**Digging Out: A Mental Health Intervention Approach to Hoarding in Senior Adult Housing**

Through a longstanding relationship with the Retirement Research Foundation (RRF), the college was able to expand on prior funding and implement the project, “Digging Out: A Mental Health Intervention Approach to Hoarding in Senior Adult Housing,” conducted collaboratively by The Chicago School of Professional Psychology (TCSPP), The Community Builders (TCB), the Japanese American Service Committee (JASC), and the Heiwa Terrace to address hoarding problems among low-income seniors through a multidisciplinary, community-based approach. RRF provided $85,790 toward this effort under the co-direction of Jill Glenn, Director of Community Services and Kate Mahoney, Director of the Naomi Ruth Cohen Institute.

Heiwa Stress Management Workshop

Gratitude Jars

The project launched at six sites - Heiwa Terrace, JASC, Thornwood (TCB), Oakley Square (TCB), and Oakwood (TCB) with the goal of providing approximately 150 seniors and their caregivers with the skills to recognize the early warning signs of hoarding, its connection to co-occurring mental illness and to supply them with access to resources to seek help. In addition, individualized care plans were developed, which included assessment, home visits, mental health care, and other supports for older adults who were identified as hoarders or at-risk-of-hoarding. Senior adults who readily identify as hoarders or at-risk-of-hoarding will advance to a stage of change, whether by merely indicating interest in discussing the problem, attending a workshop, accepting a home visit, or by linking to another provider.

Lead by staff at TCB, JASC, and Heiwa Terrace, screenings were conducted for their elderly residents and clients between April and December 2019. During this timeframe, a total of 186 individuals aged 65 or above were screened, of which 63 were identified as “at-risk” for hoarding disorder. Each was referred for formal hoarding assessments to further evaluate the severity of their hoarding symptoms, the impact of these symptoms on their behavior and functioning, and possible confounding issues such as depression and dementia.

In an effort to provide these services beyond the original six sites, a 3-hour professional development workshop for mental health professionals: “Effective Approached in Identifying and Addressing Hoarding Disorder,” was developed and delivered on TCSPP’s Chicago Campus. This workshop was delivered with the goal to enable partnering agencies and area human service agencies the opportunity to obtain the skills and resources necessary to recognize the early warning signs of hoarding, its connection to co-occurring mental illnesses, and be able to initiate appropriate intervention with confidence and care. 100% of partner agencies reported that “*as a result of completing training, they were able to describe Hoarding Disorder, including prevalence, warning signs, and potential consequences*.”

In order to sustain the program beyond RRF funding and TCSPP resources, a recorded training on “*Understanding Hoarding in the Elderly*” and “*Assessment Tools for Hoarding in the Elderly,*” were provided to each of our partner sites to ensure that new staff could also participate in training. All sites will ensure on-going training for the key individuals involved in determining if any of their older adults are at-risk for hoarding. Each site was provided with a specific plan for ongoing team training.

Hoarding Disorder is a quiet tragedy that plays out over and over in communities across the United States. Older adults with trauma histories and a deep-rooted fear of uncertainty stifle in rooms choked with possessions. They have a serious mental illness that was only recently recognized as a disorder in its own right. Through this program, The Chicago School has successfully made an impact on addressing this disorder, recognizing that more needs to be done.