Presentation Title: Community Service Action Teams (CoSAT) Program

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I. Formative Evaluation – Planning

The pre-event formative evaluation was a geographic, qualitative smoke-alarm targeting. We knew the targeted homes were older and in low-income areas. The mobile home parks targeted exist outside city limits which mean fewer resources are available to these residents. The age of homes and their place in a resource-desert meant that very few of these homes would have working alarms. Low-income households often lack the means to get these without aid.

This pre-event evaluation identified nine parks, comprising 266 homes. During these events, social work students from Colorado State University's School of Social Work conducted an informal, in-person assessment of the residents in the home. Their task was to identify needs the resident has, beyond smoke alarms. Rather than applying a limiting model to this conversation, we allowed the residents to self-identify their biggest need(s). This second formative evaluation guided our follow-up efforts with these residents.

II. Process Evaluation – Implementation

The Community Service Action Teams (CoSAT) program responds to needs identified by the community. As such, it is undergoing constant evaluation. As needs come from the community, we identify local resources to meet them. Some identified needs included winter clothing, food assistance, utility assistance, and employment help. These resources are blended into future CoSAT events, resulting in an ever-growing resource-bank.

All CoSAT members are debriefed after each event to guide future events. They identified a need for more in-home resources. At the first event, they were given a home-assessment form to get basic contact information and record needs. As our resource bank grew, CoSAT teams now carry backpacks of brochures and other materials.

III. Impact Evaluation – Short-Term Results

The impact of this program can be measured in terms of the number of alarms installed, the number of needs identified and met, and the number of hazards identified and mitigated.
- 113 out of 266 homes were outfitted with working smoke and CO carbon monoxide alarms.

- Thirty-six other needs were identified. Winter clothing and heating assistance was a recurring concern due to a recent cold snap. Twenty-four of these needs were followed up with and resolved so far. The needs that we haven't met yet are mostly related to larger home renovations or need for employment.

- Several local hazards were mitigated. The most noticeable was a clean-up event scheduled that was hosted in response to a fire in one of the targeted parks. This clean-up resulted in almost 5,000 pounds of fuels – think abandoned couches, tree branches, and trash – being removed from in and around people's homes. These efforts will slow fire growth and ensure greater access for firefighters between homes (an issue in the aforementioned fire.)

IV. Outcome Evaluation – Long-Term Results

CoSAT targets small pockets of neglected residents. To deal with this small sample size; CoSAT uses a concept of micro-communities, which emphasizes community perceptions in addition to call data. The strong anecdotal evidence from the communities is that this program made them feel safer in their homes, increased their knowledge, and built their trust in the fire department. CoSAT volunteers reported all feedback.

The call data, although limited, supports the anecdotal data. 12.4% of homes canvassed made an emergency call in the 150 days after a CoSAT event and 10% of those homes suffered a fire. Of homes that used CoSAT services, only 1.1% made an emergency call and zero of those were fires.

Recommendations for others:

This model is great if you've got a network of local resources built and dedicated, skilled volunteers. It may seem daunting to take on any requests people have, it is surprisingly easy once you start looking. Communities do not expect miracles, but they're very appreciative of any assistance they get.

Conclusions:

The CoSAT model capitalizes on the pairing of fire safety with broader social service efforts. By stretching the traditional 'blitz' model into a 'case-management' model, the fire service can build greater trust. Integrating other services into the traditional smoke alarm model is a force multiplier which allows the fire service to empower residents and make communities safer for both residents and first responders.