

How to Use This Case Study Article in the IICD Community Services Curriculum:

This case study article may be used as a review and enrichment after CS 02, CS 03, and CS 04 are completed. After the students have read the article, the questions/items at the end may serve either as a discussion starter in your class or as an assignment for a written essay. The author also provided an optional PowerPoint presentation that may be viewed at the discretion of the instructor.

CASE STUDY:

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE W.C. ATKINSON MEMORIAL COMMUNITY SERVICES CENTER, INC.

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In the winter of 1983, Elder W. W. Fordham, Pastor of the First Seventh-day Adventist Church of Coatesville, Pennsylvania, USA, challenged the church by asking why the doors were locked throughout the week except Wednesday night and Sabbath. He stated that the church is the best real estate in any community and should be open throughout the week to service members of the community. At that point, no one knew what effectively serving the community would look like. This meant we would have to go to the community and ask them. After developing a prayer team to guide the church according to God's will, a church assessment was completed. The intent was to know the interest, spiritual gifts, and talents of church members. Secondly, church members went in teams to ask the community about their needs, interest, and assets. Then finally, a small committee was formed to assess the services of community providers. We asked what service they provided and asked about unmet needs. It is the latter inquiry that would provide our "niche" list.

Our most valuable information came from city officials, local police officers, and the County Office of Housing and Community Development. We were surprised to learn that our city needed shelter for homeless men, women, and families. The homeless were invisible in our city; and no one knew this was a problem in our county. After all, it ranks as the 26th most affluent county in North America.

First Church was very conservative, and we hoped to continue the usual food and clothing ministries. However, we had been attempting that for some years with little success. Now we had information from our community that would require a drastic change in our thinking. Understandably, no one stated on the membership survey that they were either interested in or knowledgeable about homelessness.

To the credit of our church leadership, a 25-bed capacity shelter for homeless men, women, and children opened three weeks after the presentation of need to the church board

and members. We utilized the Sabbath School rooms and an open area where we usually held prayer meeting. We provided basic necessities only: shower facilities, clothing, bed and linen, meals, a caring environment and an address and phone number to help secure a job. The usual greeting was taken off of the answering machine of the church to accommodate incoming calls of potential employers leaving messages for shelter residents.

Shelter volunteers observed a phenomenal trend. Men, especially, moved toward self-sufficiency with just their basic needs being met. This was an unexpected scenario. Eliminating the concern about where they would sleep or find food, they could then focus on employment, benefits they may have been entitled to, and family. Some said they were afforded time to simply “think” that they did not have before. They found themselves hopeful once more for a brighter future.

The small committee that was given responsibility to plan for the shelter began to wonder, “If we actually provided additional and fundamental services with intentionality, what would happen?” They were about to find out.

On September 1, 1988, the Allegheny East Conference (AEC) of Seventh-day Adventists purchased the former Clement Atkinson Memorial Hospital that had lay dormant for 13 years¹ in support of the local church to provide a cadre of services that would address the needs of persons living in poverty in Coatesville and surrounding communities. After the purchase of the hospital, it was re-named in honor of Dr. Whittier C. Atkinson, an African-American physician who built the first portion of the Clement Atkinson Memorial Hospital in 1932. His primary goal was, “to provide an efficient, voluntary institution (democratic in its conception and practices) for the medical and surgical treatment and temporary care of the sick and injured.” The hospital, named in memory of his father, met and surpassed its goals, serving the health needs of the community for more than 40 years. The former hospital is now on the registry of Pennsylvania historic sites.

Today, The W. C. Atkinson Memorial Community Services and Resource Center continues this legacy to serve the needs of the community with proficiency.

The facility was fully furnished. Nothing was removed following its closure—including medications; the operating room was set up for its next case and a chest x-ray was still on the view box. We were blessed to have the local Rotary Club aid us in clearing out the former hospital. In collaboration with several banks seeking tax credits, a housing finance agency, governmental resources and a housing corporation, the former hospital was renovated for expanded service.

In February of 1989, being intentional about working *with* the community, a community representative Board of Directors was formed. The directors were chosen from AEC, local Adventist church members and community members (leaders and consumers).

¹ A timeline for the development of W.C. Atkinson Memorial Community Service Center, Inc. is at the end of this article.

They established the W.C. Atkinson Memorial Community Service Center, Inc. as a nonprofit 501 (C) 3 corporation.

A mission statement was formulated to guide the process and development of this grassroots organization. The statement read, “The mission of the W. C. Atkinson Memorial Community Service Center, Inc. is to combat neighborhood deterioration, to provide housing for homeless and lower income families, to provide members of the community with affordable and quality health care and to provide educational, preventive, supportive, and cultural services to members of the community.”

