PEERS ABOUT OUR DISAGREEMENTS WITHOUT FEELING JUDGED (3 MONTHS)	0	0	2 (40%)	0	3 (60%)
I TALK TO MY GROUP PEERS ABOUT OUR DISAGREEMENTS WITHOUT FEELING JUDGED (6 MONTHS)	1 (25%)	0	0	0	3 (75%)
MY GROUP PEERS INSPIRE ME TO SEEK OTHER RELATIONSHIPS LIKE THE ONES IN THIS GROUP (3 MONTHS)	0	0	0	2 (40%)	3 (60%)
MY GROUP PEERS INSPIRE ME TO SEEK OTHER RELATIONSHIPS LIKE THE ONES IN THIS GROUP (6 MONTHS)	0	0	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	1 (50%)
I AM UNCOMFORTABLE SHARING MY DEEPEST FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS IN THIS GROUP (3 MONTHS)	0 (20%)	0	3 (60%)	1 (20%)	0

	NEVER	SELDOM	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
I AM UNCOMFORTABLE SHARING MY DEEPEST THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS IN THIS GROUP (6 MONTHS)	0	0	2 (50%)	0	2 (50%)
I HAVE A GREATER SENSE OF MY SELF-WORTH THROUGH MY RELATIONSHIPS WITH MY PEERS (3 MONTHS)	0	0	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)
I HAVE A GREATER SENSE OF MY SELF-WORTH THROUGH MY RELATIONSHIPS WITH MY PEERS (6 MONTHS)	0	0	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	2 (50%)
I FEEL POSITIVELY CHANGED BY MY GROUP PEERS (3 MONTHS)	0	0	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	3 (60%)
I FEEL POSITIVELY CHANGED BY MY GROUP PEERS (6 MONTHS)	0	0	0	1 (25%)	3 (75%)
I CAN TELL MY GROUP PEERS WHEN HE/SHE HAS HURT MY FEELINGS (3 MONTHS)	0	0	0	3 (60%)	2 (40%)
I CAN TELL MY GROUP PEERS WHEN HE/SHE HAS HURT MY FEELINGS (6 MONTHS)	0	0	0	1 (25%)	3 (75%)
MY GROUP PEERS CAUSE ME TO GROW IN IMPORTANT WAYS (3 MONTHS)	0	0	0	1 (20%)	4 (80%)
MY GROUP PEERS CAUSE ME TO GROW IN IMPORTANT WAYS (6 MONTHS)	0	0	0	1 (25%)	3 (75%)

Table 3. Mentor Relational Health Indices Responses at Three and Six Months

	NEVER	SELDOM	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
I CAN GENUINELY BE MYSELF WITH MY MENTOR (3 MONTHS)	0	0	1 (20%)	0	4 (80%)
I CAN GENUINELY BE MYSELF WITH MY MENTOR. (6 MONTHS)	0	0	0	0	4 (100%)
I BELIEVE MY MENTOR VALUES ME AS A WHOLE PERSON. (3 MONTHS)	0	0	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	3 (60%)
I BELIEVE MY MENTOR VALUES ME AS A WHOLE PERSON. (6 MONTHS)	0	0	0	0	4 (100%)
MY MENTOR'S COMMITMENT TO AND INVOLVEMENT IN OUR RELATIONSHIP EXCEEDS THAT REQUIRED BY HIS/HER SOCIAL ROLE (3 MONTHS)	0	0	0	1 (20%)	4 (80%)
MY MENTOR'S COMMITMENT TO AND INVOLVEMENT IN OUR RELATIONSHIP EXCEEDS THAT REQUIRED BY HIS/HER SOCIAL ROLE (6 MONTHS)	0	0	0	0	4 (100%)
MY MENTOR SHARES STORIES ABOUT HIS/OWN EXPERIENCES WITH ME IN A WAY THAT ENHANCES MY LIFE (3 MONTHS)	0	0	0	4 (80%)	1 (20%)
MY MENTOR SHARES STORIES ABOUT HIS/OWN EXPERIENCES WITH ME IN A WAY THAT ENHANCES MY LIFE (6 MONTHS)	0	0	0	1 (25%)	3 (75%)
I FEEL AS THOUGH I KNOW MYSELF BETTER BECAUSE OF MY MENTOR (3 MONTHS)	0	0	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	3 (60%)
I FEEL AS THOUGH I KNOW MYSELF BETTER BECAUSE OF MY MENTOR (6 MONTHS)	0	0	0	0	4 (100%)
MY MENTOR GIVES ME EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT (3 MONTHS)	0	0	1 (20%)	0	4 (80%)
MY MENTOR GIVES ME EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT (6 MONTHS)	0	0	0	0	4 (100%)
I TRY TO EMULATE THE VALUES OF MY MENTOR (SUCH AS SOCIAL, ACADEMIC, RELIGIOUS, PHYSICAL) (3 MONTHS)	0	0	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)
I TRY TO EMULATE THE VALUES OF MY MENTOR (SUCH AS SOCIAL, ACADEMIC, RELIGIOUS, PHYSICAL) (6 MONTHS)	0	0	0	0	4 (100%)

