

A Homeless Night

One Night, No Home, One Cause



Research Report

Executive Summary

Asheville has encountered many issues in homelessness in the city. Many reasons for homelessness have included drug/alcohol abuse and increasing mental illness. Because of this, Asheville needed a solution. The Western Carolina Rescue Mission, the biggest mission in Western North Carolina, has been on the scene for awhile and is putting a large dent into homelessness. The biggest problem we face now is the awareness young people have about homelessness. The WCRM is putting on an event in late April to give students an opportunity to experience and learn about homelessness in Asheville. A Homeless Night gives students a first hand experience of what homelessness is really like. The mission hopes this event will be a great one for years to come. Students should be not only aware of homelessness, but active in their communities while fighting homelessness.



Task

WCRM is partnering with communication students at Western Carolina University to recreate the homelessness awareness and simulation "My Night In A Box" program. Students will plan, promote, and execute a new "My Night In A Box" style event to combine youth groups from various churches in Asheville and the surrounding areas and raise money for the mission.

About Western Carolina Rescue Ministries



Since 1981, Western Carolina Rescue Ministries, a non-profit running on donations, has been providing services in Jesus' name to the homeless. Each day three free meals are provided in addition to a clothing closet, free public showers, and a medical clinic - no questions asked to anyone who comes to WCRM. The Rescue Mission also provides shelter each night to anyone who doesn't have a safe place to stay.

In addition, WCRM serves the homeless population of the Asheville area through a variety of programs including:

- Abba's Love - A 12 month womens restoration program
- Abba's House - A 18 month recovery program for pregnant mothers
- Joshua Plan - A life plan creation program for both men and women
- Success Academy - Creates a vision of God's purpose in each participants life
- 12-month drug and alcohol recovery programs for both men and women

In 2017 alone, WCRM provided 33,300 nights of safe shelter, served 111,436 hot meals, provided 8,275 articles of clothing, and distributed 2,616 family food boxes (a partnership with Manna Food Bank) to individuals in need.

Situation Analysis

Homelessness:

According to the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, it is currently estimated that each year 2.5 to 3.5 million Americans sleep in shelters, transitional housing, and in public places (Homelessness, n.d.). Homelessness is a serious problem in the United States and there are many reasons behind it, the main being that homelessness is a result of insufficient income and a lack of affordable housing. Americans struggle to afford housing because after paying for their rent and utilities, they end up with only half of their income left to pay for necessities like food, medicine, transportation, and childcare.

Shelters across the United States are trying to combat this issue though, offering housing, providing meals, clothing, and other necessities to people who can't afford to buy it themselves. However, the amount of shelters and supplies available simply aren't enough to help every person who is homeless, or on the verge of becoming homeless.

Young People and Homelessness:

People who are homeless are misunderstood by people that lack an interest to learn their story, especially young people. According to Journal of Youth Studies, young people are not educated about the process by which people become homeless, and the seriousness of the issue. Many young people see homelessness as a choice (Barker, 2016). These types of assumptions don't take into consideration the situation of homelessness.

Simulation events that put people into the perspective of a person dealing with homelessness are extremely beneficial in combating the issue of misunderstanding. These events give individuals, especially youth, a real experience of being homeless, From going without a bed, to not getting a full meal or wearing ill-fitting clothing. These events provide awareness of perspective, and change beliefs to a understanding that homelessness isn't a choice, but a result of a series of unfortunate events (Barker, 2016).

Youth Groups:

In the past, there has only been one youth group involved with the “My Night in a Box” event, a group associated with Lake Hills Church. In addition to limited attendance, no funds were raised for the Rescue Mission.

Most youth groups are actively seeking activities like homeless simulation events to have their participants be apart of. Youth Pastors usually call upon groups like the Rescue Mission to set up times and places for events and involvement opportunities.

The age range for the participants in these youth groups is usually anywhere from 12-18 years old. With this being said, this demographic needs entertainment and fun to keep their focus and have them reach the learning objectives of events.

Social Media:

Social media has evolved into a mobile instrument for people of all ages. Social media in the 21st century has become more important and people depend on the instant communication. The majority of young people in America have cell phones, which give people the access to locate and educate themselves on a variety of topics. Studies show that the popular twitter and instagram are generally used by ages 15-30. While facebook is usually used by the older crowd of people, because of it’s simple mechanics. At Western Carolina Rescue Mission the majority of people that donate or volunteer are dominantly facebook users. The WNC mission has not evolved to the popular twitter or instagram, which limits their access to the younger groups of people. Social Media expansion has given many non-profit organizations like WNC a chance to grow and evolve.

