

Partnership offers mental health benefits for homeless people in Waco

June 8, 2012

WACO—Collaboration between a Baptist university's psychology department and a faith-based ministry improves the lives of homeless people in Waco.

Matthew Stanford, professor of psychology, neuroscience and biomedical studies at [Baylor University](#), developed a partnership with [Mission Waco](#) in which doctoral students provide free psychological assessments for the homeless.

During the first year of the collaborative arrangement, the graduate students—under faculty supervision—provided psychological assessments and feedback for 70 homeless people, providing a service to Mission Waco valued at \$35,000.

They also provided brief reports that helped the faith-based agency offer an additional \$22,500 of service in one year. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of the individuals assessed used the report in a Supplemental Security Income application or appeal for benefits.

“Of those who have received a benefits decision, 22 individuals are now receiving benefits, while only six applicants who used our reports have been denied thus far—a 79 percent approval rate,” the Baylor team reported.

After evaluating the partnership and its results, researchers published their findings in the April issue of [Professional Psychology: Research and](#)

Practice.

The journal article cites one case study involving a homeless woman who sought emergency shelter from Mission Waco to escape domestic violence. The woman had been denied government benefits, lacked job skills and suffered from Tourette's syndrome.

A psychological assessment showed borderline cognitive ability and revealed substance abuse issues, which led to her placement in a treatment facility prior to job training.

"The report was given to the treatment staff when she began the program. While she was there, the staff used the assessment report as part of an appeal of her benefit denial, and she subsequently was awarded benefits," the article said.

"She has since completed a job corps training program, and her SSI benefits have helped pay for the apartment in which she currently resides. "Having a professional psychological evaluation made a difference not only in selecting appropriate treatment, but also in her application for benefits, with the result that this woman is no longer homeless today."