

# **The Resident Opportunity and Self-Sufficiency Program**

**Awareness, Usefulness and Satisfaction**

**Capstone**

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## Introduction

The Resident Opportunity and Self-Sufficiency (ROSS) Program for public housing residents in Augusta has been in existence since 2006. The main goal of the program is to help the participants obtain employment, achieve economic self sufficiency and move out of public housing. The program is funded by grants and is evaluated on a regular basis to assure the quality of implementation and the attainment of the program's goals.

This research is part of the comprehensive evaluation conducted by the Augusta Housing Authority in collaboration with the CSRA Economic Opportunity Authority. The goal of this study is to evaluate participants' level of awareness, participation and interest in the program. The study will also assess if the participants find the program useful and how satisfied they are with the components of the program and case management. The research will also attempt to identify the possible obstacles to the clients' full participation in the program and their success in the program.

## Background

The Resident Opportunity and Self-Sufficiency (ROSS) Program for public housing residents in Augusta is one of the many family self-sufficiency programs that have been set up in more than 1,000 cities and counties across the United States since 1980s. These programs' goals are to help the tenants of public housing and Section 8, who often have little or no income, become economically self-sufficient, provide for basic needs and move into private housing (Anthony, 2005). Before these programs were implemented public housing tenants had typically been seen as abusers of the welfare system. To maintain political support and funding for public and assisted housing programs, the programs needed to be viewed as assisting families to become self-sufficient (Kleit & Rohe, 1999).

Among the programs of the 1980s was Project Self-Sufficiency, a demonstration program for single mothers, implemented by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In 1989, the Bush administration substituted Project Self Sufficiency with Operation Bootstrap. This project was designed to serve all public housing families, involving 61 housing authorities and about 3,000 families. The National Affordable Housing Act was enacted in 1990, which required housing authorities to implement Family Self-Sufficiency programs (Kleit & Rohe, 1999). Starting in 1993, each housing authority was mandated to have a Family Self Sufficiency program.

The Resident Opportunity and Self-Sufficiency (ROSS) Program has been in existence in Augusta since April, 2006. The program is implemented by the Augusta Housing Authority in collaboration with the CSRA Economic Opportunity Authority. These two agencies, with the assistance of the non-profit community and faith based organizations of Augusta, deliver and coordinate supportive services and other activities in order to help public housing residents attain economic self-sufficiency. The program is funded by grants for three years. Up to 140 clients will receive the services (ROSS Grant Summary, 2006). Since its inception the program has enrolled about 50 participants. At this point only 35 clients are enrolled.

A team of case managers and a Housing Authority coordinator are responsible for enrolling participants, reporting and composing a service delivery plan (for provision of supportive services) and developing self-sufficiency plans for participants. The program components also include life skills training, job readiness training, homeownership training, counseling, childcare and transportation assistance. All these services are designed to help the participants achieve economic self-sufficiency, leave public housing and become home owners.

As the program is funded by grants it is evaluated on a continuous basis. The program is required to conduct a comprehensive evaluation for funding purposes in 2007. The administration of the ROSS program and the CSRA Economic Opportunity Authority asked the researcher to conduct part of the evaluation needed for the comprehensive assessment. Because the program is still young and its goals are designed to be achieved within 3 years, it is too early to evaluate the program's effectiveness and goals. The goals of the program are:

1. To provide assistance for low-income households working towards economic self-sufficiency.
2. To help families leave public housing for homeownership or other affordable housing options by assisting them in increasing income and becoming self-sufficient. This will provide more public housing units (which are affordable) for homeless families.
3. To expand the capacity of other agencies to serve low-income people through providing in-kind resources.
4. To partner with other agencies to achieve specific family outcomes and to coordinate service delivery.
5. To leverage external resources to increase capacity to serve low-income people (\$210,000 over 3 years).
6. To help Low-Income people achieve their potential by increasing education and/or skills, strengthening families' skills, and providing access or links to services (ROSS Grant Summary, 2006, p. 1).

At this point, the administration of the ROSS program is not sure if the participants are aware of all the components and services offered by the ROSS program and if they are using

them. Before evaluating the program's goals and effectiveness in the future, it is necessary to find out the answers to the following questions:

1. Are the participants aware of all the components of the ROSS program?
2. If they are aware of the program components, are they using them?
3. If they are using the programs, do they find them useful?
4. What is the level of satisfaction with the case managers' work by the participants?
5. What is the general level of satisfaction with the program by the participants?
6. What are the barriers to clients' full participation in the program and progress?

It is important to find out the answers to these questions at this point of the program's operation so necessary adjustments and changes can be made to maximize the opportunities for the participants to reach the goals of self-sufficiency in the long run. This study will also assess the levels of usefulness and satisfaction from the services provided which are needed for funding purposes of the program.

### Literature Review

There has been some research done on the description and benefits of Resident Opportunity and Self-Sufficiency Programs around the country since their inception in the 1980s. Studies showed different results of their implementation. To understand the model and goals of self-sufficiency programs, it is crucially important to describe what family economic self-sufficiency actually means. Anne B. Shlay argued, that "a sensible definition of economic independence does not insist that families are entirely free of public subsidies but rather are moving in the direction of achieving greater economic mobility and financial stability" (Shlay, 1993, p. 459). Rather, economic independence is a process of reducing welfare assistance, where the participants receive access to life-sustaining resources, including

employment, housing, education and the support of relatives and friends (Shlay, 1993). As Bratt (1996) states, a family may be moving towards self-sufficiency even without employment, if one or more members are actively involved in an educational or job-training program which should result in increased income.

Self sufficiency programs provide poor, unemployed or underemployed people with a coordinated set of services which help them become self-sufficient by getting and maintaining employment, increasing their income and possibly becoming homeowners (Rohe & Stegman, 1991). The participants of these programs need and get education and job training to become self-sufficient. They also receive support services and counseling to help develop a set of personal goals. Workshops on financial, career, parenting, and personal skills are conducted in a lot of programs. Participants often do not know how to manage a checking account or how to use an ATM card. Women often need to be taught what clothes to wear for job interviews (Bratt, 1996 ). Participants may also get childcare and transportation assistance that allows them to participate in training and employment activities.

