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Honors Composition

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Springfield Supportive Living Mental Health Services

**Overview of the Nonprofit:**

For our service learning project this semester, we interviewed and will volunteer for Springfield Supportive Living in Springfield, Illinois. Springfield Supportive Living is approximately a 10 to 15-minute drive from the University of Illinois at Springfield campus. Unfortunately, due to the restrictions imposed on me by the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic, I was unable to see their facility, however, their Sales and Marketing Director, Jennifer Buhlig, was very open to an interview and is willing to allow me to write letters to their residents. According to Jennifer Buhlig, Springfield Supportive Living was established in 2005 and aims to create “the next best place to home” by providing assisted living services for geriatric patients (Buhlig). The individual services and events that Springfield Supportive Living provides include bingo nights, trivia competitions, outdoor visits, aftercare, transportation, 24-hour nursing staff, routine health check-ups, and more (Buhlig). All of these activities support Springfield Supportive Living’s mission statement indicated on their website, which is to provide “a new way of life for seniors.” The staff members of Springfield Supportive Living are very dedicated to ensure the health, safety, and happiness of the geriatric patients they serve.

**Identified Need:**

Although Springfield Supportive Living is an excellent organization on the whole, I have identified that support for the mental health of their geriatric patients could be improved. My best and most affordable recommendation would be to hire a clinical geriatric counselor to provide patients with weekly virtual group therapy. During our interview with Jennifer Buhlig, we became more cognizant of the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has been having on the mental health of individual people, in particular geriatric patients that are receiving assisted living or nursing home services. One of the main reasons why the mental health of geriatric patients has been negatively affected is because they are no longer able to be visited by friends and family. Major depressive disorder is the most common psychiatric disease in geriatric patients (Parkar) with one in four older adults suffering from generalized anxiety disorder or major depressive disorder during the COVID-19 pandemic (Koma et al.). In addition, the quarantines have also negatively affected the mental health of patients (Buhlig). Inevitably, Springfield Supportive Living must continue to evolve rapidly and implement new protocols upon short notice as COVID-19 continues to affect the lives of their clients. Geriatric patients already have a lot of health problems due to the inevitable ageing process (Parkar). Adding this pandemic to everything they had to deal with before is going to make the elderly more mentally unhealthy than ever before. Springfield Supportive Living has made attempts to improve mental health of its geriatric patients via various virtual and remote events. In the absence of physical visits by family members, virtual group therapy can help alleviate the struggles that residents are experiencing.

**Solution:**

A potential solution for combating the deteriorating mental health of geriatric patients receiving assisted living services from Springfield Supportive Living would be having a staff member specifically trained for mental health support, such as a clinical geriatric counselor. This requires Springfield Supportive Living to make an investment in their clients. Springfield Supportive Living would have to employ a trained mental health professional. This means that Springfield Supportive Living must look into all of the options before deciding on what exactly they will do. Having a specially trained mental health professional speak with geriatric patients at their facility would be very beneficial. Having a clinical geriatric counselor in particular would allow for effective talk therapy, and they can even bring in emotional support animals to be utilized to help mitigate the emotional strain that the geriatric patients undergo. Utilizing different types of therapy may also be worth considering to accommodate everyone with their unique personalities. Additionally, feedback can be obtained from the geriatric patients living in the Springfield Supportive Living assisted living facility to further enhance mental health services. Although it can sometimes be very inconvenient, attempting different therapy styles may be the most effective approach to implementing mental health services that will meet the needs of patients.

**Budget:**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Estimated expenses for mental health support at Springfield Supportive Living** | | | |
| Number of residents | Hours of therapy/ counseling per week | Annual hours of therapy/ counseling per year | Cost of therapy/ counseling per hour in dollars | Total Annual Cost |
| 90 residents | 1 hour per week | 52 hours per year | $46 per hour | $2392 per year |

**Budget Report:**

Shown above is a table that contains all of the financial estimates pertaining to the expenditures that Springfield Supportive Living will have to make to appropriately address the mental health needs of their geriatric patients. Details pertaining to the revenue of Springfield Supportive Living has not been obtained in our interview. On November 16, 2020, Buhlig indicated that there were 90 residents living at Springfield Supportive Living. Springfield Supportive Living can hire a clinical geriatric counselor that can hold one-hour group therapy sessions every week. According to Zip Recruiter, the average cost of clinical geriatric counseling services is approximately $46/hour in the Springfield Illinois area. This will mean a total of 52 hours of group therapy per year, which will cost Springfield Supportive Living approximately $2392 annually. This will increase customer satisfaction and thus increase revenue which will allow for this service to pay for itself and become profitable.

**Timeline:**

Once a specially trained mental health professional is hired, they are expected to provide one-hour group therapy sessions every week, communicate with other staff members, and maintain healthy relationships with the residents at Springfield Supportive Living. Assuming that everything runs smoothly and that Springfield Supportive Living has sufficient funds to initiate this plan of action, I estimate that it would take approximately 10 to 12 weeks to hire a mental health professional. This could first start with job postings on websites such as Indeed, Glassdoor, Zip Recruiter or through affiliated medical centers, which should take between one and two days. Second, about five to ten applicants would be interviewed, which will most likely take three to five weeks. Third, those interviews would be reviewed and that would most likely take about four weeks. Fourth, on-the-job training would be provided to the newly hired clinical geriatric counselor to facilitate their adjustment to Springfield Supportive Living as well as get the geriatric patients to become accustomed to their presence and ultimately comfortable with them. On-the-job training should take about three weeks.

**Outline of Benefits:**

The benefits of integrating a specially trained mental health professional into the Springfield Supportive Living team would immense, both for the geriatric patients and for the stakeholders of this assisted living company. Given that a reasonable strategy is implemented in a flexible manner, mental health support within Springfield Supportive Living is poised to tremendously improve the mental health outcomes of geriatric patients under their care. Furthermore, good mental health correlates with better biochemical and physiological health (Ohrnberger et al.). A person cannot be whole and therefore cannot be healthy if they are suffering from excessive mental health problems. Alleviating these mental health problems will make the geriatric patients at Springfield Supportive Living much happier and healthier. Upon investigating online, I have found that many assisted living facilities are lacking in regards to adequate mental health support and services, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Grabowski et al.). It is imperative that some measures are taken to mitigate the mental health ramifications of ageing and the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure the best service possible to the clients of Springfield Supportive Living. The time has come for the geriatric patients under the care Springfield Supportive Living to break the depressing shackles of mental health disorders and freely enjoy the last years of their life.

Works Cited

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