Social Media:

Most of the Rescue Mission’s donors and supporters are elderly. With the reality that their life may not be much longer, the Rescue Mission is concerned about their donation base disappearing. The Rescue Mission needs to attract younger donors because it increases the variety of people they see volunteering.

Previous "My Night in a Box" Event:

The previous "My Night in a Box" put on by the Western North Carolina Rescue Mission was regarded unsuccessful because of the lack of participation and donations gathered. Because of this, the event was ineffective for its purpose, which is to raise awareness about the homelessness issue faced by many individuals in Western North Carolina (and across the nation) while raising donations for the Rescue Mission so that they may continue their work.

Donors to the organization are what keeps it up and running. With an aging donor and volunteer pool, the Rescue Mission needs events like these to build relationships with youth. When putting on the "My Night in a Box" event, the Rescue Mission hoped to create future donors within the younger generation, while helping them realize the reality of homelessness.

Previous Communication Efforts:

The Western Carolina Rescue Mission currently has a Facebook, Twitter, and a website. Their Facebook page is active and posts weekly, and is used as one of the main ways they stay connected with churches, donors, and their community of volunteers. Their Twitter page has not been a huge success for them, and is not very active.

The Rescue Mission hopes to soon update their current website and Twitter, as well as create an Instagram page to connect with a younger demographic and spark interest in events.

The Rescue Mission also has good media connections with groups such as News 13 who have helped to promote events.

Other Homelessness Simulation Events:

Other homeless simulation events are being done all over the country. Hope Harbor does an event where they have students between 8th grade and 12th grade spend twelve hours in a box in a designated location, and require adult supervision. Homelessness Awareness Week proposes an idea every year for people to do a similar event starting at 7pm until 7am, having people stay on a busy street where a lot of people can see them (Event idea: hold a sleepout, 2016). Loveworks Leadership Inc. also planned an event that has students spend an entire night in an actual cardboard box. (Poverty Simulations, 2018)

Events like these are very different than the missions previous “My Night in a Box” event. The Mission’s event focuses on church youth groups, whereas the other events usually just focus on youth. Another difference is that these groups constructed advertisements such as brochures and signs in order to raise awareness about the event.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths:

WCRM exceeds expectations of other nonprofit organizations. While many organizations lack the amount of dedication and manpower needed toward helping people, this program is quite the opposite. WCRM has long-time committed individuals and local businesses that donate items or time to the facility in hopes of helping others get back on their feet.

These donors give the organization a chance to assist the homeless with living opportunities as well as the resources necessary to everyday life.

WCRM takes pride in their strong programming meant to rebuild the lives of the homeless, and help them out of their various struggles. The various programs run by WCRM address a number of concerns, and have helped many people get back on their feet.

WCRM's staff is the building blocks toward changing people’s lives. The process to help others in need begins with the strength in the staff of this organization, and their drive to help others out of the kindness of their hearts. Multiple doctors, pastors, and other individuals provide some type of service in the mission each week.



Weaknesses:

WCRM is a non-profit organization. Non-profit organizations only gain consistent funds through donations from members of their community. While the mission has a wealth of donors, both in terms of businesses and individuals, most of the Rescue Missions donors are aging elderly individuals. This means in the future, if new and younger donors aren't acquired, the mission may run out of money and resources.

WCRM also lacks a significant online presence. While a active Facebook page, which is popular and successful with their older donors and audience, they do not use Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, or any of the popular up and coming social media sites and applications, which are a primary source for reaching younger audiences.

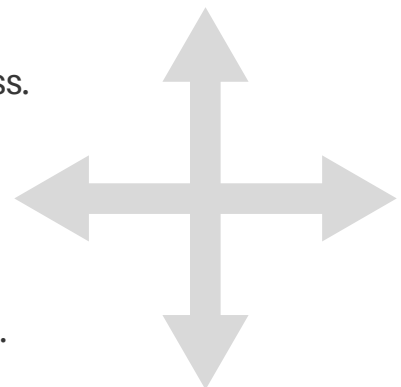
WCRM does have a website, but it is in need of a major upgrade to capture more interest, and share more information about what the mission is doing to service its cause.