Successful coordination and oversight of the progress of these services is very important and is usually implemented and monitored by coordinators and case managers from the housing authority where the program takes place, support service agencies, and non-profit and public service organizations. These programs rely on case managers to perform many duties to help the participants take full advantage of their services (Rohe & Stegman, 1991). Case managers are responsible for intakes, application process, assessments of the clients' needs and referrals to appropriate services and agencies. They often act as advocates, counselors, and life and job coaches. They are responsible for monitoring their clients' progress and following up with them after they get a job.

The ROSS program in Augusta is following the same model. These models are built on the assumption of success. It is considered easier for public housing tenants to achieve the needed outcomes because they are free of the stress of high housing-cost and can focus on other needs of the family (Jacob & Leonard, 2005). On the other hand, Bratt (1996) argues public housing is tied to horrible neighborhood conditions, crime, and drug abuse which set the tone for failure for children that grow up in public housing. Bratt (1996) also notes housing policy itself may discourage economic independence. There is not much incentive to move out of public housing. If a housing program makes a family pay thirty percent of their income for rent and the government pays the rest, it is a good plan for a low income family, especially if they live in a nice development to stay there. In some places, the cost of living and child care is so high that it is almost impossible for families living on a minimum wage to survive outside of public housing. This becomes one of the major factors of low participation in Self-Sufficiency programs. The nationwide study conducted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which involved a mail survey of the coordinators of 564 Family Self-Sufficiency programs, revealed fear of leaving public housing or losing other benefits is the number one obstacle to program participation (Kleit & Rohe, 1999).

Weak case management was another problem and a cause of low participation revealed by the same study along with low levels of interest among potential and active participants and drop out rates. These factors usually determine the success of the program and its ability to achieve its goals (Kleit & Rohe, 1999). The findings of the survey showed many programs were inadequately staffed with case managers due to different reasons. As Kleit and Rohe (1999) suggested, one of the major components of these programs is to evaluate the services needed by participants and then connect them with those services. This requires very good case

management. A lot of participants do not use all the resources available because they either do not know about them or do not know how to access them. Education and vocational programs' success also depends on good case management. Case managers provide support and encouragement when participants run into problems. Without frequent contact, participants get discouraged and are more likely to drop out (Monnet, 1997).

The results of the nationwide survey described above showed a lot of programs use inexperienced interns and volunteers for case management, which affects the awareness, participation and success of the programs overall. The study of the two housing developments on the south side of Chicago conducted by the Roosevelt University indicated low staff- to-client ratios and intensive follow-up is the key to clients' success at getting and keeping jobs (Roosevelt University Institute for Metropolitan Affairs, n.d.). Inexperienced, overworked case managers cannot provide that.

The Nebraska Employment First Program Evaluation used surveys and focus groups to evaluate its progress. The results showed many case managers had serious limitations in skills and knowledge, which prevented them from successfully identifying and addressing clients' personal and family challenges. As a result, substantial numbers of clients did not receive the services they needed and did not participate in suitable training (Meckstroth & Ponza, 2002).

The results of the nationwide survey described above also showed that not all the agencies had specific requirements for the participants to be active in the program. Some of them just required having a contract with a participant; some of them required a participant to look for work to be active. As a result, not all the programs and services were utilized by the participants. Among other obstacles to program participation detected by the same study were care for the family and small children, lack of transportation, educational background, personal problems like

substance abuse or pregnancy, cynical attitude toward social programs, involvement in other education and job training, distrust of housing authority and lack of motivation.

Findings from a study of the determinants of participation in social programs by Heckman and Smith (2004) showed that different groups often participate unequally and that “awareness of program eligibility is a major source of variation in participation” (p. 243). They also suggested patterns of program participation can expose useful information about program operation. For example, groups with less than a high school education, from poorer families and with no recent employment experience were less likely to be enrolled than groups with a high school education, those from higher income families, and those with a recent employment history. Whites had an overall probability of participation lower than that of blacks. Blacks had a higher level of awareness and eligibility, but lower levels of enrollment. They also more frequently dropped out of the programs. Persons of older age had lower participation rates compared to persons ages 22-29. Married persons had lower participation rates than single ones for all demographic groups. Divorced, widowed, or separated persons participated more than the single ones. Higher levels of educational background showed higher levels of awareness and participation. Having a child of less than six years of age had a negative impact on participation rates for men and positive for women.

Heckman and Smith (2004) also suggested that awareness is determined by differential access to information about the program, which influences participation. Language competency is a serious factor that can influence awareness. In many cases, incentives can influence participation and in some cases the desire of an individual to participate. Barriers to information, educational background and language skills were serious determinants of program awareness and therefore participation.

Currie (2004) studied the results of research on participation in Medicaid programs, Food Stamps, Supplemental Social Security Income and housing programs such as Section 8. The results showed that participation rates in social programs increase with the receipt of another welfare benefit, the size of entitlement, and the number of children. Participation decreases with age, lower education, income level, white head of household, and work experience.

A study of the two housing developments on the south side of Chicago conducted by Roosevelt University revealed issues that influence men and women's participation. Women were less confident in their job skills and abilities which affected their job search. Men were more likely than women to be satisfied with different aspects of the program and felt more listened to than women. Women were more likely to blame child care or other logistical factors for their failure in the program than men (Roosevelt University Institute for Metropolitan Affairs, n.d.).

Program evaluations have been conducted to assess the effectiveness and satisfaction of the participants from ROSS programs. Most of the evaluations used surveys, semi-structured interviews and focus groups with clients to estimate the extent the goals were met. Kleit and Rohe (1999) noted these evaluations should be in the form of the experimental design with the presence of the control group. It is important to be able to compare the progress of the participants of the programs with non participants.

Evaluations of the first programs implemented did not compare the participants with non participants and that is why it is impossible to determine whether the results were due to the program or other factors (Kleit & Rohe, 1999). For example, the first self-sufficiency program Project Self-Sufficiency, implemented in 1984, served approximately 10,000 single mothers in 155 public housing authorities. The study showed that the employment rate increased from

twenty-five to forty-five percent. About forty-two percent completed the program (Kleit & Rohe, 1999).

Operation Bootstrap in 1989 was aimed to serve sixty-one housing authorities. Assessments showed increase of employment from forty percent to forty-five and fifty after two years of being in the program. These two programs served as pilot programs before the National Affordable Housing Act of 1990 established the Housing and Urban Development Department's Family Self-Sufficiency program. Now all public housing authorities were required to have self-sufficiency programs providing services and programs described above and using the same model of operation described earlier in this review (Kleit & Rohe, 1999).