	NEVER	SELDOM	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
I FEEL UPLIFTED AND ENERGI­ZED BY INTERACTIONS WITH MY MENTOR (3 MONTHS)	0	0	2 (40%)	0	3 (60%)
I FEEL UPLIFTED AND ENERGI­ZED BY INTERACTIONS WITH MY MENTOR (6 MONTHS)	0	0	00	0	4 (100%)
MY MENTOR TRIES HARD TO UNDERSTAND MY FEELINGS AND GOALS (ACADEMIC, PERSONAL, OR WHATEVER ISA RELEVANT) (3 MONTHS)	1 (20%)	0	0	0	4 (80%)
MY MENTOR TRIES HARD TO UNDERSTAND MY FEELINGS AND GOALS (ACADEMIC, PERSONAL, OR WHATEVER ISA RELEVANT) (6 MONTHS)	0	0	0	0	4 (100%)
MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY MENTOR INSPIRES ME TO SEEK OTHER RELATIONSHIPS LIKE THIS ONE (3 MONTHS)	1 (25%)	0	1 (25%)	0	2 (50%)
MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY MENTOR INSPIRES ME TO SEEK OTHER RELATIONSHIPS LIKE THIS ONE (6 MONTHS)	0	0	0	0	4 (100%)
I FEEL COMFORTABLE EXPRESSING MY DEEPEST CONCERNS TO MY MENTOR (3 MONTHS)	1 (20%)	0	0	1 (20%)	3 (60%)
I FEEL COMFORTABLE EXPRESSING MY DEEPEST CONCERNS TO MY MENTOR (6 MONTHS)	0	0	0	0	4 (100%)

As shown in Table 3, there was a clear trend from 3 months to 6 months with regard to comfort and the overall quality of the mentorship relationship.

Table 4. Coming Home Community Relational Health Indices Responses at 3 and 6 Months

	NEVER	SELDOM	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
I HAVE A SENSE OF BELONGING TO THIS COMMUNITY (3 MONTHS)			1 (20%)	3 (60%)	1 (20%)
I HAVE A SENSE OF BELONGING TO THIS COMMUNITY (6 MONTHS)				1 (25%)	3 (75%)
I FEEL BETTER ABOUT MYSELF AFTER INTERACTIONS WITH THIS COMMUNITY (3 MONTHS)			1 (20%)	3 (60%)	1 (20%)
I FEEL BETTER ABOUT MYSELF AFTER INTERACTIONS WITH THIS COMMUNITY (6 MONTHS)				1 (25%)	3 (75%)
IF MEMBERS OF THIS COMMUNITY KNOW SOMETHING IS BOTHERING ME, THEY ASK ME ABOUT IT (3 MONTHS)			2 (40%)	1 (20%)	2 (40%)
IF MEMBERS OF THIS COMMUNITY KNOW SOMETHING IS BOTHERING ME, THEY ASK ME ABOUT IT (6 MONTHS)				1 (25%)	3 (75%)
MEMBERS OF THIS COMMUNITY ARE NOT FREE TO JUST BE THEMSELVES (3 MONTHS)			3 (75%)		1 (25%)
MEMBERS OF THIS COMMUNITY ARE NOT FREE TO JUST BE THEMSELVES (6 MONTHS)					4 (100%)
I FEEL UNDERSTOOD BY MEMBERS OF THIS COMMUNITY (3 MONTHS)		1 (20%)	2 (40%)	1 (20%)	1 (20%)
I FEEL UNDERSTOOD BY MEMBERS OF THIS COMMUNITY (6 MONTHS)				1 (25%)	3 (75%)
I FEEL MOBILIZED TO PERSONAL ACTION AFTER MEETINGS WITH THIS COMMUNITY (3 MONTHS)		2 (40%)	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	1 (20%)
I FEEL MOBILIZED TO PERSONAL ACTION AFTER MEETINGS WITH THIS COMMUNITY (6 MONTHS)		1 (25%)	1 (25%)		1 (50%)
THERE ARE PARTS OF MYSELF I FEEL I MUST HIDE FROM THIS COMMUNITY (3 MONTHS)	1 (20%)		2 (40%)		2 (40%)
THERE ARE PARTS OF MYSELF I FEEL I MUST HIDE FROM THIS COMMUNITY (6 MONTHS)	1 (25%)		2 (50%)		1 (25%)