Opportunities:

WCRM's new Director of Development, Jessica May has a new creative take on event planning for the organization, which provides an opportunity for new and different events . WCRM seeks to increase attendance and awareness, using new and more interesting events to do so. Recently, May hosted a successful Gala that garnered large attendance and raised a large amount of donations for the mission. With a new Director of Development at the helm, WCRM hopes to continue hosting unique events that both spread awareness about homelessness, and gather much needed donations so that WCRM can keep doing what they do.

Opportunity is rich for youth involvement and awareness. If more young people know about WCRM, volunteer involvement has every opportunity to grow and become more diverse. As mentioned, The current donor and volunteer pool is aging, and in need of youth involvement.



Threats:

WCRM faces an aging and shrinking donor base. As donors age and pass, the WCRM is losing its base for supplies and money that help them continue their mission of serving the homeless.

In addition to an aging and shrinking donor base, from 2016 to 2017 the donation of articles of clothing has decreased. In 2016 about 11,520 articles of clothing were obtained and handed out, and in 2017 that number dropped to 8,275.



CORE PROBLEM/ OPPORTUNITY

The current format of the My Night In A Box offers an opportunity for an update to the program to encourage participation, and conduct the event on a much larger scale. The event will be used to maximize community involvement while increasing donations to WCRM, gathering money that is desperately needed. Bringing together community ministries in an event like this to recognize and understand the homelessness problem facing the Western North Carolina Region increases awareness and promotes action, helping raise money while making others aware of a non-profit in their area in need of help.



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Strategies & Tactics

Objective #1:

To have an effect on the action of individuals ages 12-18 years old in youth groups in Asheville and the surrounding area, specifically to have them gather donations from friends, family, and congregation members for WCRM. (\$_____ total raised by event day)

Strategy:

Create sponsor donation requirement for the A Homeless Night event

Tactics:

- 1.) Create and distribute a donor card to each youth attending the event. Donor card should include donors name and amount of donation (minimum \$10).
- 2.) Create suggestion list for youth to reference to help them ask family, friends, and congregation members for donations.

Objective #2:

To have an effect on the action of individuals ages 12-18 years old in youth groups in Asheville and the surrounding area, specifically to gain the attendance of youth groups to A Homeless Night, put on by WCRM. (Have _____ youth groups attend)

Strategy:

Invite Asheville and surrounding area youth groups to the A Homeless Night event.

Tactics:

- 1.) Compile a list of potential youth groups in the surrounding area from WCRM resources such as lists of previous donors/churches affiliated with the ministries.
- 2.) Email youth pastors/leaders about the A Homeless Night event, inviting them and their youth to attend. Include promotional video and link to event website for more information.
- 3.) Request RSVP from youth groups including name of youth group and leader contact information, as well as number of youth wanting to attend.

Objective #3:

To have an effect on the awareness of individuals ages 12-18 years old in youth groups in Asheville and the surrounding area, specifically for these individuals to gain awareness of about the A Homeless Night event put on by WCRM, including what it is and when it is being held. (Reach _____ youth groups between _____ and _____ [beginning 5-6 months before event date])

Strategy:

Provide promotional materials to youth pastors/leaders and or youth to use to learn about event.

Tactics:

- 1.) Create promotional video sharing the stories of homeless individuals at WCRM, and what youth attending an event like this means to the homeless population.
- 2.) Create website or website tab for event that features a promotional video, an explanation of the event and its purpose, information about WCRM's involvement, contact information, and a event outline/schedule that details all activities of the event as well as information to request an event packet for other groups to host their own A Homeless Night event.
- 3.) Distribute video and website in emails to youth pastors/leaders (see above objective), and on the Facebook page and/or other social media for WCRM.

Objective #5:

To have an effect on the awareness of individuals ages 12-18 years old in youth groups in the Asheville and surrounding area, specifically to increase their knowledge of the opportunity to give money and other items to the WCRM. (Distribute donation information to at least _____ participants)

Strategy:

Discuss needs of WCRM and common household items that youth may find extra of in their own homes that their families can then donate at the A Homeless Night event

Tactics:

- 1.) Compose and present a short presentation as a part of the event that discusses what items WCRM is in need of that people may not often think about, and may have extra of in their homes. Also discuss the importance of donations to WCRM (how they provide the mission the ability to serve the homeless).
- 2.) Discuss during part of the event the opportunities WCRM has for volunteering, and how that volunteering helps WCRM serve the homeless (it helps assist the homeless working in the shelter to help others in the shelter).
- 3.) Compose and distribute handout that covers the discussed information, detailing the items the mission needs, and how to donate them.