Family Self-Sufficiency programs around the country were assessed using the nationwide survey described above. Overall, the program was viewed as useful by participants and sixty-nine percent were still enrolled in the program (Ficke & Piesse, 2004). The evaluation of the Gateway program in Charlotte, North Carolina showed that ninety-six percent of the participants who stayed in the program stated that Gateway either made a minor or major impact on their lives (Bratt, 1996).

The study of the two housing developments on the south side of Chicago described above showed that more than seventy-three percent of the clients who attained jobs were satisfied with their positions and the program in general (Roosevelt University Institute for Metropolitan Affairs, n.d.). The numbers and results looked similar in the evaluations of the Saint Paul and Nebraska programs described above. They showed general satisfaction with the programs. Ninety-six percent of the participants of the ROSS program in Saint Paul indicated that they were either "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the quality of the program. Sixty-five percent gained employment (Arnold, Helmstetter & Romero, 2006).

As Lise, Seitz and Smith (2003) indicated, social programs can have different effects on different groups of the population. Program evaluations can lead to very different conclusions and results. There are many factors influencing the outcomes of the program. Though self-sufficiency programs are relatively young and not much research has been conducted on them, it is still possible to make the conclusion that a big part of the success of these programs depends on professional case management, clients' awareness of the programs, consistency of services and following up with the clients. Different programs showed different rates of success, but overall they have helped the clients increase their level of income and skills.

### Methodology

This study is designed to examine six research questions:

1. Are the participants aware of all the components of the ROSS program?
2. If they are aware of the program components, are they using them?
3. If they are using the programs, do they find them useful?
4. What is the level of satisfaction with the case managers' work by the participants?
5. What is the general level of satisfaction with the program by the participants?
6. What are the barriers to clients' full participation in the program and progress?

A cross-sectional, non-experimental, descriptive research design was used to examine and test the above stated questions. The study was conducted from the perspective of the actual participants of the program due to the nature of the research questions and the fact that they are better informed about the awareness, usefulness and satisfaction issues examined.

### *Participants*

The ROSS program has been in existence since April 2006 and has enrolled more than 50 participants since its inception. Now only 35 participants are enrolled. Due to the small amount

of participants the whole population of 35 participants was studied. Therefore, no sampling procedures were needed.

### *Data Collection*

The data for this study were collected through surveys, focus groups with the participants and interviews with the case managers of the program. After consulting the case managers and the director of the program, it was determined the surveys would be administered by the case managers during their one-on-one appointments with the participants. This ensured a higher response rate. The advantage of administering the survey this way was that all the questions or misunderstanding of the directions in the survey that might have occurred could be answered on the spot. According to the script attached in Appendix A, before the survey was administered case managers explained the purpose of the survey to the participants, what the results would be used for, and participants were told that participation was voluntary. Case managers also gave detailed instructions on how to fill out the survey. To ensure privacy and confidentiality the case managers sat far enough from the participant to make sure they could not see what the participant was writing. Attached with the survey was an envelope where the participant put the completed survey, sealed it and gave it to the case manager.

The copy of the survey is enclosed in Appendix B. The survey was designed by the researcher based on the research questions and the literature review. Because self-sufficiency programs are still relatively young, the researcher could not find any actual examples of the surveys administered in previous studies. The survey was approved by the case management staff and the director of the ROSS program.

The survey started with the short introduction and each section started with instructions. The survey consisted of four sections. The purpose of the first section was to find out the level of

general satisfaction of the participants by the program. The questions had a five point scale, with (1) meaning Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither Disagree or Agree, (4) Agree and (5) Strongly Agree. The second section aimed to find out the degree of awareness among the participants of the services provided by the program. In order to do that, seven dummy variables were created to distinguish between the respondents who were aware of the program components and those that were not. In addition, a count variable called Program Awareness was created to identify the number of program components each respondent was aware of.

To assess satisfaction with the work of the case managers eleven questions were created which had a five point scale, with (1) meaning Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree and (5) Strongly Agree. To assess the overall satisfaction with the case managers a composite measure was created by computing the mean of the eleven variables as well as the mean for each respondent. Prior to computing the composite score, reliability analysis was performed to check for consistency among the items. The analysis produced a Cronbach's Alpha result of .902 which indicated that the overall correlation among the items was very strong.

The second step in data collection was a focus group with the participants of the ROSS program. All the participants of the program were invited and participation was voluntary. The focus group was facilitated by the researcher. The questions and topics for the focus group were derived from the completed surveys and looked for deeper understanding of the participants' satisfaction with the components of the program and case management, their perspective on what parts of the program needed improvement or change, and what they saw as potential obstacles to their achievement of self sufficiency. This document is enclosed in Appendix C. One of the concerns of conducting a focus group was the fact that the clients did not feel comfortable rating

the program and case management objectively in front of the interviewer. Confidentiality concerns and bias were the major problems the researcher encountered during the interviews. One-on-one interviews with the case managers were conducted to get their perspective on the program's progress, problems, needed changes and improvements. This document is enclosed in Appendix E.

Conceptually this research can be described in a model with two groups of variables. The review of the literature showed that socio-demographic characteristics of the participants such as gender, race, number of children, educational level, marital status and income influence the participants' awareness of the components of the program, their satisfaction with the program services and case management.

#### Participant Characteristics

Socio-Demographic factors:

Race

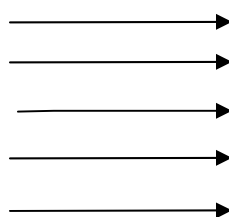
Gender

Number of Children

Educational Level

Marital Status

Income



#### Program Outcomes

1. Awareness of the components of the program
2. Satisfaction with the program services
3. Case management satisfaction

The data collected will be analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software. Before the beginning of analysis, all the data will be checked for completeness and reliability. Any inconsistent or incomplete data will be excluded from analysis.

