



LITTLE SISTERS *of the* POOR

Little Sisters of the Poor Chicago Focus Group Report

Conducted on February 18, 2014

by: Ashlen Courtney, Dee Gomez, Gina Knapik, Joanna Scott & Nicolás Tiparescu
for: PRAD 585 Research Methods

INTRODUCTION

Client Briefing:

Kelly Conmey, Development Director for the Little Sisters of Poor Chicago, met with the DePaul University graduate Research Methods class on January 21, 2014. During this meeting she provided a brief overview of the organization and its needs. Little Sisters of the Poor is a non-profit that cares for the indigent elderly. The Chicago nursing home has been open for 138 years and has 76 beds. There is financial support from Medicaid, but an additional six million is needed each year for operational costs. This is funded through donations from individuals, churches and businesses.

In the briefing, Conmey expressed concern about the lack of awareness for the organization and its mission. She felt this was true even in Lincoln Park, the neighborhood where the nursing home is located. Additionally, Conmey said she wanted to increase the number of donors. She believed many of the donors were older, and due to their stage of life it was becoming more difficult to donate. It was also explained that the tradition of the Little Sisters of the Poor organization is to rely on divine providence. The facility will not accept any forms of support that cannot be fully used by the end of the year. This tradition is also carried out as a group of sisters, known as the begging sisters, make appeals to local churches and businesses for support.

Research Goal:

The goal of this research was to better understand the habits, beliefs and attitudes about donating to the Chicago Little Sisters of the Poor organization. The development director wanted to know more about those who have previously supported the facility and why they chose to give. She wanted to understand the motivations behind the donation. As the client was looking for detailed information about perceptions and outlook, it was decided that the most effective and

best research method was a focus group. This form allowed the opportunity to interview multiple people and ask probing questions to gain insights. The ultimate goal was to provide the client with an understanding on how to preserve and strengthen the relationship with current donors as well as brainstorm initial ideas that might attract more donors.

METHOD

Participants:

The development director recruited and selected individuals to participate in the focus group. All individuals had previously financially supported the non-profit organization, and some of them also volunteered their time and abilities at the facility. Phone calls and email messages were the sources of communication used by Conmey to invite donors to participate in the focus group. The development director aimed to have between seven and 12 individuals participate and resulted in seven who agreed to attend. Although, one participant, who was scheduled to be at the focus group, did not arrive. Six individuals participated in the focus group.

Trends based on the participants' background questionnaire:

- Primarily female, married, Catholic and had a household income of \$90,001 or more
- Everyone was older than 50 and most lived in Chicago
- All have been making donations to the Little Sisters of the Poor for more than one year

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Female	Female	Male
Age	54	62	60	62	66	76
City, Zip Code	Chicago, 60631	Chicago, 60614	Chicago, 60614	Chicago, 60618	Chicago, 60645	Chicago, 60622
Education	Bachelor's Degree	Post-graduate Degree	High School	Post-graduate Degree	Some College	Post-graduate Degree
Marital Status	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Single
Household Income before taxes	\$90,001 or more	\$90,001 or more	\$90,001 or more	\$90,001 or more	n/a	\$15,000 to \$30,000
Employment Status	Not employed	Self Employed	Full Time, Realtor	Full Time, Telecom Business	Part Time, Substitute Teacher	Not employed
Religion	Catholic	Catholic	Presbyterian	Catholic	Catholic	Catholic
# of years donating	2 years	10+ years	1.5 years	6+ years	5 years	5/6 years
Average annual donation	Not sure \$0 to \$500	\$1,001 or more	\$101 to \$500	\$1,001 or more	\$501 to \$1,000	\$101 to \$500

Interview Procedure

Before conducting the focus group, an interview guide was created to facilitate the event. The interview guide (see Appendix A) started with an explanation of the guidelines and introductions for participants. Then it was structured to ask general questions related to donating at the beginning and then slowly transition to specific questions about personal involvement and donations to the Little Sisters of the Poor organization. Within each question there were probing follow-up inquiries to gain a thorough understanding and uncover more detailed insights. The interview guide and focus group were also organized in a manner that allowed for flexibility and

gave participants some ownership of the conversation resulting in meaningful insights.

Additionally, prior to the focus group, participants received information from the Little Sisters of the Poor's director of development about the session so they were prepared and in agreement with participating. An invitation including details about time, location and parking was developed by Professor Kim Yeuseung and given to participants. Additionally, the focus group participants were incentivized with pizza and refreshments.

