

Homeless Shelter Workers in Midwestern Urban Centers

Archie Green Fellows Project AFC2016034

Oral History of Carla Dudley, Director of Housing with the Primo Center

Chicago, Illinois on October 21, 2016

Summary of Interview

Carla Dudley works as the Housing Director with the Primo Center, located at 4241 West Washington Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois 60624. Her job is to assist families coming from situations of homelessness, to secure and maintain their housing.

This interview took place at the Primo Center's Permanent Supportive Housing program at 4231 West Division, Chicago, Illinois. The Primo Center is a multi-site social service for homeless families.

Interview Log

- 00:00:01 Introduction
- 00:00:17 Carla's job title and description of responsibilities: Director of Housing; oversees people who live in 12 units on-site [located in a Primo Center property] and 20-25 units off-site [rental property owned by private landlords.] Her activities with families leaving homelessness include:
- Providing case management.
 - Connecting clients to community resources or public aid programs or to WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children).
 - Connecting clients with psychiatric services, provided on-site by Primo staff.
 - Permanent Supportive Housing building staffed 24 hours/day.
 - She is on call 24 hours/day for clients who need support.
- 00:02:49 Staff supervised by Carla:
- Security and Property manager;
 - House managers who engage the clients;
- Carla is part of a team of four case managers; she worked with veterans at one time; Chicago Housing Authority and Section 8 vouchers;
- 00:05:45 Permanent Supportive Housing program requirements;
- 00:07:05 Works with families; one-time single adult veteran program;
- 00:07:35 How families enter Primo Center's programs:
- CRS (Central Referral Systems) ;
 - Another way: housing available that's not a fit for those waiting on CRS;
 - People can enter the CRS themselves online;
 - CRS prioritizes need over any client-provider personal connections;

- 00:12:58 Reasons families become homeless:
- Prior Department of Children and Family Services' (DCFS) wards of the state, group home, foster home, group residential program; teen parents who "aged out" with no place to go; emancipation;
 - Youth age out of foster or institutional care at age 18, or with extension at 24
 - Older parents homeless for other reasons such as domestic violence or lost their housing for economic reasons;
 - Family members put them out;
 - Chemical abuse and mental health issues;
- 00:17:36 Details about identifying mental health issues or other issues:
- Trauma Symptom Index and Parental Stress Index;
 - Building trust to learn more;
 - Other physical health concerns;
 - Lost benefits they were receiving;
 - Illiteracy;
 - Most shelter stays limited to 120 days; Primo Center's shelter not limited;
- 00:21:45 Details about Primo Center:
- Primo started with staff of 4;
 - Philosophy to not kick anyone out;
 - Clinicians bring services into the shelter;
 - Story about a challenging client who hid her homelessness;
- 00:26:11 Carla's style of work and strategies:
- Loves her work;
 - Prioritizes listening over what she needs to get done [such as forms filled out];
 - Meet people where they are;
 - Motivational interviewing and empowering clients;
 - Clients have her cell phone number; boundaries; staff "on call" hours;
- 00:37:50 Difficulties of the work and coping; Carla's period of illness; ways to relax;
- 00:39:27 How Carla came to this work; was an athlete and coach; worked for the Chicago park district in in the projects; worked for Maryville Academy with DCFS wards of the state; worked at Thresholds residential treatment; always like working with difficult to engage individuals; a story about a former client who was found dead;
- 00:44:49 Rewarding parts of Carla's work: relationships with clients, their successes; story about a challenging client;
- 00:51:45 Challenging parts of Carla's work: budget cuts and fewer services; notes that Cook County jail is the largest "psychiatric institution" in Chicago; people who abuse the system; people's benefits being sanctioned; families staying on TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) permanently and when it was capped in Chicago, Carla wonders if Minnesota saw an influx of Chicago families coming for help; story about a client in college; insufficient income is the biggest barrier for homeless;

00:59:32 Carla's belief that future generations will still be doing her job, though family complexities may require a post-graduate degree;

01:00:01 End