Objective #5:

To have an effect on the awareness of individuals ages 12-18 years old in youth groups in the Asheville and surrounding area, specifically to increase their knowledge of the homelessness problem in Asheville, and what they experience of homelessness is like (Have _____ attendees indicate that they learned something new and/or had their mindset changed).

Strategy:

Have youth participate in homeless experience activities, and educational sessions to teach them about the experience of homelessness.

Tactics:

- 1.) Form and execute an event consisting of homelessness experience activities, including but not limited to sleeping in a box for the night, and homelessness education activities, including but not limited to, a true/false game, small group discussions, a prayer walk, and a scavenger hunt.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Goal #1:

Raise money for the Western North Carolina Rescue Mission.

Objective #1:

To have an effect on the action of individuals ages 12-18 years old in youth groups in Asheville and the surrounding area, specifically to have them gather donations from friends, family, and congregation members for WCRM. (\$_____ total raised by event day).

Goal #2:

Bring together multiple youth groups in the Asheville and surrounding area to participate in a homelessness simulation event.

Objective #1:

To have an effect on the action of individuals ages 12-18 years old in youth groups in Asheville and the surrounding area, specifically to gain the attendance of youth groups to A Homeless Night, put on by WCRM. (Have _____ youth groups attend).

Objective #2:

To have an effect on the awareness of individuals ages 12-18 years old in youth groups in Asheville and the surrounding area, specifically for these individuals to gain awareness of about the A Homeless Night event put on by WCRM, including what it is and when it is being held. (Reach _____ youth groups between _____ and _____ [beginning 5-6 months before event date])

Goal #3:

Make perspective youth donors aware of opportunities to donate to the Western North Carolina Rescue Mission

Objective #1:

To have an effect on the awareness of individuals ages 12-18 years old in youth groups in the Asheville and surrounding area, specifically to increase their knowledge of the opportunity to give money and other items to the WCRM. (Distribute donation information to at least _____ participants)

Goal #4:

Make perspective youth aware of what homelessness is, what the experience of it is like, and how it affects Asheville and the surrounding areas to promote a better understanding of the issue.

Objective #1:

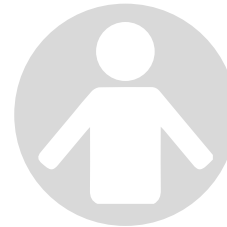
To have an effect on the awareness of individuals ages 12-18 years old in youth groups in the Asheville and surrounding area, specifically to increase their knowledge of the homelessness problem in Asheville, and what they experience of homelessness is like (Have _____ attendees indicate that they learned something new and/or had their mindset changed).

KEY PUBLICS & MESSAGES

Primary Audience: Youth Groups

Demographic & Psychographic Profile

The Demographic the Rescue Mission is working with are youth groups in the Asheville and surrounding cities in the Buncombe County area.



The age range “A Homeless Night” is primarily trying to attract is between ages 12 to 18. Youth groups in the area have high school and middle school students, which ranges from 7th to 12th grade. The middle school population in youth groups has grown extensively in the past 10 years. With younger parents attending church, youth groups are booming with middle schoolers.

Youth groups have a good gender mix of girls and boys. Most of the youth groups in this area have an even number of both genders.

The churches in Asheville area are almost exclusively of the southern baptist denomination. These churches hold more conservative christian traditions and place a key role on those traditions. They have a focus on issues such as homelessness as Jesus calls Christians to help “the least of these”. The traditions these churches align with are the same the mission does.

According to Patricia Snell of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society, “Youth ministers seek to make church relevant, to prevent youth from becoming bored with their religious participation, and keep youth interested in what happens at church by providing opportunities for recreation and entertainment,” these events help youth commit to doing good (Snell, 2009).

Youth groups think about what they can do for their community members, and what good they can do in the world, choosing activities like “A Homeless Night”. What is learned in church is carried over into activities and participation opportunities with the youth groups. Events provide not only fun, but also learning opportunities to carry over lessons from church into real life scenarios.