The focus group occurred on February 18, 2014 from 6 to 8 p.m. in room 406 of the Arts and Letters Building, located at 2315 North Kenmore Avenue, on DePaul University's campus in Chicago. Five students conducted the focus group. Two individuals acted as moderators, and one person was responsible for logistics and filming. The last two students took notes during the session. The classroom was set up with pizza and refreshments placed along a back wall. Tables and chairs were organized in a square so that participants could face each other and feel more at ease to talk with each other. The moderators sat among the participants to be viewed as equals. The logistics coordinator and note takers were seated on an angle outside of the square so that these individuals would not distract participants from talking. Background questionnaires and pens were placed next to each seat. Nametags were made for everyone involved. A video camera was set up, with the assistance of DePaul University's technology staff, near the group to record the entire session.

Participants began arriving at 5:30 p.m. Moderators greeted each person with a nametag and an explanation for hanging coats, gathering food and locating a seat. Once individuals were seated and comfortable, they were asked to complete the background questionnaire. The session began at 6:30 p.m. after six out of seven participants arrived. The moderators began with the introduction and guidelines for the focus group, as written in the interview guide (see Appendix A). From there, the moderators rotated asking the questions and probing for more detailed responses while the note takers wrote insights from the participants' conversation. At the conclusion of the focus group, each individual was thanked verbally and given an appreciation

gift, a DePaul University pen. One week after the focus group the student team transcribed the video and discussed insights.

RESULTS

After reviewing the focus group transcript, five common themes became apparent. In response to a majority of the questions, participants spoke mainly about their personal and financial *involvement* with the Little Sisters of the Poor, the positive and negative *communication* practices of the organization, their *connections* to the organization, the aspects about the Little Sisters of the Poor that they hold as *values*, and finally, *advice* that they had for the organization.

Although each of the participants responded to all of the interview questions, the questions below generated the most interesting and useful conversations.

RQ1: Can you give a brief description of your community?

In response to this question, all of the participants noted that they live around the north or northwest side of Chicago, in neighborhoods that have been or are still being gentrified and improved - specifically: Lincoln Park, Bucktown, West Rogers Park, North Center and Edison Park. They also mentioned quality of life, friendliness, diversity, convenience, walkability, family values and proximity to entertainment and Catholic churches as reasons for living in these neighborhoods.

RQ 3: What is the best way to go about asking for donations? How often should an organization ask donors for support? What types of communication tools are useful?

Involvement. Participants in the group said that financial support of an organization is typically a result of personal involvement with the cause. Many spoke about their support of Little Sisters of the Poor, which occurred because of a mother living at the facilities. Additional

examples included support of cancer organizations because of relatives or friends who were suffering from the disease.

“Yea, I tend to donate more to places that I have had a personal involvement. Ya know Little Sisters my mother lives there. And I have a lot of friends who have lymphoma. So I give generously to lymphoma. Ya know I give to children’s organizations like St. Jude.”

Communication. When prompted to give more information about how a non-profit organization should seek donations, the participants shared about methods of communication they prefer. Throughout the focus group, it was agreed that multiple tactics are necessary, but the individuals preferred direct mail. It was shared that if larger donations are wanted, then personal outreach is necessary. Additionally, the participants only want to be contacted by phone if there is an existing relationship, and they do not appreciate lengthy phone conversations. Interestingly though, many of the participants asked for more informational e-mail blasts from the Little Sisters of the Poor; however, in this question respondents pointed out that they usually dislike receiving emails. They often ignore them or delete without even opening the message.

“Larger donations do come from people that have the power to make larger contributions. They need someone to be able to meet with them and make these contributions. I think for smaller contributions direct solicitation works.”

“They call you so often and never let you off of the phone. And you actually get anti-donation because you get hostile because they are pushing too hard. So I don’t like when they call me especially at night when you’re tired and I really find that too much.”

RQ6: How did you hear about Chicago Little Sisters of the Poor? Why do you support it? What makes you want to support it over another? How often and when do you support it?

Connections. In response to this question, participants overwhelmingly cited personal connections as the means of their knowledge about and reason for supporting Chicago Little Sisters of the Poor.

For example, four out of the six participants had or currently have mothers who live at the home, and not surprisingly support it for that reason. Participants who did not have family members living at Little Sisters of the Poor mentioned hearing about the organization from friends or colleagues (i.e. word of mouth). After attending one of the organization's events or volunteering at the facility, they empathized with the mission and decided to get involved financially.