	NEVER	SELDOM	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
IT SEEMS AS IF PEOPLE IN THIS COMMUNITY REALLY LIKE ME AS A PERSON (3 MONTHS)	1 (20%)		1 (20%)	1 (20%)	2 (40%)
IT SEEMS AS IF PEOPLE IN THIS COMMUNITY REALLY LIKE ME AS A PERSON (6 MONTHS)			1 (25%)		3 (75%)
THERE IS A LOT OF BACKBITING AND GOSSIPING IN THIS COMMUNITY (3 MONTHS)	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	
THERE IS A LOT OF BACKBITING AND GOSSIPING IN THIS COMMUNITY (6 MONTHS)	2 (50%)			1 (25%)	1 (25%)
MEMBERS OF THIS COMMUNITY ARE VERY COMPETITIVE WITH EACH OTHER (3 MONTHS)	1 (20%)		1 (20%)	1 (20%)	2 (40%)
MEMBERS OF THIS COMMUNITY ARE VERY COMPETITIVE WITH EACH OTHER (6 MONTHS)	1 (25%)			1 (25%)	2 (50%)
I HAVE A GREATER SENSE OF SELF WORTH THROUGH MY CONNECTION WITH THIS COMMUNITY (3 MONTHS)			1 (20%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)
I HAVE A GREATER SENSE OF SELF WORTH THORUGH MY CONNECTION WITH THIS COMMUNITY (6 MONTHS)				1 (25%)	3 (75%)
MY CONNECTIONS WITH THIS COMMUNITY ARE SO INSPIRING THAT THEY MOVE ME TO PURSUE RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE OUTSIDE THIS COMMUNITY (3 MONTHS)				1 (20%)	4 (80%)
MY CONNECTIONS WITH THIS COMMUNITY ARE SO INSPIRING THAT THEY MOVE ME TO PURSUE RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE OUTSIDE THIS COMMUNITY (6 MONTHS)					4 (100%)
THIS COMMUNITY HAS SHAPED MY IDENTITY IN MANY WAYS (3 MONTHS)			1 (20%)	1 (20%)	3 (60%)
THIS COMMUNITY HAS SHAPED MY IDENTITY IN MANY WAYS (6 MONTHS)				1 (25%)	3 (75%)
THIS COMMUNITY PROVIDES ME WITH EMOTIONAL SUPPORT (3 MONTHS)					5 (100%)
THIS COMMUNITY PROVIDES ME WITH EMOTIONAL SUPPORT (6 MONTHS)					4 (100%)

The participants, including the one participant who received a job, reported being highly satisfied with the Coming Home program. Participants shared the following impressions of the Coming Home Program:

“I’m impressed that people are so concerned with my welfare. At the end of the day we are all people and we all got issues and we all got background.... I stuck with it for 6 months because I was ready for a change. I dedicated my life to so much bull crap, that one time a week for something greater and worth maintaining made me want to commit. I can do it if I put my mind to it.”

“Coming Home enlightened me on the importance of positive relationships. It facilitates growth and significance.”

“I learned how to listen to other people’s point of view. I learned how to respond to negative situations, to be calm and listen. ***It encouraged me to better myself and create realistic expectations for myself. It taught me to be mindful of other people, and to listen to people wiser than me. It taught me humility.***”

“I had a good time, I learned a lot. I’m impressed overall. ***It taught me that people still love.*** During the interview process, the program was thoroughly explained to me. She said it was only 1 time per week for six months. The people really seemed to care for me.”