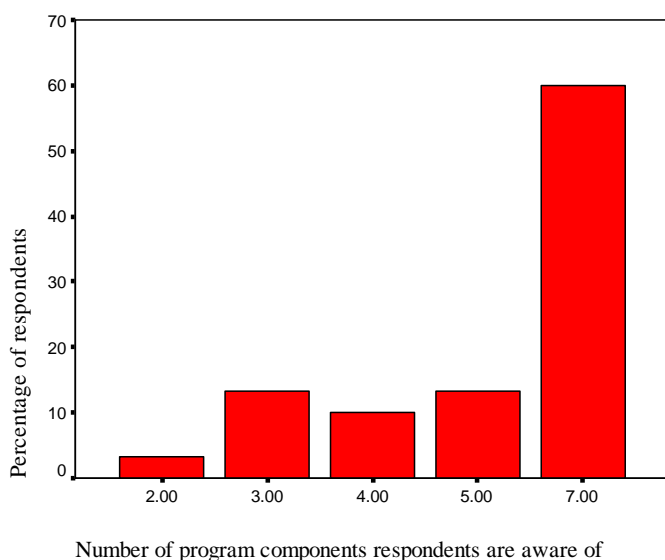
#### Findings

The results of this research were derived from a survey and a focus group administered to the participants of the ROSS program, and an interview with the case managers of the program.

### Survey Results

The four sections of the survey aim to find answers to the five research questions of this study. The first research question focuses on the degree of awareness among the participants of the services provided by the program, which include childcare, transportation assistance, life skills training, job readiness training, educational assistance, homeownership training and counseling. On average, awareness among the participants is high. The results revealed that sixty percent of the participants are aware of all seven components of the ROSS program (n=34). Only three percent are aware of only two program components. The overall mean for program awareness is 5.733 (see Graph 1).

Graph 1: Program Awareness



The researcher also looked at the variables individually to see which services the participants are more aware of (see Table 1). Life skills training had the highest score. Ninety-seven percent responded that they were aware of this service. Ninety-four percent of respondents knew about childcare and ninety percent were aware of transportation assistance. Only sixty-one percent knew about counseling services.

Table 1: Percentage of participants aware of the different components of the program

Program component	Percentage of participants aware of the program component	Number of respondents
Life skills training	96.9	32
Childcare	93.5	31
Transportation	90.3	31
Job readiness training	81.3	32
Homeownership training	75.8	33
Educational assistance	71.9	32
Counseling service	61.3	31

The second research question aims to find out if the participants are using the services provided by ROSS. Table 2 exhibits the findings on this question.

Table 2: Percentage of participants using program services

Are you using this service?	Yes	No	Do not need	Number of respondents
Childcare	60.7	21.4	17.9	28
Transportation assistance (bus tickets)	42.3	23.1	34.6	26
Life skills training	73.3	20.0	6.7	30
Job readiness training	12.0	60.0	28.0	25
Educational assistance	4.8	57.1	38.1	21
Homeownership training	4.5	72.7	22.7	22
Counseling	5.3	47.4	47.4	19

The results revealed that life skills training is the most utilized service of the program, followed by childcare and transportation. The findings also show very low usage of the most important components of the program. For example, only twelve percent of the respondents use job readiness training and only five percent use educational assistance, homeownership training and counseling. Although finding a job and becoming self sufficient is the goal of the program, sixty percent of the participants do not use job readiness training and twenty-eight percent say that they do not need it. These results are similar for educational assistance, homeownership training and counseling services.

The third research question aims to find out how useful the participants view the programs provided by ROSS. Table 3 displays the results of this section.

Table 3: Usefulness of the ROSS programs

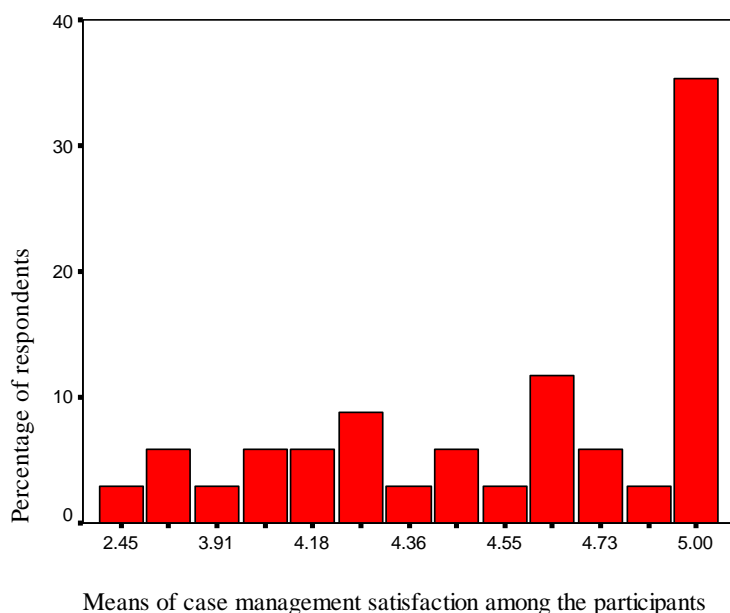
Program Component	Not at all useful	Not very useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Do not use	Number of respondents
Childcare	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	55.9%	44.1%	34
Transportation	2.9%	0.0%	8.8%	32.4%	55.9%	34
Life skills training	2.9%	0.0%	20.6%	47.1%	29.4%	34
Job readiness training	3.0%	0.0%	6.1%	12.1%	78.8%	33
Educational assistance	2.9%	0.0%	5.9%	2.9%	88.2%	34
Homeownership training	2.9%	0.0%	0.0%	5.9%	91.2%	34
Counseling	0.0%	2.9%	0.0%	5.9%	91.2%	34

The results of this section show that childcare was rated as the most useful service provided by ROSS. Sixty percent of the respondents found it very useful. Life skills training was

rated second in usefulness. Forty-seven percent found it very useful and twenty-one percent somewhat useful. Transportation was rated very useful by thirty percent of the respondents and nine percent found it somewhat useful. Only twelve percent of the respondents found job readiness very useful and six percent rated it somewhat useful. Educational assistance, homeownership training and counseling were rated very low. Only three percent found educational assistance very useful and six percent found it somewhat useful. Six percent rated homeownership training and counseling very useful.

The goal of the fourth question is to assess satisfaction with the work of the case managers. Graph 2 displays the mean satisfaction for the 34 participants in the program. Overall, the majority of the respondents are very satisfied with the services provided by the case managers.

Graph 2: Case management satisfaction



The response pattern to the individual questions assessing case management satisfaction is consistent with the overall satisfaction. Overwhelmingly, the majority of the respondents

strongly agreed or agreed that the case managers are effective in all aspects of their work (see Table 4).