“For all those reasons, and that we have this absolutely extraordinary body of individuals in the Little Sisters, themselves, who have this ethic about the elderly which is really incomparable. You just don't hear it anyplace else and nobody takes it more seriously than they do and what they do is something that is really priceless.”

RQ7: What adjectives would you use to describe the Little Sisters of the Poor?

Values. Participants have positive associations with the organization and most were related to the values held by the sisters. Adjectives included: loving, caring, passionate, dedicated, humble, hospitable, clean and professional. As a group they agreed that what distinguishes the facility and non-profit is how the sisters treat the residents and families. It was also brought up at various times throughout the focus group that there is a significant difference between the Little Sisters of the Poor and other nursing homes. The participants were critical of the care provided by other facilities, but valued the Little Sisters of the Poor home and staff.

RQ8: How do you think the Chicago community perceives the Little Sisters of the Poor?

Communication. When asked about the perception of the organization, participants expressed that there is little awareness. A lack of communication was a common theme among the answers given to this question.

“Maybe they are too under the radar.”

“They are not known.”

RQ11: What do you think Chicago Little Sisters of the Poor should do in order to get other people - such as your friends, family, or colleagues - to donate to the organization?

Advice. Participants were eager to provide advice on ways that Little Sisters of the Poor could reach out to others and increase the awareness of the organization. One participant said that she had once been invited to a friend’s house for a meal and a video was shown about a non-profit organization. The participant remarked that it was a way to become familiar in a relaxed and comfortable environment. Another participant suggested that the Little Sisters of the Poor do more to reach out to the neighborhood. Others added on to the idea by suggesting that an open house occur at the facility or suggested more events. One participant suggested that greeting cards be sent to the surrounding area and remarked that these would not seek donations, but rather inform about the mission.

DISCUSSION

Key Learnings:

Overall the participants in this group were often in agreement with one another’s views and opinions. They had lengthy conversations and built on each other’s ideas. A few key things we learned from this group:

- Participants had a personal connection to Little Sisters of the Poor or heard about it from a friend and this was the reason for donations.
- The group was passionate about the mission of the organization.
- They prefer direct mail for donations; however, they would like to see more frequent communication about upcoming events.
- The group agreed there was a lack of communication and awareness about the organization.
- Participants used the adjectives of loving, caring, passionate, dedicated, humble, hospitable, clean and professional to describe the organization.

Recommendations:

The objective of the research was to have a better understanding of the typical donor of the Little Sisters of the Poor. Through the background questionnaire and conversation during the focus group it became evident that there is a profile of a donor. These individuals support the organization because of a personal connection. Additionally, they are passionate about their religious views and hold a high regard for the mission of the non-profit organization. The recommendation for the development director is to keep fostering the relationship between the facility's mission and donors. It should be noted though, that participants in the focus group did voice concern for follow-up efforts. These individuals would appreciate more information about the needs of the home. They would also appreciate details about previous support to be included on newsletters seeking future donations. One participant said he wished the following message was included, "thank you for your check of X dollars which you gave on December 31, 2013."

Another recommendation for the client, in terms of reaching new donors, is to be more present and vocal in the community. Participants suggested that the organization reach out by sending invitations to the Lincoln Park neighborhood and hosting more events. Specifically, these would be at the facility so people can see the mission statement in action and make that personal

connection with Little Sisters of the Poor. Participants also suggested a more timely newsletter with current information and a calendar of events. Based on the responses and enthusiasm from the group, it is recommended to establish a small volunteer group to assist with recruiting new financial supporters. These individuals could share their stories of giving to their neighbors, friends and family and ultimately attract more donors.

Limitations:

A limitation for the study was that only donors of the organization were interviewed. The focus group was useful in understanding the preferences of these participants, but the data is limited in answering the client's question about how to attract new financial supporters. Another focus group would need to be conducted, perhaps with a group who supports a similar charity, and compare the results.

It was also noted in the focus group, that participants say and want two different things. When asked about communication from non-profit organizations, most of the participants suggested that email was not a good way to capture their attention. Participants said that they delete anything that is not urgent. However, during another question, participants actually said they desired more communication and information, including emails, from the Little Sisters of the Poor. More research, in alternative methods, is needed to thoroughly understand how these participants view emails.