In January of 1992, having sheltered men, women, families, and occasionally “run-away” or “throw-away” youth in the church for six years, the shelter relocated to the newly renovated former hospital where a 22-bed shelter was developed for homeless men. Meanwhile, a shelter for single women and women with children was established in the city by another organization, negating our need to provide shelter for women and children.

The renovated hospital provided significant space for developing additional and fundamental services as envisioned by the local church leadership as well as an important emotional symbol for the community. It stands today as a testament of faith and desire to become a beacon of light to the community. Its services are as complex as are the needs.

Providing enhanced services with intentionality also infers accountability. The first step toward helping others is to seek to understand and to be understood. Who are the homeless? Research regarding homelessness baffles us as much today as it did in the 80’s. It is estimated that, in the United States, some 100,000 Veterans are homeless on any given night. Of the general population, 3.5 million people experience homelessness each year. An estimated 730,000 persons find themselves homeless on any given night of the week. Further, some 700 homeless die on our streets from hyperthermia each year. These are estimates because unknown thousands are invisible homeless and are not counted. Why? The causes of homelessness vary even across regions and are difficult to quantify. However, studies show the main causes of homelessness to be a lack of affordable housing and poverty. As stated by the National Coalition for the Homeless, July 2009, “If you are poor, you are essentially an illness, an accident, or a paycheck away from living on the streets.”²

THE LONG ROAD HOME FROM SHELTER TO PERMANENT HOUSING

Shelter for Homeless Men

The Atkinson Men’s Shelter opens each evening at 5 p.m. and closes by 8 a.m. each morning. Any man that finds himself homeless is initially accepted no matter his state of sobriety or any other factor, other than a lack of space or his inability to care for himself. The 22-bed emergency/temporary shelter is the entry level of a progressive program to address the root causes of homelessness that lead men to our doors. The emergency shelter is a source of food, shelter, referral, and supportive services for those who have lost most or all of their support systems. Nearly 200 men are sheltered annually.

The shelter provides a non-threatening environment where residents may stabilize their circumstances; discover the various support systems available; and then begin to access those services within the community. Most men stay an average of 7-9 months. Located one block from Main Street, public transportation is both accessible and affordable.

The residents are provided an address and telephone number, and a stable and caring environment which enhances their ability to gain employment. This process begins with case management (including, but not limited to, individual goal setting) provided by Building Bridges of Chester County. Case management is loosely defined as participation in any structured environment that addresses the causative factors of the individual's homelessness. The residents sometimes also receive case management services from the Veterans Administration Medical Center treatment programs, Riverside's out-patient program, and Open Arms steps program.

Area churches representing various faiths are a vital part of homeless recovery. Beyond the wonderful meals provided by churches, they often mentor and encourage the men during meal time, also providing clothing and personal care items, and linens and funds for shelter operations.

More recently, a weekly health seminar is provided to inform men about health-related issues, believing that an informed person makes healthier lifestyle choices. This initiative is sponsored by partnerships with Lincoln University and Fox Chase Cancer Center of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA. The early results are encouraging.

Many of the nearly 200 annual residents find gainful employment, a few have a savings account, many more are awarded social security or disability benefits because they are in a stable environment and follow through with appointments. A few returned home to family, many located permanent housing and now own transportation; some take advantage of local treatment centers for addictions or mental illness, and a precious few made extraordinary progress like the man that is now serving in the Peace Corp and another accepted into college.

Each of the three Part-time Shelter Attendants are paid staff and are former residents. This factor serves as excellent peer support and adds credibility to the "message" to the residents about their ability to become self-reliant. It also bolsters the confidence of the former residents, two of whom work full time elsewhere. **A former shelter resident** is a member of the board of directors and helps guide the planning process.

Transitional Housing

Two houses adjacent to the "Atkinson Center" are owned and operated by the board of directors and have been rehabilitated into transitional housing. Three men (one man per bedroom) share each of the homes. Men that are moving toward self-sufficiency, yet need additional support (like time to build up their credit) are invited to transfer from the shelter to the transitional homes. The men work, pay a rental fee, volunteer in the community and usually continue their meals at the shelter.

Permanent Housing

Three Atkinson townhouses funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, located one block from the Atkinson Center are supportive permanent housing for eight disabled men, most of whom are Veterans. The men either work or are on long-term disability. They continue supportive services with an assigned case manager and an on-site facilities manager. Although these homes are “permanent housing” the ultimate goal is the men will seek full independence and acquire non-supportive permanent housing. Men in these homes also volunteer their service to community organizations.