Table 4: Satisfaction with the case managers' work

Program Component	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Number of respondents
My case manager helped me to better understand the requirements of the ROSS program	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	41.2%	58.8%	34
My case manager helped me to better understand all the services and opportunities provided by ROSS	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	34
My case manager is very knowledgeable about the types of services that are available in the community to help me achieve self sufficiency	0.0%	0.0%	5.9%	35.3%	58.8%	34
My case manager helped me to understand the social assistance programs and benefits that I might be qualified for	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	52.9%	47.1%	34
My case manager is knowledgeable about human behavior	2.9%	0.0%	11.8%	26.5%	58.8%	34
The number of home visits was about right	5.9%	0.0%	0.0%	32.4%	61.8%	34
When I ran into problems my case manager was easily accessible	2.9%	0.0%	2.9%	23.5%	70.6%	34
When I ran into problems my case manager knew what agencies to contact to help me	2.9%	0.0%	2.9%	32.4%	61.8%	34
My case manager always followed up on my case	2.9%	0.0%	2.9%	23.5%	70.6%	34
I have a strong and supportive relationship with my case manager	2.9%	0.0%	5.9%	23.5%	67.6%	34
Overall, the services of my case manager were effective in helping me make progress toward self sufficiency	2.9%	0.0%	0.0%	23.5%	73.5%	34

The purpose of the fifth research question is to find out the level of general satisfaction of the participants by the program. Overall, the respondents (n=34) gave positive responses to all six questions (see Table 5). Comparing the medians of all the variables, four questions out of six had the highest median of 5.00. Statements that the ROSS program provided the participants with enough training and support services to acquire employment had lower medians of 4.50 and 4.00.

Table 5: Participants' satisfaction with the ROSS program

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree or agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Median
ROSS provided me with necessary services to move towards economic independence	0.0%	0.0%	5.9%	38.2%	55.9%	5.00
ROSS program provided me with enough training to be able to acquire employment.	0.0%	2.9%	23.5%	26.5%	47.1%	4.00
Participation in the ROSS program helped me strengthen my life skills.	0.0%	2.9%	2.9%	35.5%	58.8%	5.00
ROSS provided me with enough support services to be able to acquire employment.	0.0%	0.0%	14.7%	35.3%	50.0%	4.50
Participation in the ROSS program helped me strengthen my family skills	0.0%	0.0%	8.8%	35.3%	55.9%	5.00
Overall satisfaction with ROSS	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	29.4%	70.6%	5.00

To look at the overall general satisfaction a scale was created by computing the mean of the six variables. Based on the mean score ( $m = 4.45$ ,  $S.D. = .516$ ), the overall general satisfaction with ROSS services is very high.

Socio-demographic information about the respondents was collected in the last section of the survey. The data showed that all of the ROSS participants ( $n = 34$ ) are African-Americans.

The majority of them are females, who are either divorced, have never been married, with one to three children. Half of the participants are employed and have a High School Diploma or less.

Part of this research was dedicated to testing the concept derived from the review of literature that socio-demographic characteristics of the participants such as gender, race, number of children, educational level, marital status and income influence the participants' awareness of the components of the program, their satisfaction with the program services and case management. In order to establish possible relationship between these variables bivariate correlation analyses were conducted. Before the analysis was run all the socio demographic variables were checked for variance. Overwhelmingly, the variables gender (one male, thirty two females), ethnicity (thirty four African-Americans), and marital status (thirty single/never married participants) displayed little or no variance and therefore could not be included in the bivariate correlation analyses.

Educational level and employment status variables were recoded into dichotomous variables, where education was divided into those who had a high school diploma (coded as 1) and those who had a GED or less (coded as 0), and employment status was divided into those who were employed (coded as 1) and those who were not (coded as 0). This was done to make these variables operable for this analysis. The composite scores created for case management assessment, general satisfaction of the ROSS program and program awareness described above were used.

The results obtained in this analysis coincide with the findings from the review of literature discussed above. The correlation matrix displayed in Table 6 shows the relationship among the independent and dependent variables. The independent variables are employment

status, number of children, annual income and educational level. Dependent variables are case management assessment, overall satisfaction with ROSS and program awareness.

Table 6: Correlation matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Employment status	-						
2. Number of children	.019 (33)	-					
3. Annual income	.428* (32)	.120 (32)	-				
4. Educational level	.132 (33)	-.232 (34)	.135 (32)	-			
5. Case management assessment	-.126 (33)	-.068 (34)	.075 (32)	.370* (34)	-		
6. General satisfaction with ROSS	.061 (33)	.388* (34)	.112 (32)	.283 (34)	.052 (34)	-	
7. Program awareness	.386* (29)	.045 (30)	.258 (28)	.033 (30)	-.104 (30)	.339 (30)	-

Note. \*p is equal or less than 0.05

The results revealed a positive relationship between the first independent variable employment status and the dependent variable of program awareness ( $r = .386$ ). In other words, employed participants are more aware of the programs that are available to them than those that are not employed. There is no statistically significant relationship found between employment and the other dependent variables.

There is a positive correlation between the independent variable of the number of children the participants have and the dependent variable of general satisfaction with the program ( $r = .388$ ). Therefore, the number of children the participants have is positively related to their overall satisfaction with the program. A significant correlation is also found between the

third independent variable of educational level and the dependent variable of case management assessment ( $r = .370$ ). Therefore high school graduates assess their case managers higher than those with GED or less.

A positive correlation also exists between the two dependent variables of program awareness and general satisfaction of the program ( $r = .339$ ). The more the participants are aware of the programs available to them the more satisfied they are with the program in general. There is no significant correlation between the other dependent variables.

### *Focus Group*

A focus group with the ROSS participants was conducted to get a better understanding of the program and its members and also to get an answer to the sixth research question of the study about the barriers to the clients' full participation in the program and their progress. Questions were composed after the results from the surveys were obtained. All the participants ( $n = 35$ ) of the program were invited to participate, but only four people attended. According to the case managers, such a low turnout rate is typical for this program.

### *Reasons for participating in ROSS.*

In the beginning of the discussion the participants were asked about the reasons why they joined the ROSS program. All four participants said they joined ROSS to get help and services. When asked if they knew what the goals of the program were, three participants answered that it was for those who needed help. Only one participant knew about the self sufficiency goal of the program. When asked if they wanted to achieve self sufficiency and move out of public housing, the participants enthusiastically responded that they wanted to find employment and live outside of public housing as it was not a good environment to live in.