Motivating Self-Interests

When youth groups participate in “A Homeless Night” not only are they getting a taste of what being homeless is really like, all the money raised goes straight to the cause; Western Carolina Rescue Ministries. This event is both helping raise awareness of an issue of homelessness while raising money towards the local homeless community. This is a great opportunity for youth groups to be active in learning and helping their community. This helps youth groups with achieving both learning something and doing good by helping others. It keeps the youth active with fun activities while keeping them interested in church and religious participation.

Current relationship with WCRM and Homelessness

The previous simulation event “My Night in a Box” was unsuccessful for the Rescue Mission. Their attempts since to create youth awareness, involve nearby church youth groups, and raise money has been little to none. Previously, there was only one youth group in attendance to this type of event, and there was no money raised.

Jessica May, the Rescue Mission’s director of development and major donor officer, reports that she is not aware of any youth that donate to the Mission. However, they have some that volunteer at the Mission (generally high school seniors completing school requirement). Other than that, young children come in with their families during the holidays to help serve. Each about 25 individuals fall into those categories.

Therefore with the new simulation event “A Homeless Night” needs to create a constant youth base that care about the mission, donate to it, and serve at it.

Third party influentials and other opinion leaders

Pastors and youth leaders have great influence on the youth and how they act and what they participate in. Youth often follow the actions that the ones they look up to do. Youth leaders that are involved, donating, and care about the Rescue Mission are extremely important. They have a sphere of influence on them that nobody else has. Youth leaders choosing to involve their groups in the event will be essential to getting individuals to participate from different youth groups across the area.

What objectives will public help you accomplish?

Youth groups contribute to all of WCRM's objectives.

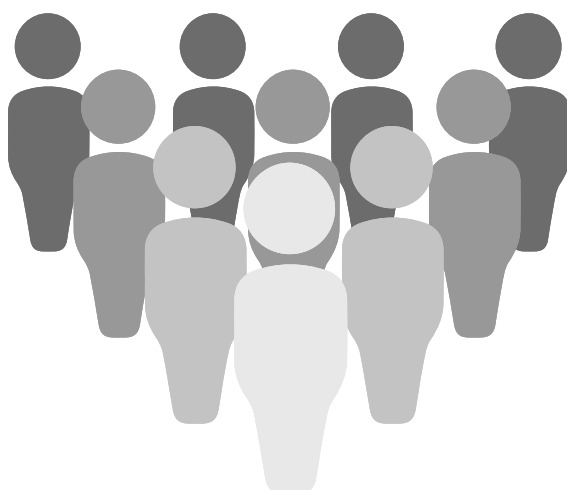
- To raise money for WCRM, attendance of youth groups is necessary.
- Bringing together 2-3 youth groups from the area to participate in this event is essential to holding the event. Getting the participation WCRM expects is reliant on youth groups being appealed to and choosing to attend the event.
- Making perspective youth donors aware of opportunities to donate, beings with participation in this event and the attendance of youth groups.

Action desired from youth groups:

The Western North Carolina Rescue Mission intends to both have youth groups attend the homelessness simulation event, and collect donations for the Rescue Mission.

How that action ties to a youth group's self interest:

In participating in "A Homeless Night" youth groups are collecting money for Western Carolina Rescue Ministries. The Ministry is raising money through having sponsors donate for a youth participant attending the event. By having youth collect donations, the youth groups get to have a fun, educational, and bonding experience within their groups while stepping into a homeless person's shoes and experiencing how they live. This helps them accomplish their goals of doing good in their community while also getting involved in their ministries and religious beliefs and traditions.



Primary and Secondary messages:

Primary Message: One night, no home, one cause. Youth who learn about homelessness encourage understanding.

Secondary Messages:

- Testimonial/interview style promo video from homeless individuals at WCRM about how youth activities like this make them feel
- A study of a similar simulation event, “The Poverty Simulation Project”, showed “When students are exposed to integrative teaching and learning experiences such as this, they start to understand the complexity of living in poverty” (Vandsburger, 2010)

Primary Message: Donations save lives, brighten futures, and help end homelessness.