The Apartments

AMSCI expanded to develop W. C. Atkinson Investments, who co-partnered with the Housing Development Corporation (HDC) of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA, several banks seeking tax credits, a housing finance agency, and governmental resources to develop 18 apartments in the former hospital for persons with a low to moderate income. Among the first residents was a woman who stated, “If heaven is like this, I want to go there.” The apartments are managed by HDC.

Community Resource Center at Atkinson

Ongoing community involvement, assessments, research, and attention to demographics and trends generated a variety of relevant community programs and services over the years, and have included:

- § Diabetic Support Group
- § Search Your Heart – sponsored by the American Heart Association
- § Body & Soul – sponsored by Fox Chase Cancer Center of Philadelphia
- § Grandparent Support Group
- § Computer Literacy
- § English as a Second Language (ESL)
- § Piano/Organ Lessons w/Annual Recital
- § Youth Summer Camp
- § Community Gardening
- § Kids ID, facilitated by Coatesville Police Officers
- § Creative Arts and Photography
- § After-School Homework Assistance
- § Girl Scouts – Formation of a Local Troop
- § Weekly Health Seminars at the Shelter

Over the Years, Space has been Granted to:

- § Community Impact – Legal Aide
- § Family Services of Chester County
- § Brandywine Hospital
- § Stork’s Nest – March of Dimes
- § Narcotics Anonymous
- § New Life Services – Foster Care Visitation
- § Meeting Space for Community Committees/boards

The Atkinson Health Center: (1994 – 2007)

The Atkinson Health Center opened April of 1994 and was operated, staffed, and managed by the Brandywine Hospital. There being no accessible affordable health care in the city; space for the health center was provided free of charge to the hospital by Atkinson. The Center provided an array of health services to community members and extended its services to sheltered men that included annual physical exams and annual prostate cancer screening. The Atkinson Health Center closed in May 2007 to help provide a patient base for the newly developed Chess Penn Health Clinic, developed by a local foundation one block away. Atkinson is pleased to have been a pacesetter in health care delivery. Now Atkinson focuses on community health education.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

The Atkinson is currently the only agency in Chester County that can offer a continuum of housing that begins with emergency shelter, then on to permanent housing for single men. This level of continuum contributes to sustainable support and men are more likely to have their core needs addressed and become contributing citizens, as evidenced by the fact that many do find gainful employment, housing, and volunteer in the community. The agency is unique in that its shelter staff is comprised predominantly of former shelter residents and its leadership comes from both church and community.

The intentionality of addressing the basic core needs of homeless individuals through collaboration and advocacy with other agencies improves the quality of life for homeless individuals. Outcome: Services are more easily identified. Respect and trust amongst both homeless individuals seeking services and the organizations that work together improves due to increased collaboration and communication. Organizations have a higher level of cooperation, identify together the holistic needs of the homeless population, and seek improved methods to meet those needs/concerns.

As service providers work together, we have the potential to lower the incidence of homelessness in our county through housing, health, and other supportive services for those that find themselves without a place to call home each night.

The board of directors of “Atkinson”, as it is fondly known, is intentional about responsible investment of volunteers, staff, real estate, materials, partnerships, and funding resources throughout our housing and community outreach system. As stated, nearly 200 men are sheltered for an average of 7-9 months each year. In addition, some 50 community members come by the shelter to have an evening meal each month. During the last quarter of 2010 alone, forty-six men were sheltered for 1,836 nights.

The health lectures have resulted in healthier choices as the men spend their vouchers throughout the day. They are more likely to buy the orange than the orange soda. After the lectures, one resident decided to sign himself into rehab for substance abuse. This is a recent occurrence, but not unusual. As the men are mentored, experience positive peer support, and begin to make better lifestyle choices in the “little things”, they feel empowered to take greater charge of their lives.

One resident stood before newsmen recently to advocate on behalf of homeless and otherwise displaced populations, stating “I am blessed to have a shelter ... they have helped me get back on my feet. I have pride in myself again.” He affirmed that the national budget should not cut benefits designated for the most vulnerable in society. The shelter residents were proud as the remarks of their comrade circulated on the internet and in local papers. They were in awe as they realized he was listened to; they have found their “voice” against practices that cripple their growth.

It is strongly believed that landscaping, new roofs, siding, a newly surfaced street and sidewalks throughout the community were the result of the rehabilitation of the former hospital and its grounds, improving the neighborhood. This one-site rehabilitation provided impetus for community-wide revitalization.