*Awareness and usage of the program services.*

Participants were well aware of all program components, which confirmed the results obtained from the surveys. One of the most important tasks of the meeting was to find out why certain services of the program like educational assistance, job readiness training, homeownership training and counseling are not used actively by the participants. When asked if they were using these services, participants said that they either were not getting the announcements about training or they just did not come. One participant said that she wanted to use educational assistance and go to Augusta Technical College but did not have \$15.00 to pay for her application. Respondents expressed a lot of interest in the homeownership training class but did not know when it took place. Three of the participants attended resume training and thought that that completed their job readiness training. All the participants also stated that case managers spent time with them one-one-one to prepare them for job search. When asked if they felt they were ready for the job search or able to maintain employment, three of the participants could not give a definite answer and said that they did not know. One participant was employed at the Public Housing Outreach Center and said that she was perfecting her typing skills there to obtain a better job in customer service.

The counseling service was actively used by one participant, who stated that she benefited from the service tremendously and it changed her life. All of the participants knew about the childcare service and some of them used it when they needed to. None of the participants used transportation assistance or knew how to obtain the bus tickets.

*Effectiveness of program services.*

All of the participants felt that support services like childcare and transportation assistance were not coordinated well enough to help them find employment and maintain it.

Childcare hours of operation and bus schedules often contradicted with work hours or job search activities. According to them, it was difficult to transport children back and forth from childcare without a car. All the participants stated that having a car would make their job search easier. Without it they felt desperate. All four participants said that life skills training was a very effective component of the program. It made them stronger, more motivated, helped them open up and stay out of trouble.

One of the participants said that job readiness is not what it should be. She commented that there needs to be more announcements posted about job openings. She also suggested that it would be helpful if the participants could be transported to the Labor Department and other hiring places once a week so that they could apply for jobs. Other participants commented that they had to do too much on their own to find employment and were overwhelmed by that. Participants could not rate the other components of the program because they were not using them enough.

*Case management assessment.*

When asked about the work of the case managers, participants responded very positively. According to them, their case managers were very caring, understanding, helpful and knowledgeable. They always followed up on their case. They called the participants two or three times a week just to hear their voice and make sure they were alright. Participants did not make any negative comments about their case managers.

*Obstacles to achieving self sufficiency.*

Participants were asked to identify the obstacles that could or were preventing them from becoming self sufficient and moving out of public housing, which was the sixth research question of this study. All the respondents said that children, family problems, no help from the

father of their children, and the absence of transportation were the main issues they were dealing with. They felt lost and overwhelmed and it was hard for them to look for a job having all that trouble at home.

*Good and bad things about the program. Suggestions.*

The participants were asked to give comments on what the program did for them and what its negative sides were. All the participants responded that they benefited from the program by getting childcare, diapers, hygiene supplies when needed and the support of the case managers. They felt that the program gave them an opportunity to get out and do things. It gave them hope for change and motivated them to do better in life. They mentioned that they wanted to see more gatherings for the ROSS participants so that they could get to know each other. One of the negative aspects that all the participants mentioned was inadequate transportation assistance and the need for more of it.

*Interview with the Case Managers of the ROSS Program*

An interview with two ROSS program case managers revealed important information about the operation of the program. According to the case managers, one of the major drawbacks of the program is its intake process. To become a participant of the ROSS program candidates need to be public housing residents. There are no additional requirements. Case managers feel that a lot of the candidates are not suitable for the program due to different reasons. Many of them, without admitting it, are not interested in achieving the goals of self sufficiency and join the program just to receive assistance with childcare, transportation and counseling. Some of the candidates are not capable of working towards self sufficiency either because they have a learning disability, too many mental health issues or just need to be in a basic literacy program before coming to ROSS. As a result, case managers spend a lot of time helping the participants

with social security issues, medical problems and things that the program is not designed to do. Case managers are convinced that if a serious assessment could be done before the intake and if participation was determined according to that, the program would be more effective as it would be serving those who really need the program and those who could benefit from it. At this point the program can not reject applicants and anybody can enter the program.

In the beginning of the program a case manager conducts an orientation with each participant. During the orientation a participant is given a packet of all the services and resources provided by the program, and is thoroughly informed about all the components of the program. Case managers note, that because the participants are involved in many different social programs, they often get confused about what is available where. Case managers have to constantly remind participants about what is available. In the very beginning of the process case managers develop individual self sufficiency plans for each participant where they set goals that the participants have to reach. If the participants do not meet their goals by the established deadline, they face no consequences, meaning that they can stay in the program even if they are never accomplishing any of their goals.

According to the case managers, the system of rules in the program needs to be stricter. Participants should be held to a standard and work hard towards the accomplishment of their goals. As case managers say, participants need to give something in return and not just demand services. Participants promise to do a lot of things but most of the time they do not and the case managers can not make them do things. Participants miss job interviews, appointments, training. Sometimes they do not pick up their phones when case managers call to remind them about the upcoming events. Some of the participants complain about having to do their eight hours of

community service which is a condition of staying in public housing. Participants' motivation is one of the biggest problems case managers deal with.

Dishonesty of the participants is another problem that the case managers mentioned. Case managers say that some participants try to avoid the rules of the program. Sometimes they do not report to case managers when they lose jobs, in the meanwhile continuing to use childcare. There were cases when participants got evicted from public housing and still kept using ROSS support services. They use bus tickets given to them to search for employment to go shopping. Participants also say that they often do not receive announcements about trainings or other upcoming events and that is why do not attend them. To cover themselves, case managers learned to always put a copy of all flyers and announcements sent to the participants into their case files.

Although a lot of the participants come to the program because they want to use childcare and are not interested in job readiness or educational assistance, some come for a reason and make significant progress. One client graduated from the program in one year. She received employment, maintained it, bought a car and was able to move out of public housing. There are some participants who are accomplishing their goals and succeed. Some of the clients actively use counseling and learn how to deal with anger management which helps them maintain employment. This proves that the program can work for those who want to make progress.

