

CIVIL MONEY PENALTY (CMP) FUNDED PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

Grantee

**Park View Health Center
725 Butler Ave
Oshkosh WI 54901**

Project Title

"Write Your Life" Project

Award Amount

\$7,500

Grant Period

December 1, 2017 - May 31, 2018

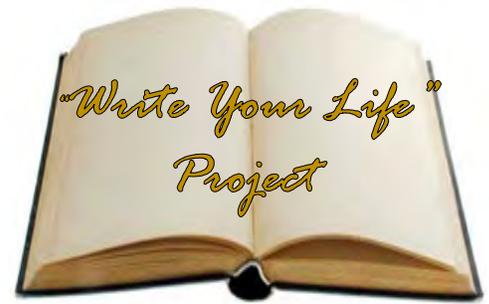
Additional Information and Resources



**Department of Health Services / Division of Quality Assurance
Quality Assurance and Improvement Committee**

This project report has been prepared by the author under a research grant from the Department of Health Services (DHS) Quality Assurance and Improvement Committee. The views expressed in the report/training are personal to the author and do not necessarily reflect the view of the Department of Health Services or any of its staff and do not bind the Department in any manner.

F-01593 (08/2015)



Oshkosh, Wisconsin
Monday, February 26 through Friday, March 2, 2018
CMP Funds Final Report

Purpose and Summary

Park View Health Center staff worked along with a community leader who has ties with various local Rotary Clubs in bringing the author/founder of "Write Your Life" seminars to the Oshkosh area. One of the purposes was to bring together young adults with PVHC residents in order to write about the residents' lives.

Ibtisam Barakat, the founder and leader of the "Write Your Life" Project, is the only Arab-American author who won each year the International Reading Association's Best Book Award since the beginning of the prize in 1975. Her program is a creative-expression forum through which people from various age groups and backgrounds contribute to writing a more collective history by sharing personal narratives. She has led "Write Your Life" workshops and conducted author residencies in a large number of school and learning communities throughout the U.S., and other parts of the world.

Sixteen Park View Health Center residents participated. The residents spent four afternoons, from February 26th through March 1st sharing their lives - whether it was stories about growing up, or their adulthood experiences, or their lives now while residing in a nursing facility. They were led through time frames and life experiences with the guidance of Ibtisam's non-intimidating, discussion strategies. The students were there to listen to their paired participants and to take notes. The completed notes were collected by PVHC staff and published.

On Wednesday, May 2nd, there was a "Write Your Life Project Book Party." Residents and their loved ones were presented the books by each of their own writers. PVHC Food and Nutrition Services provided distinctive refreshments while the writers and their families opened the wrapped gifts to peruse published works.

With Ibtisam's remaining time in Oshkosh during that week, she was a keynote speaker at UW-Oshkosh, speaking of her own life story and her commitment of helping others to write about their lives; she led discussions with International Book Club students in Advanced Learner Programs at Perry Tipler Middle, Oaklawn Elementary, and Washington Elementary Schools in Oshkosh; and she met with area students and adults of refugee backgrounds in writing their life stories with the assistance of UW Oshkosh students.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of this project were:

- 1) To provide a memorable impact in relationship-building between young adults and our elderly and/or disabled residents.
- 2) To give our resident participants a means to share and preserve their valued histories for their loved ones.
- 3) To provide an avenue for our resident participants to open up about areas of their lives, resulting in a feeling of worth and being heard.

An overall resolve in offering the "Write Your Life" project was to portray to all involved (i.e., resident participants, writers, staff, and volunteers) that everyone has life experiences which mold us and make us the unique individuals we are today.

Original Goals and Indications of Accomplishment

- 1) **Short-term goal:** One of the short-term goals of this project was to bring together young adults with residents – all who may have similarities as well as differences in opinions, tastes, beliefs, and other social and cultural norms that exist – in a gratifying purpose, which is sharing life stories that will also become written keepsakes for the residents and their families, while opening doors of understanding and tolerance with differences.

Measurement: The progress towards this goal was measured by the number of residents involved, as well as the results of the completion and presentation of the finished books at a “get-together” for resident participants, their writers, and loved ones.