Among other issues, Atkinson is an advocate for preservation of historical buildings in our city. The former hospital has been recognized as a historical site and has applied for national recognition. We believe that history plays a key role in the esteem of youth growing up in a community.

Finally, the Atkinson is a favored mission for community churches of various faiths. They provide wonderful meals and bring their families for socialization of the men without fear. This mutual respect between volunteers and residents is community impact at its best when it touches the human soul.

THE LUZ DE ESPERANZA CENTER: 2009

Luz de Esperanza is the newest addition to the Atkinson Center. The Center stems from the fact that there is a marked increase in the Latino population within the community of the Atkinson Center. Many, though legal immigrants, are without jobs, are English language illiterate, and without adequate housing. Luz de Esperanza will assist families with basic necessities of food, clothing, English as a second language (ESL), and orientation to our community, county, and state.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

As expected, the mission of W. C. Atkinson Memorial Community Service Center, Inc. (AMSCI) has been revised to remain relevant to the current needs of community and reads; “...to enhance neighborhood revitalization through housing for homeless men and lower income families, to provide supportive and cultural service; and to promote a healthy lifestyle through community education.” And these are the attributes for which the Adventist Church is known in our city.

As the Atkinson Board considers their productivity, value, and impact in view of their mission and vision *with* the community they serve, they remain committed to community involvement, on-going demographic research and relevancy—charting a path toward the future and helping others envision a brighter future as well, one life at a time. Having set very aggressive goals from the onset, the Board finds itself continually

validating its purpose and expectations. We cannot attain these goals without collaborative effort with other service providers and volunteers. Atkinson has been the grateful recipient of the generosity of individuals, foundations, corporations, investors, clubs, organizations, churches, schools and government. Together, we do make a difference.

DISCUSSION/OR WRITTEN ESSAY QUESTIONS:

After completing CS 02, CS 03, and CS 04, share examples from this case study article on how the First Seventh-day Adventist Church of Coatesville and/or W. C. Atkinson Memorial Community Services Center, Inc. (AMSCI) accomplished the following:

1. Community assessment process
2. Follow up on the community assessment
3. Program development & strategic planning through the years, including
 - a. The four types of social ministries:
 - i. Relief
 - ii. Individual Development
 - iii. Community Development
 - iv. Structural Change (Advocacy)
 - b. The three styles of social ministries:
 - i. Settlers
 - ii. Gardeners
 - iii. Shepherds
4. The Logic Model of Performance Measurement

Appendix:

Time Line for W.C. Atkinson Memorial Community Service Center, Inc. Coatesville, Pennsylvania

Initial Idea to Develop a Community Resource Center/Housing/Shelter (September 1987)

Administrative Board Selection (November 1987)

Purchase of Property by AEC (September 1, 1988)
(Allegheny East Conference of Seventh-day Adventists)

Dedication of Property (September 4, 1988)

Board of Directors for Non-profit Corporation Named (November 17, 1988)

Board of Directors First Meeting (February 16, 1989)

Application for Funding to PHFA – Feasibility Phase Accepted (May 11, 1989)
(Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency)

Property Deeded to Board of Directors (September 1991)

Construction of First Phase of Project – Atkinson Shelter Completed
Shelter for Homeless Men Opened (January 7, 1992)

PHFA Commitment for Funding (November 1992)

Apartments Completed/First Rental in Collaboration with HDC (December 7, 1993)

Atkinson Health Center in Collaboration w/ Brandywine Hospital (April 18, 1994)

Atkinson Resource Center Opened (February 28, 1995)

Hiring of First Executive Director (May 15, 1995)

Transitional House Completed (November 19, 1998)

Second Transitional House Completed (August 5, 1999)

Start Construction of Permanent Houses on 9th Ave. (February 27, 2002)

Three HUD Supportive Permanent Housing Units Completed (December 2002)

Atkinson Named Historic Site by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission,
(April 14, 2007)

Atkinson Health Center in Collaboration with Brandywine Hospital Closed May 2007

Atkinson Fulfilled 10 year Obligation to County for Transitional Housing (Feb. 18, 2009)
(Transitional Housing Units located at 828 & 830 East Chestnut Street, Coatesville, PA.)

Community Enrichment Programs - Ongoing

Community Center Coordinated by the Hispanic Community Dedicated June 6, 2009

Formalized Partnership with Lincoln University and Fox Chase Cancer Center,
December 3, 2009

Luz De Esperanza Hosted a Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service January 18, 2010

Agreement Signed with Fox Chase Cancer Center to host Body & Soul, Dec. 02, 2010