Case managers were also asked about their case load. Both case managers have a case load of more than twenty clients. They shared that it is a heavy case load taking into consideration how much time they have to devote to each client. Case managers have to do a lot of home visits because participants often do not pick up the phone. On average, each home visit takes from two to four hours. Managers spend a lot of time doing things like reading applications

for their clients because of their illiteracy. A lot of the participants ask managers to transport them to their job search places, childcare and school, but due to time limitations case managers can not do these things. Case managers also worry that they are not being able to do intensive enough follow up on each case because there are only two of them and the load of work is heavy.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The study revealed very high overall satisfaction with the ROSS program and its case managers among the participants. Seventy percent of the participants strongly agree and twenty-nine agree that they are very satisfied with the services provided by ROSS. Participants are well aware of the services provided. They actively use support services like childcare, transportation and life skills training and find them very useful. Training services of job readiness, educational assistance and homeownership training are barely used by the participants when they are the most important services to utilize in order to achieve the goals of self sufficiency. Twenty-eight percent of the participants respond that they do not need job readiness training and thirty-eight percent say that they do not need educational assistance. It is important to mention here that half of the participants have less than a high school diploma therefore they could definitely benefit from more training.

The research shows that participants of the program are not actively moving towards achieving self sufficiency. Focus group revealed that some of the participants do not know what the goals of the program are and think that ROSS is for the people who need help. Participants say that problems at home, care for their children, lack of transportation and support from the father of their children are the most important reasons why they are not able to look for jobs or maintain employment.

According to the case managers, ROSS is a good program for people who are motivated to succeed and work hard towards self sufficiency. There are some people who graduated from the program after fully accomplishing all their goals. Some participants benefit from counseling services and learn how to manage their behavior. But the majority of the participants come to ROSS because they want to use childcare, transportation assistance and help of the case managers. This totally coincides with the results obtained from the surveys. A lot of the participants are not suitable for the program due to mental limitations and lack of desire to achieve self sufficiency and move out of public housing.

From the findings of the survey, focus group comments and interview answers, the following recommendations can be made to improve the ROSS program:

1. Conduct screenings and assessments of applicants before they get admitted to the program. Make participation exclusive for those who are able to achieve self sufficiency and truly desire to do so.
2. Establish requirements for the participants to stay active in the program. Standards and deadlines should be established for how and in what time limit the participants can accomplish certain goals.
3. Establish rules for participation in the key training services. Failure to attend trainings should result in termination of services.

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**- APPENDIX A -**

**Case Manager's Introductory Speech at the Meeting with the ROSS Participant before the survey is administered.**

Good Afternoon!

Thank you very much for coming today. Let me tell you why I wanted to meet with you today. As you know, ROSS program has existed for over a year now. It is time for us to evaluate what the program is doing right and what it is doing wrong. Our organization is conducting a research to find out if you are aware of all the services ROSS provides, if you use them and what you think about them. I am about to give you a survey that I would like you to fill out. Information that we get from your surveys will help the ROSS program provide you with better services and address your needs better. It is also very important for funding purposes.

Your answers will be kept confidential. The survey consists of 4 sections. Each section provides you with directions on what to do. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask and I will assist you with all of them. Upon finishing, please, put the survey in the attached envelope, seal it and return it to me.

Please, take your time and thank you very much again.

Your answers are very valuable to us.

**- APPENDIX B -**

**ROSS PROGRAM PARTICIPANT SURVEY**

## *ROSS Program Participant Survey*

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**Dear Ross Participant,**

**The purpose of this survey is to assess your experience and satisfaction with the ROSS services. Please, answer the following questions by following special instructions in each section. Return the survey by placing it in the attached envelope and giving it to the researcher. Your participation in this survey is voluntary. All answers are confidential. Thank you for your participation.**

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**1. General Information** – Listed below are some general statements concerning the Ross Program. For each statement, please tell me if you **1- Strongly Disagree**, **2 – Disagree**, **3 - Neither Disagree or Agree**, **4 – Agree**, or **5 - Strongly Agree** with the statement by circling the appropriate number by each statement.

**1- Strongly Disagree   2 – Disagree   3 - Neither Disagree or Agree   4 – Agree   5 - Strongly Agree**

A.) The ROSS Program provided me with necessary services to move towards economic independence.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
B.)The ROSS Program provided me with enough support services to be able to acquire employment.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
C.)The ROSS Program provided me with enough training to be able to acquire employment.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
D.)My participation in the ROSS program helped me strengthen my life skills.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
E.) My participation in the ROSS program helped me strengthen my family skills.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
F.) Overall, I am very satisfied with the services provided by ROSS.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

## **2. Assessment of Program Components**

The purpose of this section is to assess your awareness of particular programs provided by ROSS. We also want to know if you use the programs and if you find them useful. Please, circle the number that applies to you

**Are you aware of the following program components? If yes, are you using them or have you ever used them?**

Program Component/Service	Are aware of this service?		If you are aware of this service, are you currently using it or have you used it?		
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Don't Need
A. Childcare	1	2	3	4	5
B. Transportation assistance (bus tickets)	1	2	3	4	5
C. Life Skills Training	1	2	3	4	5
D. Job Readiness Training	1	2	3	4	5
E. Educational Assistance	1	2	3	4	5
F. Homeownership Training	1	2	3	4	5
G. Counseling	1	2	3	4	5

**If you have been using these programs and services, how do you rate their usefulness? Please, circle the number that applies to you.**

Program Component	Not at All Useful	Not very Useful	Somewhat Useful	Very Useful	Do not Use
A. Childcare	1	2	3	4	5
B. Transportation assistance (bus tickets)	1	2	3	4	5
C. Life Skills Training	1	2	3	4	5
D. Job Readiness Training	1	2	3	4	5
E. Educational Assistance	1	2	3	4	5
F. Homeownership Training	1	2	3	4	5
G. Counseling	1	2	3	4	5

**3. Case Management Assessment.** For this section please read the questions and select from the list of responses to the right one at a time. Decide how well each statement describes what you have experienced while working with the ROSS Case Manager.