Indications of Accomplishment:

- An indication of accomplishment was the number of interested residents (that had outweighed the number of available writers). The original response of 25 interested residents reveals a project that was valued and desired by them. By the time the project date was near, there were a few residents who withdrew from the project due to illness or their hesitation to get involved. The final number of resident participants (16) is explained further in the “project’s weakness” section.
- The afternoons spent on this project, seeing the rapport being built between students and residents, are difficult to put into words. What was apparent by those of us privileged to be there was that it was heartwarming and magical. We had the honor of seeing how these

residents “lit up” when experiencing that one-on-one interest in their lives; seeing the emotions that flooded the room at various times of the assignment – truly, one had to actually be in that room to understand the immense impact of it all.

- An additional signal of accomplishment was the “Book Party,” which had been scheduled for two months following the project in order to provide time to create the books, order them, and receive them in plenty of time for the Book Party. Repetitiveness aside, *one had to be in the Great Room on the afternoon of the Book Party* to experience the atmosphere of having the writers and the families joined together in the common purpose of highlighting and honoring their residents. And there remained that special bond between resident and writer, *even two months later*, due to the building of relationships throughout project week.

2) **Short-term goal:** Another, more important short-term goal for our residents was to see improvements in demeanor and self-esteem amongst those involved in the project.

Measurement: The progress towards this goal would be measured through communications between staff and the participants.

Indications of Accomplishment: The Activities Department gathered what was merely a portion of the effects on residents following the Write Your Life Project –

- *Ruth: Ruth ended up purchasing additional books for the significant people in her life. She has maintained a new friendship in her WYL writing partner. Ruth has begun to write more chapters about her life. It appears Ruth has become re-energized and excited about her life story, and she is feeling what she has to say is worthy to share. Some of the writings have motivated her seek out and recall good and happy memories from her past. Ruth seems more independent in choices of daily living. Examples include - drawing and art, menu choices, and making phone calls. Ruth was more apt to seek out staff to assist her and encourage decision-making, prior to the Write Your Life Project.*
- *Nancy: Nancy has always had a very strong sense of self. She has maintained her matriarch role in her family, despite her physical limitations. Observations reveal the WYL experience has enhanced her resolve in this role.*
- *Bruce: Brad (Bruce’s son) attended the Book Party to honor his dad, who had passed one week following the project. He shared how it was a bit of a “renaissance” for his dad in deciding to choose Park View for his care. Bruce had found true peace in his final days. Brad also shared during the book party what an impact his dad had on the family. And now, Bruce’s completed book will provide them with proof of how proud he was of them, and how proud he was in being a part of raising the upstanding individuals his kids are today.*

The effects of Bruce's story will be immeasurable in generations to come.

- *Irene: Irene's writer has come to visit her a few times since the project. He happened to notice her photos displayed in her room, and in one of them is Irene's grandson, with whom the writer realized he knew from work! Another inadvertent bond occurred with this realization.*
- *Audrey: Audrey was the other resident who passed shortly after the project, and before the books could be distributed to her. Both her daughters came to the Book Party and met Audrey's writer.*

On a Sunday following the Book Party, Audrey's writer came back to Park View and played her cello during dinnertime in Audrey's neighborhood, to honor Audrey. Also in attendance were the cellist/writer's parents, her brother, and her cello teacher and son!

- *Ray: Ray makes sure each and every person entering his room to visit sees his completed book. He has a pride within him that exudes because of this project. He even ordered two more books to make sure his daughters receive their own copies!*

The following Instagram photo about Ray, from his writer, says it all...



- 3) **Long-term goal:** We would like to look at bringing this writing project back to our area an additional time to provide an opportunity for other interested residents to participate.

Measurement: Progress towards this goal will be measured by the number of interested residents in three to five years, then through successful planning in gathering those in the community willing to assist with the project a second time.

Indications of Accomplishment:

- The indications of accomplishment of this goal will need to be revisited at the time of a workshop in three to five years.