The Coming Home Participants shared the following ways that they believe Coming Home helped them. Consistently, across individuals, the mentorship was expressed as a valuable and helpful aspect of their experience.

“Mentorship helped me. ***They also bought me a cake on my birthday this year, and that taught me to think of others and to open up my heart and be generous.***”

“It taught me how to prioritize and be mindful of perspective. ***It was the mentorship.***”

“It impacted my feelings and my ability to communicate them. ***My mentor always seems to find the right answers on how to achieve.***”

“Mentorship. My mentor took me to church.”

There was only one area of improvement suggested, and that was to consider ways to screen out individuals who may not be attending the group for the right reasons at the beginning. All participants shared that there were individuals who came “for other people” or who “tried to manipulate the program”. All remaining group participants were very proud that they stuck with the program over the full six months and that they did it for themselves and their personal growth and development.

In summary, participants that completed the program or exited for employment reported high levels of satisfaction with the program, expressing the benefits of positive relationships and community and the mentorship.

Mentorship Coming Home Experience

There were 6 responses from mentors to the online anonymous survey during the period between August and November 2018. This survey was administered as a 3-month and end of program survey. There were 3 responses to the 3-month survey and 2 responses to the 6-month survey. Ideally, we will improve responses to this survey in the next administration of the program. One way to achieve this may be to ask the mentors to complete the hard copy of the surveys on site during weeks that they are in attendance for the programs. The responses that were received suggested that the mentorship role was enjoyable, there were high levels of confidence in one's ability to fulfill the mentorship role, and that they were well matched with their mentee. Three of the responses indicated feeling very close to their mentee. The responses to the open-ended questions from the online survey are provided below.

The Best Aspects About Being a Mentor in the Coming Home Program. The following statements were provided about the best parts of being a mentor in the Coming Home Program.

“The ability to share and receive from the experience.”

“In addition to the close relationship I have developed with my mentee, it has been wonderful to connect with others in the faith community in such a relaxed and positive setting.”

“Community.”

“Watching the program and its results evolve.”

The Most Challenging Aspects of Being a Mentor in the Coming Home Program. The following statements were provided about the most challenging aspects of being a mentor in the Coming Home Program on the anonymous survey.

“Not being able to spend more time together.”

“Communication can be a challenge simply due to the life circumstances of my mentee. Probably the hardest thing is to refrain from helping in a way that would be negative in the long run, such as helping out with overdue bills.”

“My mentee has dropped out of the program and won't return my texts or the leader's texts.”

Changes Experienced Personally. The following statements were provided about the personal impact of being a mentor in the Coming Home Program on the anonymous survey.

“Much more aware of the challenges of being rehoused.”

“I am more ready to accept the mentee where he is and that he needs time to decide where he wants to go.”

“Yes, a greater level of gratefulness.”

“I have definitely improved in my ability to empathize with others in an effort to really provide what the other person needs.”

“More awareness of the difficulty for felons to reentry society jobs, etc.”

Mentors were also asked to participate in a focus group after the program ended. Key themes and findings from this focus group are highlighted below.

1. The building of community seemed to solidify around 3 months. There was more consistency in who came, as those who were non-committed dropped off. As described by a mentor who was in attendance every week, “It wasn’t anything I could see, it was a feeling...and familiarity. You see the same people coming back, maybe not every week, but they come back. They show a real concern for each other just in those little passing by conversations.” Another mentor shared the mentee commented, “He made a comment a couple of times during the meal that he couldn’t believe that some of these people would come just for them, for this program. And so, while the food was really important, I think the comradery was equally important, and that people treated each other with respect and dignity.”
2. It was difficult to maintain boundaries, and there were specific challenges when it felt like the mentee needed money or requested help to obtain money or loans. This was difficult to navigate in the context of building relationships.
3. Sometimes it was difficult to communicate, and phone contact was not ideal or it was difficult to reach the mentee.
4. Developing an understanding of the experiences and perspectives of individuals in Coming Home, as well as the barriers and challenges they were facing. Part of this understanding involved meeting the participants where they were at and helping them meet their goals, even if they were not the goals the mentor thought were ideal or that their mentee was not moving quickly enough toward larger goals. Learning how to navigate this and reframe what a success is from the perspective of the mentee was part of the learning process. Every mentee’s needs and the way they benefited was different.
5. Mentors found the meal and the opportunity to serve others to be most meaningful for their mentees. “In the beginning, I think the meals were really important to my mentee...and as the program went on, the one thing to really became important to him

was to be of service and he was the guy that cleaned, and I think he got a lot of positive feedback from that.... he was the guy that somebody thought worked for the church.”