Secondary Messages:

- Testimonial/interview style promo video from homeless individuals at WCRM about how youth activities like this make them feel
- A study of a similar simulation event, “The Poverty Simulation Project”, showed “When students are exposed to integrative teaching and learning experiences such as this, they start to understand the complexity of living in poverty” (Vandsburger, 2010)
- Shelters need help obtaining a variety of things like clothing, food, books/entertainment, bedding, toiletries, and much more. In 2017 The Western North Carolina Rescue Mission served approximately provided 33,300 nights of safe shelter, served 111,436 hot meals, provided 8,275 articles of clothing, and distributed 2,616 family food boxes (a partnership with Manna Food Bank) to individuals.

Third Party Influentials and how they will be used:

Leaders from the youth groups will be influential in telling their youth members about the event, the importance of it, and getting them to sign up to attend.

References

Emergency & long-term help for the homeless, hungry, & poor | Volunteers of America. (n.d.). Retrieved February 15, 2018, from <https://www.voa.org/homeless-people>

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Evaluation Plan

Objective #1:

To have an effect on the action of individuals ages 12-18 years old in youth groups in Asheville and the surrounding area, specifically to have them gather donations from friends, family, and congregation members for WCRM. (\$ _____ total raised by event day)

- Collect and use donation collection form and money from every attendee.
- Calculate total money raised, adding together each form, and counting all money turned in, ensuring the money turned in by each student matches the amount they indicated on their forms.
- Compare actual total to goal total to determine if goal was met.
- If goal was not met or was exceeded, revise goal total for next year in comparison to actual results and the average amount each student was able to raise.

Objective #2:

To have an effect on the action of individuals ages 12-18 years old in youth groups in Asheville and the surrounding area, specifically to gain the attendance of youth groups to A Homeless Night, put on by WCRM. (Have _____ youth groups attend)

- Keep an updated excel sheet of contacted churches, indicating the churches name, contacts name, phone # and email.
- In addition to this information, indicate whether or not the church has confirmed their intention to (or not to) attend. If planning to attend, also indicate how many youth they will be bringing.
- 1 week before the event, contact all groups who indicated they would attend, and get a final confirmation they still intend to attend.
- On event day, keep a list of the churches/groups that actually show up
- Compare the actual number of groups that show, to the goal total to determine if goal was met.
- If goal was not met or was exceeded, revise goal total for next year in comparison to actual results.

Objective #3:

To have an effect on the awareness of individuals ages 12-18 years old in youth groups in Asheville and the surrounding area, specifically for these individuals to gain awareness of about the A Homeless Night event put on by WCRM, including what it is and when it is being held. (Reach _____ youth groups between _____ and _____ [beginning 5-6 months before event date])

- Keep an updated excel sheet of contacted churches, indicating the churches name, contacts name, phone # and email.
- Compare the actual number of groups contacted, to the goal total to determine if goal was met.
- If goal was not met or was exceeded, revise goal total for next year in comparison to actual results.

Objective #4:

To have an effect on the awareness of individuals ages 12-18 years old in youth groups in the Asheville and surrounding area, specifically to increase their knowledge of the opportunity to give money and other items to the WCRM. (Distribute at least _____ handouts to event participants)

- Count number of handouts originally printed.
- Count number of handouts left after distribution.
- Subtract number of handouts left from number originally printed to get actual total distributed.
- Compare actual total distributed to goal total distribute to determine if goal was met.
- If goal was not met or was exceeded, revise goal total for next year in comparison to actual results.

Objective #5:

To have an effect on the awareness of individuals ages 12-18 years old in youth groups in the Asheville and surrounding area, specifically to increase their knowledge of the homelessness problem in Asheville, and what they experience of homelessness is like (Have _____ attendees indicate that they learned something new and/or had their mindset changed).

- Prepare survey questions for event participants, asking them if they learned something new about homelessness (and if so what), and if the event, and what they learned at it changed their mindset in relation to homelessness, and its causes and solutions. Include a free-write section for participants to indicate what could have been done better/ and what they would like to learn if they did not feel they changed their mindset or learned something new.
- Print survey sheets to be completed.
- Distribute surveys to each event participant, having each fill it out before they leave the event.
- Collect completed surveys from participants.
- Calculate the number of surveys which indicated a participants mindset was changed/and or that they learned something new to goal number, to determine if goal was met.
- If goal was not met or was exceeded, revise goal total for next year in comparison to actual results.
- Review written responses to determine what changes participants would like to see in the event, and compile a list of ideas to be contemplated for the next years event.
- Determine if more people learned something/had their mindsets changed than not to determine if the event was more effective than not.