- 4) **Long-term goal:** Sharing our residents' stories and the results of the project with the community, such as in area schools, clubs, etc., to further the scope of bridge-building, as well as to bring compassion and understanding within the differing generations and populations.

Measurement: Progress towards this goal would be measured by the success of obtaining consents to share participating residents' stories, then through the number of interested clubs, schools, etc., in the area wanting to read the life stories.

Indications of Accomplishment:

- This accomplishment will remain to be seen as to whether it will be a desired experience in the community however, *every single one* of the resident participants consented to having their stories consolidated into one compilation for sharing at the State Focus Conference, with the book then remaining at PVHC as an extraordinary remembrance of the assignment. It's important to note that some of these participants were awfully private prior to joining the project - another gauge of success of the project.

Description of the Project's Strengths and Weaknesses

The strengths of the project were:

- 1) The residents' pasts were shared, validated and preserved.
- 2) A genuine bonding between the residents and their writers. There have been writers who have since visited and/or kept in touch with their resident partners at PVHC; one high school writer, following the workshop, applied for and has been hired as a certified nursing assistant here; yet another high school writer has become a regular volunteer at PVHC. *Even two months later*, the writers felt the importance of being a part of the Book Party with their paired residents and

families, and were able to attend and present the books to their resident partners. Further reference of the bonds formed were noted in #2 of Goals/Indications of Accomplishments.

- 3) The culmination of bringing together the loved ones of resident participants to honor the residents' lives. Many had several members of their families in attendance for the Book Party – one resident had *thirteen* family members – young and old – attend the book party.

Note: As mentioned previously, two resident participants passed away shortly after the project, before the book party took place. This saddened all of us involved with the project, including the young writers who had worked with them. What was an incredible sight was seeing those family members of the two residents, *in attendance at the Book Party*, and the *instinctive* bonding between them and the two writers.

- 4) All the work PVHC staff provided for the initiative was well planned and executed. There were no regrets or “what ifs” in decision-making with anything that was prepared and accomplished in-house. The PVHC departments (i.e., Administration, Activities, Food and Nutrition Services, Housekeeping Services, and Nursing staff) worked brilliantly together.
- 5) The use of the “Mix Books” site for creation of hard-cover books resulted in lovely pieces, along with the opportunity to purchase them at half price.

The weaknesses of the project were:

- 1) Miscommunications and procrastination on the part of the community leader.
 - a. Through the community leader’s connections with students and teachers at area high schools and UW-Oshkosh, PVHC staff were assured there would be an ease in enlisting writers for the project. Even though this initiative had been in planning stages for a few years, with the final planning being a few months in advance, seeking interested young adults to be writers for the workshop week appeared to have been very last-minute, thus causing PVHC staff unnecessary frustration in having to “scramble” to fill the writer spots as late as a couple days prior to the workshop. PVHC Staff were able to gather 6-8 “standby adults,” which was not the plan, but it wouldn’t leave a resident without a writer. In the end, PVHC did utilize three of their backup, young adults. The rest of the slots were filled by high school students (*even on the first day of the project it was unknown for sure who would actually be in attendance*).

PVHC did their part in finding approximately 25 residents who were interested in participating. Due to news from the community leader approximately one-two days before the workshop was to take place that there were less than half that amount in high school writers, some of whom only *tentatively* signed on, the resident list had to be reduced. Fortunately, those residents who chose to decline participation as part of the reduction were not hurt or disgruntled.

- b. It had been understood PVHC would apply for funding to attain \$5,000 towards the project, which was half of the original quote of \$10,000. The remaining monies would be provided through contacts the community leader made in the area. Thankfully the Board of Directors overseeing CMP Funds distribution felt this was a worthwhile project and provided a generous \$7,500, instead of the requested \$5,000 amount. The final bill from the workshop leader was over what had been quoted. Promised area donation opportunities originally discussed did not fully meet the final bill.
 - i. Costs of the hotel stay for the workshop leader were over the amount the community leader noted in meetings with PVHC staff.
 - ii. It had not been mentioned that taxi service to and from the airport would be a part of the costs, as it had been talked about in earlier meetings that the workshop leader would be picked up from the airport and dropped off by a volunteer who was known by the community leader.
 - iii. With being overbudget, we had to eliminate the plan for a “banquet” for distribution of the books and opt for a simpler, “Book Party” with refreshments, instead. Our Food and Nutrition Services department came through for the project with amazingly decorated and tasty cakes with punch and coffee.
- 2) A couple writers had extra-curricular obligations that ran at the same time as some of the sessions. That left a couple residents working with another volunteer or staff person for a day or a portion of a session. This ended up being a bit problematic with consistency and a trust factor issue from those residents, initially.
- 3) Although the use of “Mix Books” produced a well-made book for each resident, the program itself was tedious and not easily operational. What should have only taken a few days to complete took double or triple the time due to hang ups with the site.