6. Mentors shared growing in their understanding of the experiences of individuals who have been chronically homeless and who continue to struggle with access to basic needs despite having permanent housing. One mentor shared, “I’m just reflecting on the fact that [mentee] didn’t know where his next meal was coming from. I actually did not know this was his situation and to me, I need to redo my thinking that just because they’re living in an apartment that they have food to eat everyday.” Another mentor commented, “I think it’s kind of important to know that for people who are homeless, they have a different bottom than other people. Right? So right now my bottom may be that I’ve lost my job, or didn’t make enough money to buy something. But homelessness takes the bottom to another level where it goes into survivor mode, and in survivor mode things that we think of just as basic like breakfast, lunch and dinner, may not be on the list that day.”
7. The appearance of the mentees seemed to change over time. “...the other thing I just noticed when we first started is that [my mentee] would come in pajama pants, and then he got his hair done and would come in a button-down shirt. It was really profound, and I think a lot of it was that he felt valued and it was reflected in that.” Other mentors shared noticing this as well among the other participants over time.

With regard to specific improvements, mentors shared the following outcomes of their mentees that they were proud of:

- 1) One mentee was able to reconnect to family he had not been in contact with for many years and substantially improve his financial situation with the help of his mentor. The change in this financial situation was very important, as it allowed the mentee to have more consistent access to food (which is not guaranteed when someone is housed).
- 2) Another mentee was returning to get his GED with the help of his mentor.
- 3) One mentee is going to return to work as a mentor in the Coming Home program given his strong desire to give back to the community and support others who have dealt with similar challenges.
- 4) One mentee is actively pursuing employment.
- 5) One mentee, the one that exited the program for employment, is maintaining employment and recently bought a car for transportation.

Another result of the mentorship and connections of the community, as communicated during the mentor’s meeting was the establishment of a ***new community employment opportunity for individuals with felonies to get jobs at Texas Children’s and Methodist Hospitals***. This new opportunity came about because of the opportunity to network with dining volunteers and mentors.

Coming Home Volunteer Experience

There were 31 responses to the volunteer mentor online anonymous survey over the course of the program. Responses were from six different congregations, including: St. Paul’s United Methodist Church, First Cumberland Presbyterian Church, St. John The Divine, United Orthodox Synagogues, Trinity East United Methodist Church, and Bellaire United Methodist Church. Ninety-three percent of responses reported volunteering as a dining companion and nearly half (48%) were involved in both meal preparation and serving. Other volunteer activities reported (as other) included greeting, set up and clean up, planning of meals, coordination with other volunteers, and recruiting other volunteers. All responses were provided between May and August 2018 and may not reflect views of volunteers before or after this time during the course of the program.

As shown in Table 5, the majority of volunteers reported enjoying the opportunity to volunteer, did not see it as more of a time commitment than expected, and thought it was enjoyable and a good fit.

Table 5. Coming Home Volunteer Experience Online Survey

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
I ENJOY THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A VOLUNTEER FOR COMING HOME.	1 (3%)	0	0	11 (38%)	17 (59%)
BEING A VOLUNTEER FOR COMING HOME IS MORE OF A TIME COMMITMENT THAN I EXPECTED.	7 (24%)	16 (55%)	4 (14%)	2 (7%)	0
I EXPECTED THAT BEING A VOLUNTEER FOR THIS PROGRAM WOULD BE MORE FUN THAN IT ACTUALLY IS.	8 (28%)	11 (38%)	6 (14%)	4 (14%)	0
THIS VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY WITH COMING HOME HAS BEEN A GOOD MATCH FOR ME.	0	0	3 (10%)	18 (62%)	8 (28%)

Best Parts About Volunteering for Coming Home. Volunteers were asked to share the most valuable parts of participating in the Coming Home program. Examples of the most common themes by count are reported below, however, many of the comments were representative across themes. The most commonly reported theme, shared in 24 of 29 responses (83%) was **being a part of the community**. While most responses were brief, a few examples of these responses are shared below:

“Engaging in conversation with all of the table guests, especially the participants.”