**1 - Strongly Disagree    2- Disagree    3 - Neutral    4 - Agree    5 - Strongly Agree**

A. My case manager helped me to better understand the requirements of the ROSS program	1	2	3	4	5
B. My case manager helped me to better understand all the services and opportunities provided by ROSS	1	2	3	4	5
C. My case manager is very knowledgeable about the types of services that are available in the community to help me achieve self sufficiency	1	2	3	4	5
D. My case manager helped me to understand the social assistance programs and benefits that I might be qualified for	1	2	3	4	5
E. My case manager is knowledgeable about human behavior	1	2	3	4	5
F. The number of home visits was about right	1	2	3	4	5
G. When I ran into problems my case manager was easily accessible	1	2	3	4	5
H. When I ran into problems my case manager knew what agencies to contact to help me	1	2	3	4	5
I. My case manager always followed up on my case	1	2	3	4	5
J. I have a strong and supportive relationship with my case manager	1	2	3	4	5
K. Overall, the services of my case manager were effective and helpful in helping me make progress toward self sufficiency	1	2	3	4	5

**4. Participant Information.** Please circle the number by the appropriate response or fill in the blanks

5. How did you find out about ROSS? (Please, circle all that apply)

- |                               |                                |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Housing Authority Referral | 4. Public Housing Announcement |
| 2. Family Y Day Care Center   | 5. From a Case Manager         |
| 3. From a ROSS Participant    | 6. Other (specify):_____       |

6. How long have you been a participant of the ROSS program?

1. 1-3 months
2. 4-6 months
3. 7-9 months
4. 10-12 months
5. More than 12 months

7. Are you currently employed?

1. Yes (if yes, please answer questions 8 and 9)
2. No (if no, please, proceed to question 10)

8. About how many hours a week do you work?

1. Less than 15 hours
2. 16-20 hours
3. 21-35 hours
4. 36 or more hours

9. What is your current annual income?

1. Below \$4,999
2. \$5,000 to \$14,999
3. \$15,000 to \$25,000
4. More than \$25,000

10. What is your gender?

1. Male
2. Female

11. What is your marital status?  
(please, circle only one number)

1. Single/Never married
2. Single/Divorced
3. Married
4. Separated

12. How many children do you have in your household?

1. None
2. 1-3
3. 4-6
4. 7-9
5. Other (specify):\_\_\_\_\_

13. What is your ethnic background?

1. Black
2. White/Caucasian
3. Hispanic
4. Other (specify):\_\_\_\_\_

14. What is your educational background?

1. High School Diploma
2. GED
3. Other (specify)\_\_\_\_\_

- APPENDIX C -

**ROSS PARTICIPANT FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT**

I. Introduction

A. Welcome and introductions

B. Purpose of the focus group

1. Briefly discuss the purpose of this focus group, its goals and objectives
2. Discuss how findings will be used and confidentiality

II. Discussion of Rules

A. Participation is voluntary

B. Length of the meeting/ Refreshments

C. Encourage Participation. Inform that all answers will be used to improve the program.

D. Ask the participants to be honest, respect opinions of others and permit the moderator to change the topic.

III. Identifying reasons why participants joined the ROSS program and their awareness of the goals of the program

A. What made you become the participant of the ROSS program?

B. How long have you been a participant?

C. Do you know what the goals of the program are?

D. Do you want to achieve self sufficiency and move out of the public housing?

IV. Identifying the level of program awareness and usage among the participants

A. Surveys that participants filled out revealed that they are well aware of the services that the program provides.

Are you aware of the childcare, transportation assistance, educational assistance, counseling, homeownership training, job readiness training and life skills training?

If not, why?

- B. The survey results revealed that childcare, life skills training and transportation assistance are the most used services. A lot of the participants said that they either did not need the rest of the services or just did not use them.

What services do you use? Why? If you are not using educational assistance, counseling, homeownership training, job readiness training altogether or one of them, why? If you are not using these services, how are you going to achieve self sufficiency?

V. Identifying the level of effectiveness of the program services

- A. How would you rate the trainings that you receive? Are they good enough to help you achieve the goals of the program?
- B. What do you think about the support services like child care, transportation, etc.? Do they help when you look for jobs or when you already have a job?

VI. Identifying the level of satisfaction with case managers

Do you feel your case managers know enough to be able to help you? Do they always follow up on your case? Do they understand your problems? Do they refer you to the right services and agencies?

VII. Identifying participants' potential obstacles to achieving self sufficiency and the goals of the program.

Are there any obstacles in your life that prevent you from getting employment and keeping it? Could you tell in more detail about the problems that keep you from achieving the goals of the program and moving out of the public housing?

VIII. Identifying pros and cons of the program.

- A. Feel free to tell about all the good sides of the program and what it does for you.
- B. Feel free to tell about all the negative sides of the program and its limitations.

IX. Asking for suggestions on improvement and changes.

Feel free to talk about any improvements or changes that need to be done in the program.

**- APPENDIX D -****Focus Group Recorder's Form**

## GROUP INFORMATION:

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ Location \_\_\_\_\_

Recorder \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Participants \_\_\_\_\_ Total Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

Approximate Age Range \_\_\_\_\_

Introduction and Opening Statements; Record general reactions of the group:

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List topics of general concern:

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Summarize responses, including body language, for each question. Remember to write down "quotable quotes". Use back of sheets if necessary.

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- APPENDIX E -

**Questions to the interview with the case managers of the ROSS program**

1. What is the official intake process to the program? Are there any requirements that the applicant has to meet to become a participant? Do you do any assessments or screenings to make sure that applicants are suitable for the program?
2. Once the participants are in the program, do you conduct an assessment of their needs and work out individual plans with goals? Do you conduct an orientation and inform them about all the services available to them?
3. When setting goals and plans of action for the participants, do you set deadlines for when they need to complete certain tasks and achieve certain goals? If they don't meet their deadlines, are there any consequences for them? Do they risk losing their place in their program?
4. The results of the survey administered to the participants of ROSS showed that they are well aware of the services available to them. The results also revealed that the participants are using childcare, transportation assistance and life skills training a lot, but are not using the most important services like job readiness and educational assistance. Why do you think this happens? What's the problem here? Please, tell in details.
5. How many people are making progress in your program? What's the key to their success?
6. How many people are not making any progress? Why? Please, tell in details.
7. How many clients do you have on your case load? Do you have enough time and resources to effectively help all your clients?
8. Tell me about positive and negative parts of the program. What works and what does not work? What is the biggest problem of this program? What needs to be changed , added?

**- APPENDIX F -****Interview Recorder's Form**

Interviewee Information:

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ Location \_\_\_\_\_

Recorder \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Participants \_\_\_\_\_ Total Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

Approximate Age Range \_\_\_\_\_

Introduction and Opening Statements; Record general reactions of the interviewees:

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List topics of general concern:

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Summarize responses, including body language, for each question. Remember to write down "quotable quotes". Use back of sheets if necessary.

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