

Community Engagement

LCBB4002

Assessment 2

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Introduction

This reflection is based on the learning experience as a community engagement practitioner and the presented community project elaborated for assignment 1. This reflection will make use Gibbs reflective model which involves different stages that make the learning more efficient: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusions and action plan. Gibbs (1988) model of reflection will benefit the reflection by providing a systemised structure for a more in depth analysis. The author considers that reflecting on the learning helps to improve at future experiences. The purpose of the reflection is to make sense of the understanding generated from the community project that aimed develop a project towards the local community, the London Borough of Merton.

Reflection

Description: The first stage of the Gibbs reflective model is the description stage. This stage involves a descriptive approach which sets the scene. In the role of the community engagement practitioner I was requested to develop a community program in order to address the issues from the selected community. The local community selected for the project was the London Borough of Merton. Based on the secondary research regarding the community mapping it has been researched that the borough has a very diverse faith community and the Orthodox faith community represented by the Romanians had been identified as vulnerable and affected by different issues such as isolation and loneliness of its members especially during a very important religious celebration the Orthodox Easter. After defining the issue in my role of the community engagement practitioner I have started developing a project to address the presented issues. For the strategic planning I introduced the purpose of the project, to help the faith community to address integration within the faith community, to tackle isolation and loneliness. I decided to create an event that will reunite families and members of the Romanian community who could feel lonely and isolated because they did not know about the religious community, or do not have nobody to celebrate too. The event that I considered to be the best approach is an Easter lunch where everyone can meet and socialise and celebrate the Orthodox Easter. I established a timeline for the lunch to be hold on the Easter Sunday after the Easter mass. I planned in detail the modality for raise funds for the project and how exactly is this event to happen. It has been explained that the event will be advertised in advance in order to attract volunteers from the community and get the community involved throughout the project. It has been highlighted the benefits of the project and how will help in the long term with the mental health of the members of the community especially with all the changes that pandemic brought and people lived in isolation for weeks. Another benefit to be mentioned was that will make the community stronger and more connected. In order to establish the aims and objectives of this project it has been used the SMART

objectives theoretical model. It has been looked at the stakeholders map in order to observe who will be the main groups that will have interest or power in the project and I delegated the roles across the team of volunteers. I discussed how the plan will be communicated and which will be the mechanisms for control used for this project. The last stages of the projects involved tracking progress and data collection which I chose to realise primary data research because of the small sample size of 20 members from the Romanian community. This primary research gave guidance for the organisation of the event. I emphasised that the recommendations should be in connection with implicit purposes that are also tackled through this project such as direct help to people in need by offering parcel with food. Another implicit purpose was to help the promotion of the local business who help with contributions to the event. As part of the project itself it has been acknowledged the importance of the secondary data to identify the selected issues and the importance of a final evaluation to assess the results of the project. The findings regarding the project outcome stated that this project benefits the community to provide more information on the church, to give the people opportunity to meet and be together for Orthodox Easter and improve isolation, loneliness and implicitly mental health.

Feelings: this stage is important for the reflection because it expresses the feelings before, during and after the experience. In the role of the community engagement practitioner I felt anxious because is my first project of this type and I wanted to create a community project to help the community which I represent. Although it was a biased decision to help this community, the secondary research and my primary had emphasised struggles in the community especially for the Orthodox faith community who come to the UK for work and many times they leave their families back home and with celebrations such as the Orthodox Easter it can become overwhelming and feel more isolated and lonely. I felt that I had a good grasp of the concepts regarding community engagement, strategic planning, but it was confusing if the evaluated outcomes represented the an unbiased representation.

Evaluation: the evaluation stage has great importance because it looks at the positive and negative aspects from the experience. The positive aspects in my role as a community project were that I had decisional power of the project and based on the data collection I was aware of what are the community members expectations. Another positive aspect was the involvement of the community throughout the project. As a representative member of the Romanian community I had full understand of how hard can be for the mental health to be alone for Easter because even if is a religious celebration is part of the cultural heritage and has great weight and importance. The negative aspects of this project is the lack of in depth exploration of the social media platform to communicate the event more efficiently and to identify exactly the number of the participants. The lecturer feedback about the project has queried the lack of clarity for the purpose of the project which has been updated and that is should follow the module descriptor in more details which was also addressed.

Analysis: is the stage of the reflection to make sense of the situation. I consider that this project could be very effective for the community and similar events for Christmas and Easter could help the Romanian community from London Borough of Merton to connect and to improve the mental health. It would create a sense of family and belonging to the community. There are many communities who can feel isolated at one point either as part of faith communities or not.

The role of a community engagement practitioner was an experience that had theoretical aspects , because I learned about the concept of community building concept and how to target the audience and it determined me to use a top-down engagement by obtaining the help of the priest and of others members of the community and practical aspects which assumed developing a community project.

The analysis of the positive aspects of the experience is that although it is very empowering to develop a community project, it needs great attention to detail and data analysis. The segmentation criteria for selecting this community can be criticised from the outside that is a biased decision, that is why the limitations of the project are acknowledged. The involvement of the community can be considered as an indicative of a positive result as per the principle 9 regarding community collaboration and long term commitment (atsdr.cdc.gov., 2020).

The project should have emphasis more the role of social media for community engagement because Internet is now part of everyday life and is used in most of the households. The social media could have been used for primary data collection also to have more precise details of number of participants, how many children, how many adults. This would had helped to ensure all the children would receive a package with goodies for Easter. As this project could be just an incipient project of a more long term regular events to help the community. The less positive feedback from the lecturer did not provide a clear understanding with regards to the selection criteria and the type of the considered project. It should have been given a more specific feedback which I consider would had helped me improve the proposed community project from my role of the community engagement practitioner.

Conclusions: This is one of the final stages from the reflection model which draws conclusions about the situation and what was learned. I learned how to conduct a community mapping. I learned about different types of community engagement such as direct service, community building, community education and economic development, I learned about the benefits and the principles of the community engagement, I learned about strategic planning stages and I learned how to write about a proposed community project as a response to the needs and issues of the selected community. I learned about the current importance for communication and information, but also for engaging the community and target a larger number of community. There are various approaches that can a project be designed for such as sustainability, human capital, developing a logic model to select the best approach and to identify the criteria for success.

I consider that from this learning experience I developed academic writing skills, research skills which will help me for future assignments, but also if I decide to work as a community engagement practitioner. I will need to develop more my critical thinking skills which will benefit me on personal and professional plan.

Action plan: this is the final stage of the reflection and involves the reflector to plan how to use the knowledge gained to future situations. This assignment had determined me to re-evaluate the knowledge gained through this module in order to ensure clear grasp of the concepts to have all the tools available to develop a community project. I will make use of all the knowledge and I will aim for better time management in order to get more feedback from the lecturer. In the role of the community engagement practitioner I would allow myself more time for secondary and primary data collection in order to ensure the feasibility characteristics of the community project. The plan is to continue my studies as a student and take on apprenticeship in order to gain more experience and to put in practice the knowledge gained at the university.

Conclusion

In conclusion the assignments had help me demonstrate the understanding of the concepts and theories within the teaching sessions for this module and it had made me more confident student. In the role of the community engagement practitioner I consider that I developed and potential community project that could be easily implemented.

References

Gibbs, G. (1988) Learning by Doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods. Further Education Unit, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford.

Atsdr.cdc.gov. (2020) “Principles Of Community Engagement”, | ATSDR. [Online] Available at: <<https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/communityengagement/index.html>> Accessed 01/05/2022.