“The company.”

“Meeting new people.”

“Having a personal relationship with some of the participants.”

“Experiencing the enjoyment of the participants.”

“I enjoy the camaraderie among the group as a whole. It is wonderful to see everyone supporting and encouraging each other. I can only imagine how difficult and even lonely it can be to try to move forward with the circumstances our guys face, and I know that they get a lot from sharing their issues as well as their successes.”

A second common valuable experience was **feeling as though their presence and contribution – particularly through bringing meals - was helpful and valued**. Ten of the 29 (34%) open ended responses included this theme.

“Meeting the participants and seeing their progress.”

“Providing healthy food. Friendship.”

“Sharing food and talking with the participants. It has provided an environment of hope for many.”

“Providing healthy meals for the clients.”

A third theme included **experiencing/providing the meal itself specifically**. This was reported by eight of the 29 (28%) open ended responses. Some of the comments below reflect his sentiment:

“Eating with the group. Getting to know the men and the bus driver. Seeing the participants and friends weekly. Participating in a well-planned activity. We just had fun and got to know members from our churches better.”

“Having a civilized dinner with other people.”

“Getting to know the participants. Getting to know the SEARCH staff. The good meals.”

“Sharing a meal and conversation with the program participants and the other volunteers.”

The fourth theme that emerged was **learning from others who have different experiences**. Four of the 29 comments (14%) reflected this sentiment.

“Connecting with people I could not experience in my daily life, experiencing their humanity.”

“The chance to sit with the participants and learn about their lives.”

“Meeting the participants, getting to know them and understand their lives.”

“Meeting the clients, getting out of my comfort zone, feeling that I have provided a service.”

Most Challenging Parts of Volunteering for Coming Home. Volunteers were asked to share any challenges faced as a volunteer in an open-ended question. There were 29 responses to this survey over time. Six responses indicated there were not any challenging aspects of volunteering. The most common challenge shared in 7 of 29 (24%) responses was **finding ways to start conversation with participants in the program**. Examples of these responses are provided below.

“Finding things to talk about with the clients. The “social” time is too long. It is a struggle to have substantive conversations.”

“Being so different from the participants, it is an effort to relate at first.”

“Speaking to the participants.”

“Having a topic to talk about.”

“Getting the conversation started.”

The second most challenging aspect of volunteering, which somewhat overlaps with challenges relating to participants at first, was **developing a relationship with participants**. This was expressed in four of the 29 responses.

“Relationships cannot go deep with participants. They are coming out from very difficult times, but they are not there yet. This is only one step to help them.”

“Establishing rapport with the participants.”

“Relating to the participants.”

Other challenges mentioned by less than a handful of participants included **feeling ill prepared to deal with participants’ emotional issues, maintain boundaries, and challenges with the timing of the program in the evening**. Some of these comments are listed below.

“How to respond when the client is showing signs of mental illness.”

“Not being discouraged by some of the emotional problems seen in some participants.”

“It is always difficult to know when you may be doing more than you should to help someone, and that is not really helping in the long run.”

“Worrying about maintaining healthy boundaries.”

Ways Coming Home Has Changed Volunteers. Nearly three-fourths (73%; n=19) of responses indicated that a personal change had resulted from volunteering with the Coming Home program. The **most common response (38%; n=10) was developing a greater awareness of experience of individuals who are transitioning out of homelessness**. Some of these responses are shared below.

“It helped me be more aware of what homeless people go through.”

“I am more aware of the challenges that the participants face.”

“It made me feel more sympathetic to the men and women I see on the street.”

“Made me aware that transitioning from being chronically homeless to having housing is very difficult. I had not really thought about the challenges they face.”

Five volunteers indicated that their service with Coming Home changed them personally by helping them to become **more grateful** for what they have (n=2), benefit from **working with other people with “such serving hearts”** (n=1), become **more “patient with the processes than I have been with my own processes and processing”, and reach out to others more**. There were also three responses which indicated that this work was in line with prior work, so the change was likely not so recent.

“Truthfully, I have been working with the homeless and transitionally housed, as well as foster kids aging out of the system, for years. So, I am not sure it has really changed me other than just reaffirming the fact that we are all God’s children and all deserve to be the people He called us to be.”