Another limitation was that only one small group of six individuals were interviewed. Interviewing multiple groups would yield better results. The development director believed that there were more than 3,000 donors each year; therefore, to get a better understanding of a donor profile more focus groups would be conducted.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Joanna Scott – Observer/Note Taker
Dee Gomez - Moderator
Ashlen Courtney – Observer/Note Taker
Gina Knapik - Moderator
Nicolás Tiparescu – Logistics Coordinator

Focus Group Interview Guide

Objective: To understand the habits, beliefs and attitudes about donations for Chicago Little Sisters of the Poor organization.

Respondents: Current donors who financially support Chicago Little Sisters of the Poor

Outcomes: Research insights that will support idea generation for increasing donations

Arrival of Participants:

Participants will have the opportunity to eat dinner and should complete a nametag with their first name.

Welcome & Introduction:

Good evening. My name is Dee Gomez, and I am a student at DePaul University. Thank you for taking the time to be here. I am working with a group from the university to learn more about how the Chicago non-profit organization Little Sisters of the Poor is financially funded. You were asked to participate in this evening's discussion due to your prior involvement as a donor.

I have a few questions to ask you, and am interested in your honest opinions. Please answer candidly, and know that there are no right or wrong answers. Speak up, if you agree or disagree as we are looking for a wide range of opinions.

This discussion will be recorded so that my group is able to best represent our findings, but I want you to know that all information gathered will remain confidential and will not be associated with you as an individual. Following this discussion, my group will put a report together with our findings that will contain summaries and commonalities from our time together, but will not include specific names.

Before we start, I am going to make a couple requests. Everyone's opinion is important, so please speak one at a time. Additionally, some individuals have a tendency to talk more while others are natural listeners so if I haven't heard from you in awhile I may call on you. This is just to make sure all opinions are voiced.

At this point do you have any questions? If you think of any later on in our discussion, please feel free to ask. Lastly, remember there are no right or wrong answers.

Participant Introductions:

Let's begin by going around the room for introductions. Tell us your name, what neighborhood you live in and an interesting fact about yourself.

Moderators will go first.

Participants will introduce themselves

Questions:

1. Can you give a brief description of your community – i.e. types of people, political views, religious views, entertainment. (*Moderator gives example.*)
2. Take a minute to think about non-profit organizations in the Chicago area; specifically those that you know solicit donations. What organizations come to mind, and can you give a brief description of them?
Probing
 - a. What is their purpose (what do they do)?
 - b. How do these organizations ask for financial support?
3. What is the best way to go about asking for donations?
Probing
 - a. How often should an organization ask donors for support?
 - b. What types of communication tools are useful?
4. What non-profit organizations do you support financially?
5. Why do you support these non-profits? (What is your motivation?)
 - a. How does donating make you feel?
6. How did you hear about Chicago Little Sisters of the Poor?
Probing
 - a. Why do you support it? (*Client wants to know – Is it because of the mission? Location? Sisters' mission?*)
 - b. What makes you want to support it over another?
 - c. How often and when do you support it?
 - d. How do you go about supporting them – online, event, check, and in-person?
 - i. If you don't donate online, why not? Would you ever consider it?
7. What adjectives would you use to describe the Little Sisters of the Poor?
Probing
 - a. *For interesting words* – what made you think of that word?
 - b. What do you like most about Chicago Little Sisters of the Poor?
8. How do you think the Chicago community perceives the Little Sisters of the Poor?
9. How do you stay updated with the needs of Chicago Little Sisters of the Poor?
Probing
 - a. Do you receive newsletters, email blasts, check the website, or attend events? (*Specify which ones – print or electronic.*)
 - i. Would you change anything about the communication outlets – i.e. website, newsletters? If so, what?
 - ii. What information would you like to receive from the Chicago Little Sisters of the Poor?
 - b. How do you prefer to receive updates or information (website, social media, phone call, thank you card)?
 - c. Do you volunteer at the home?

10. How do you feel that your donation impact's the Sisters' mission? (*Client wants to know – Do donors know where the budget comes from? E.g. more than 3 million come from private donors. Does it matter? Do they think their gift makes a difference?*)
11. What do you think Chicago Little Sisters of the Poor should do in order to get other people, such as your friends, family or colleagues, to donate to the organization?

Closing:

Check to see if observers/note takers have questions that need to be asked.

Before we end our time together, do you have any questions?

Participants have the opportunity to ask questions.

Thank you very much for coming and answering our questions. Your comments have been very helpful. This concludes our time. Thank you.