Recommendations for the Project

Our recommendations for improvement of the project are as follows:

- 1) Eliminate the go-between of a community leader, and work directly with the author/workshop leader and the area schools for writer recommendations. Expectations and interest awareness will be much more clear. We had three-four young professionals paired up with residents, and the remaining were high school-aged; all were honor students and/or high achievers, so their writing and task orientation was exemplary.

- 2) Obtain not only the flight costs and workshop costs from the author/workshop leader, but all the extras she plans on charging during her stay. Try negotiating to see whether there can be some reduced costs.
- 3) Obtain signed consents from the resident participants (or their representatives) for sharing photos and stories prior to the start of the workshop.
- 4) Find an in-house staff member who is accustomed to, and likes photography, for the purpose of candid remembrances to share on social media, placement in a PowerPoint presentation, and for photos to enhance the books. Our Staff Development Coordinator was the photographer/videographer for workshop week, as well as for the Book Party, and the moments were captured for lasting visual memories.
- 5) Convey the importance to each writer far enough in advance that they need to make every effort to attend every afternoon workshop. The residents will be depending on their reliability and consistency in order to build that trust. Also, have the students share their schedules and availability *in advance*, so as to be upfront with the residents should there happen to be a need for a “substitute writer” for a portion of a day’s session. A resident shouldn’t be blind-sided that their writer is missing for a session and someone is taking their place.
- 6) Arrange the workshop in a room with one table per resident and writer, if at all possible. This brings more of a “one-on-one” atmosphere. Try to do the same for the Book Party.
- 7) Provide each writer and resident with their own folder and a shared, inexpensive bin, which includes:
 - Workshop leader’s biography.
 - Pencil/black and red pen/highlighter.
 - Index cards for short sentence recollections.
 - Writing pads.
 - Name tags.
 - Staff business cards for writers to submit their notes, or for questions, etc.
 - A separate card formatted for the writers to note their own names, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses, which should then be turned in to an assigned staff person at the start of the workshop. Writers’ contact info will be used for sending reminders to turn in their notes, and keeping them informed as to the book creation process, the Book Party, etc.

The bin with the resident’s name on it can be used to easily collect all the items at the end of each session, then to easily set out at their table for the next day.

- 8) Plan for light refreshments for everyone at each workshop session. The high school-aged writers will appreciate them after a full day of school.

- 9) Once the writers' notes are collected (we gave them two-three weeks out as a due date, so as to give them time to go over them and rewrite as needed), each should be shared with the matching resident to ensure accuracy prior to creating the books. There will be a new cost (including shipping cost) for a "corrected" book, so accuracy is important. Our Activities staff handled the reviews with resident participants effectively and efficiently, so utilizing this team is also a recommendation.

- 10) If choosing to use the "Mix Books" site, allot more time than normally planned for completion of the books. Their site will be well worth the headaches and frustrations because in the end, the product is fantastic. Also – designate one staff person to create the books from the notes; choose someone who has strong grammar and proofing skills, and who can maintain a consistency in structuring each book.

- 11) No need to put on a "banquet" for distribution of the books. It was discovered that the time together again, with providing a PowerPoint Presentation (photos from the workshop, which ran throughout the entire party), and the simple, but classy refreshments with simply decorated tables, worked very well. It was a beautiful time with a culmination of what the workshop had meant to those involved. Spending a great deal on food was not necessary.

Respectfully submitted by:

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