“I work with other programs dedicated to helping the fringe of society already, so, this for me is just another outlet for good works.”

“I already serve the spiritual needs of men and women experiencing homelessness. It is good to see some of them in the process of recovery.”

Suggestions for Improving the Volunteer Experience. Twelve of 25 responses (48%) indicated there were not any suggestions for improvement. The suggestions for improvement are listed below.

1. Find ways to stimulate conversation between volunteers and participants (n=3). Some suggestions were to provide question lists or conversation starters, or to offer a game night or prayer partners/group prayer, or to shorten social time at dinner by 10 minutes.
2. Let volunteers know when a participant is not returning (n=3).
3. Preference for more participants, or fewer volunteers “...so they are not overpowered by the volunteers.” (n=5) A couple expressed disappointment that they were not able to speak with participants when volunteering, and one volunteer indicated a preference for participants to spread out at the tables instead of sitting together.
4. Start time of the program (n=1). “Timing with work. Starts early in the evening.”

General Thoughts and Feedback from Volunteers. There were several comments shared by volunteers that are provided below.

“This program is a gift to all involved.”

“I have enjoyed the times I could attend and regret not being able to attend all evenings.”

“I am concerned about the effectiveness, but am only a dining friend, not a mentor. I worry that a white middle class person like me doesn’t have much to offer. We talk about sports and the weather and about life in Houston or other places they have lived.”

“The original amount of participants is a good amount.”

“I appreciate the fact how the program takes the next step in helping the client adjust after being homeless. Having mentors make it more personable.”

“Seems like a good program.”

“I appreciated the way that Ashley and Lisa and the men have seemed so pleased to see me and that Darrell and Dorothy have helped us out so much in the kitchen.”

“I really love the whole dinner experience before the meetings. It is a great way for all of us to get to know each other and relax. I love the small touches, like real dishes and silverware, that give the whole experience a warm and dignified touch.”

“The collaborations of SEARCH board, staff and Council of Congregations combined with the network of research and resources could have a powerful influence to effect positive change for the futures of all involved. Please promise to continue to commit these kinds of collaborations on behalf of our city.”

“One of most common questions after volunteer orientation "Are you going to do this program again?" how many other programs like this in the city? “

“I am glad Coming Home is trying this in Houston!”

“Keep learning and adjusting.”

“I can’t believe more people aren’t interested in volunteering. The dinners have been so nice to attend!”

“Please promise to continue it!”

Staff Perspective

Despite very positive feedback from all constituents, there were several lessons learned during the first iteration of the program. In the next round of the Coming Home program, one future identified need based on experience and observation was to improve the training of program staff and mentors on trauma-informed care. Specifically, there are planned improvements to the mentor training to provide more background on trauma-informed care to help contextualize some of the challenges Coming Home participants may be dealing with as they are transitioning out of chronic homelessness. The group leader and program coordinator will also go through more extensive training in trauma-informed care and work on ways to improve its integration into the weekly group. In addition to trauma-informed care, the mentor training will also provide additional background information on the population that SEARCH is serving with the Coming Home program and help prepare them by letting the mentee lead the goal setting process. This is important, as one of the key realizations of mentors was that their idea of what a good goal for their mentee was not always the same idea the mentee had.

In the first iteration of the program, staff observed that spirituality was highly valued by group members. All of the group members shared a faith in God, and consistent with this preference, the program offered materials (songs, group meditations) focused on spirituality. As one staff member shared, “It helped solidify the group and recognize them as a whole person. God is a strength for a lot of them. We acknowledged this part of their being as a strength.”

Staff also shared the importance of the role of congregations in bringing the meal and the attending. A homemade meal was particularly meaningful for the group. One staff member shared, “We also learned that when congregations bring more people and tables are full, participants felt ‘wrapped in care.’ When food was homemade it was more meaningful, as it was apparent that effort was put into its preparation. The program will continue to emphasize the value of bringing homemade meals and the impact this has on helping participants feel cared for.”

Throughout the program, there was one staff person who consistently provided the transportation. This trip sometimes could take up to two hours for pick up and transportation to the church, and then there was more time in the van on the way home. As such, this staff person had a great deal of time to get to know the Coming Home participants. The driver shared that Coming Home participants were always “very positive about the program and had no complaints.” She also shared, “Coming Home did an excellent job picking the mentors, because they were dedicated. The participants didn’t want the program to end. The four left loved the program, loved their mentors. They all looked forward to the meal. They loved the meal, they loved it. They said it was something they hadn’t done since childhood. It was like a new experience. This population has a tendency not to feel comfortable sharing personal stuff. They got really personal with their mentors.”

