

RISE PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

Volunteers of America Delaware Valley



Overview

Volunteers of America Delaware Valley (VOADV), a local affiliate for the national Volunteers of America, serves more than 13,000 individuals throughout southern New Jersey and Philadelphia. For 125 years, VOADV has provided homeless services, reentry services, and services for seniors and individuals with intellectual disabilities. VOADV currently runs six homeless, emergency, and transitional shelter programs in four counties and provides wraparound services and case management, from one-on-one counseling to group workshops on financial literacy, housing supports, and life skills. The organization's holistic approach aims to support individuals and families from intake to successful discharge to permanent housing.

VOADV is further enhancing its impact as one of 15 organizations selected to participate in the RISE Partnership's "Implementation" phase.



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Tamika Levels-Hood, vice president of homeless services at VOADV

The primary focus of VOADV's work with RISE was on one particular shelter, the Anna Sample Complex located in Camden, New Jersey. The shelter serves single women and families with dependent children, housing nearly 100 individuals every day. The shelter had always centered its support on adult services, including referrals for medical, mental, and behavioral services as well as providing families resources for their children. But VOADV wanted to try providing children's services, specific to age and grade.

"Our overall goal was to provide parents and children experiencing homelessness with direct services and access to holistic supports as they worked towards getting permanent housing," said Tamika Levels-Hood, vice president of homeless services at VOADV. "We felt like if we start focusing more on the children and the children's services, then we could better support and provide more resources and information and education to the parents."

VOADV's work with RISE started with the development of a logic model, which led to authentic assessments of youth, parents, and staff to inform more tailored services.

"Because our program is in the inner city, we were looking for more of an assessment that really spoke to the issues that the clientele faces, not just a broad approach," said Levels-Hood. "We really wanted to tailor it and then create some type of service plans so that even the children could focus on these goals themselves."

"We wanted to get a feel for what the children were actually going through or what they would like to see while staying at the shelter that could better help them, as well as the parents," added Monique Reddick, regional director of homeless services at VOADV. "We did a lot of surveying and group meetings and came up with the different activities that we would try to put in place at the shelter as it related to the children's different needs."

VOADV learned from RISE the importance of including all stakeholders in data collection and analysis, not just for richer data but for collective understanding and buy-in.

"The goal of the surveys and the feedback and the canvassing was to get the ideas from the actual clients and also our staff because it was important

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Monique Reddick, regional director of homeless services at VOADV

for us to have staff understand what we were trying to do,” said Reddick. “So, when we did implement any of the activities or services, everybody would be on the same page and understand the mission or the goals or the outcomes of what we were trying to create.”

“The kids are kind of along for the ride and we wanted to give them some voice,” added Levels-Hood.

The evaluation revealed insights into children’s behavioral and mental health, which led to staff trainings on trauma-informed care as well as connecting children and parents to additional supports.

“A lot of the feedback from the staff was being able to get those trainings to help them interact with kids when they go through crisis moments,” said Reddick. “We were able to do a lot of different things as it relates to mental health with children and parents, and we were able to do the trauma-informed care.”

“One of the biggest outcomes was to have the kids increase their understanding of their own mental health and the various resources that are out there that will be able to support them,” said Levels-Hood.

Not only did VOADV’s work with RISE lead to important staff trainings and supports for children and parents at



the Anna Sample shelter, but it helped inform data collection and use across the whole division of homeless services at VOADV.

“I think RISE was kind of like our jump start on: How do we correctly collect the data? What do we do with the data? How do we turn it into a story? How do we present it to our stakeholders?” said Reddick. “It gave us a clearer understanding of how we should do that

without being overwhelmed with data and let it reach the people that it needs to reach from the top down.”

RISE also helped VOADV tell its story.

“We wanted to tell a story with the data we had and we wanted to tell a specific story,” said Levels-Hood. “We keep tons of information on our clientele, but we are really trying to help the community see who the *individuals* are.”



Established in 2018, The RISE (Readiness, Implementation, Sustainability for Effectiveness) Partnership supports promising Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey nonprofit organizations. The RISE Partnership Evaluation Funders Learning Community is the first convening supported by a network of funders in the region. The Learning Community is a collaborative effort with the Barra Foundation, Campbell Soup Company, Horner Foundation, Nelson Foundation, Philadelphia Foundation, PropelNext/Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Scattergood Foundation, and United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, and a partnership with YaleEVAL of The Consultation Center at Yale. The Partnership provides nonprofits with resources and training to strengthen organizational effectiveness and ensure a greater impact on social, economic, health, and educational conditions in communities, including the effects of racism, intergenerational poverty and trauma.

For more information visit therisepartnership.org

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