She also shared, “The closer to the end, they had gelled. The way we set up was everyone get your own table so you can talk to the volunteers. They got comfortable with that really fast. It gave them a time to have their own conversation with others at the table. One thing that would be nice is to bring in more diversity of churches. But they never discussed being uncomfortable about race or class, they loved the food. They got kind of tired of chicken, but really enjoyed the food. They were being exposed to new things.”

With regard to the impact of Coming Home on staff, they shared the following:

“This program allowed me to see our participants more benevolently than I normally would have. It showed concretely the power of community. I had an intuition that it was important, but this was demonstrated through this program.”

“I enjoyed the experience. It broadened my horizon. I enjoyed it because I had an opportunity to break bread with individuals I wouldn’t normally have dinner with. It allowed me not to just be exposed to clients, but also volunteers. It was more of a family. A safe and friendly environment.”

Conclusions & Recommendations

The implementation of the first Coming Home program was successful in engaging local congregations, mentors, volunteers and a small group of committed participants in its Restorative Community Program. Overall, there were high levels of satisfaction expressed from the participants who completed the program and the volunteers and mentors. The first implementation of this program also offered several lessons to inform future iterations of the Coming Home Program.

1. It may be helpful to more carefully screen incoming participants to ensure they are ready and able to commit to the program on a weekly basis for six months. While this was emphasized at the beginning, gathering additional information from case managers and re-emphasizing the need to address any health-related needs prior to starting may help decrease dropout rates going forward. Likewise, given participants’ feedback, it may be helpful to further assess potential participants’ true motivation for participating.

2. Volunteers may benefit from additional training and conversation starters to increase comfort with engaging with participants, particularly when they are new or at the start of the program. It seemed to work, from both the participant and volunteer perspectives, to have participants spread out at tables to engage dining companions in conversation during dinner. While some volunteers may have felt there were too many volunteers and not a chance to sit with the participants, it may be helpful for them to know that their presence was still valuable to participants, who expressed appreciation for the number of people who showed up. Just having people show up, even if not sitting at the same table, helped them feel cared for.
3. Mentorship was a very valuable aspect of the program from the perspective of the first group of Coming Home participants. Both mentors and mentees expressed learning from one another. Mentors, during the final focus group, expressed challenges dealing with boundaries, communication and relationship building initially. The program may benefit by supporting mentors through a few meetings to process and support each other through some of the challenges faced with communication and boundary setting. The mentorship training may also benefit by offering more trauma-informed content, and helping orient the mentors to the common challenges, issues (both individual and structural) that participants may be experiencing. While mentors did find ways to communicate with their mentee in what appeared to be an effective manner, it may be helpful to know or be prepared for challenges related to access or use of a cell phone, or challenges in communicating. Case managers could also work with participants to try to prepare them to have reliable communication for their mentor/mentee interactions.
4. There was clearly a sense of community experienced by all involved in the project. This was expressed by participants, mentors, volunteers and staff. The meal was an essential aspect of the community. Meals that were homemade and offered opportunities to experience new kinds of food and culture were very much appreciated by the first round of participants.
5. It was clear that all participants benefitted by serving each other in some way. Participants became valued members of the community, as did the volunteers and mentors. This community became a place where all came to serve regardless of background or reasons for coming.
6. All participants in this restorative community shared that they were able to learn by participating in the Coming Home Program. For many, across all kinds of participant groups, the learning came from interacting with people from different backgrounds. For the participants, it involved trying new kinds of meals, experiencing new cultures, learning of a shared humanity despite different backgrounds, and re-discovering that there are people who care about their well-being. For others who participated as a volunteer or mentor, there were both personal lessons and a broadening of understanding of the world and the challenges that individuals who have struggled with homelessness have faced and continue to face once they are housed.

7. One important aspect of the Coming Home program was the relationship that the staff person who provided transportation offered the program. This individual developed relationships with the participants, and also helped to reach out and locate them when they did not show up at the bus. The combination of this, the outreach of the program coordinator and the support of the mentors were essential in helping to keep participants engaged in the program during the first iteration.

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