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## From a Consumer's Perspective: What is Helpful for Residents of Four Bed Group Homes to Maintain Good Mental Health

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# From a Consumer's Perspective: What is Helpful for Residents of Four Bed Group Homes to Maintain Good Mental Health

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## Introduction:

The population with mental illness has faced many changes in the services provided to them throughout the years. And fortunately, in recent years there has been many progressions in the field that have made the services even better. This transformation all began with the gradual process of closing mental health hospitals and the opening of community based alternatives, otherwise known as deinstitutionalization (Brunt & Hansson, 2002, p. 611). The main objective of the deinstitutionalization movement was to create more humane services for the individuals with mental illness (Searight & Handal, 1987, p. 8). Through this process one of the community based alternatives created were group homes. Group homes can be described as a residential housing option for individuals with mental illness that provides:

- 24/7 staffing,
- Food preparation,
- Medication management,
- Help with financial budgeting,
- Behavioral programming,
- Activities,
- Transportation and
- Help with scheduling doctor appointments

Group homes have been evaluated for their effectiveness and how they have impacted the population with mental illness. Multiple studies have been conducted to see if group homes are effective in creating a more humane way of providing services, if they are a cost effective or if they have impacted quality of life. Of those studies many of them have shown positive effects. Some of those areas being:

- Decreased rates of hospitalization (Husted & Wentler, 2006; Rhoades & McFarland, 2000),
- Cost effectiveness (Rhoades & McFarland, 2000),
- Increase in interpersonal relationships and independent choices (Nelson, Hall & Walsh-Bowers, 1997) and
- Increased life satisfaction (Salokangas, Honkonen, Strengard & Kovivisto, 2006)

Even though these studies have indicated and strongly suggest that group homes can be helpful and beneficial to the individuals with mental illness, there is still a missing piece that is unknown. How, why or what it is about the service that is helpful to the residents that is creating decreased rates of hospitalizations? How do the consumers find these services helpful? So that leads to the research question:

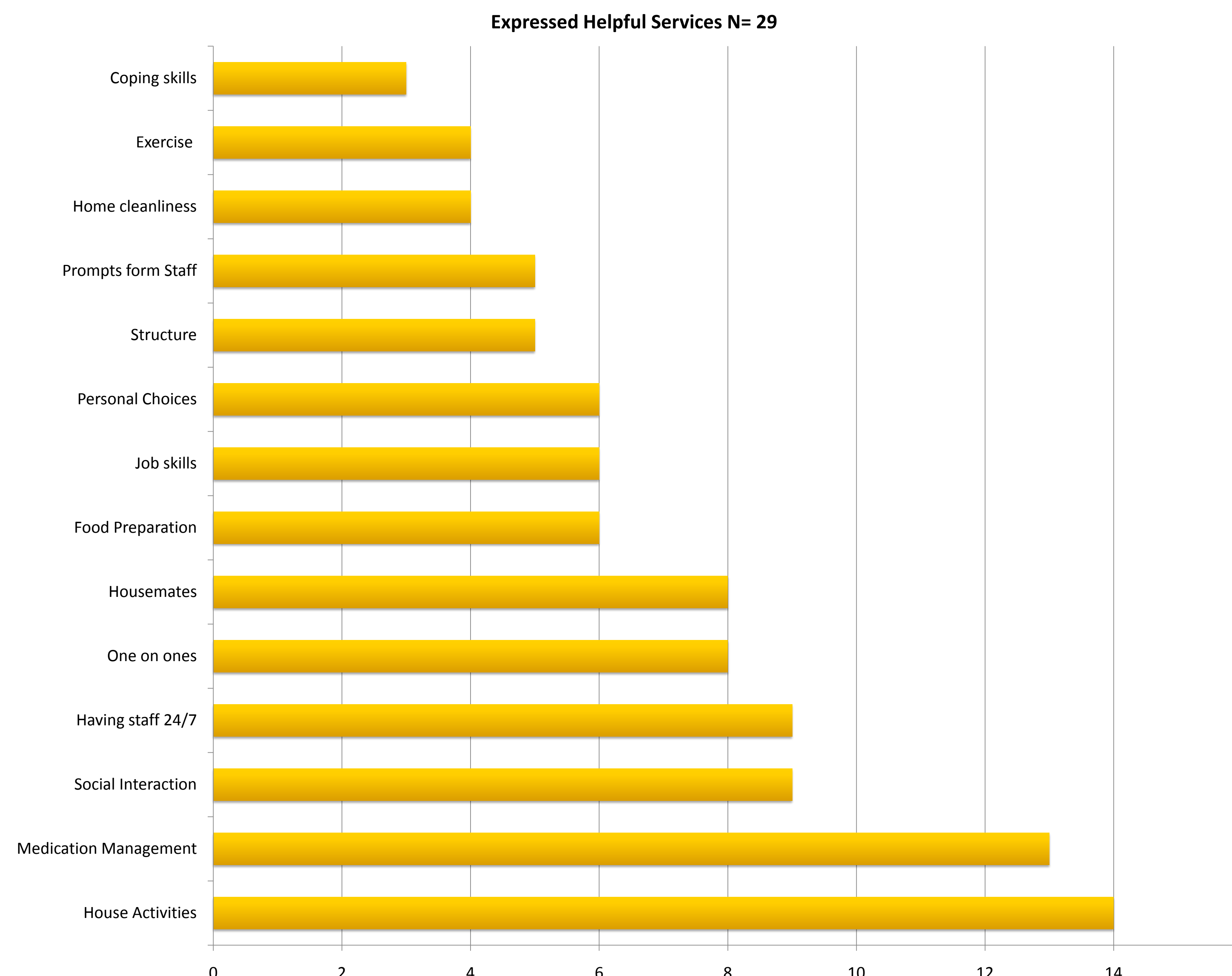
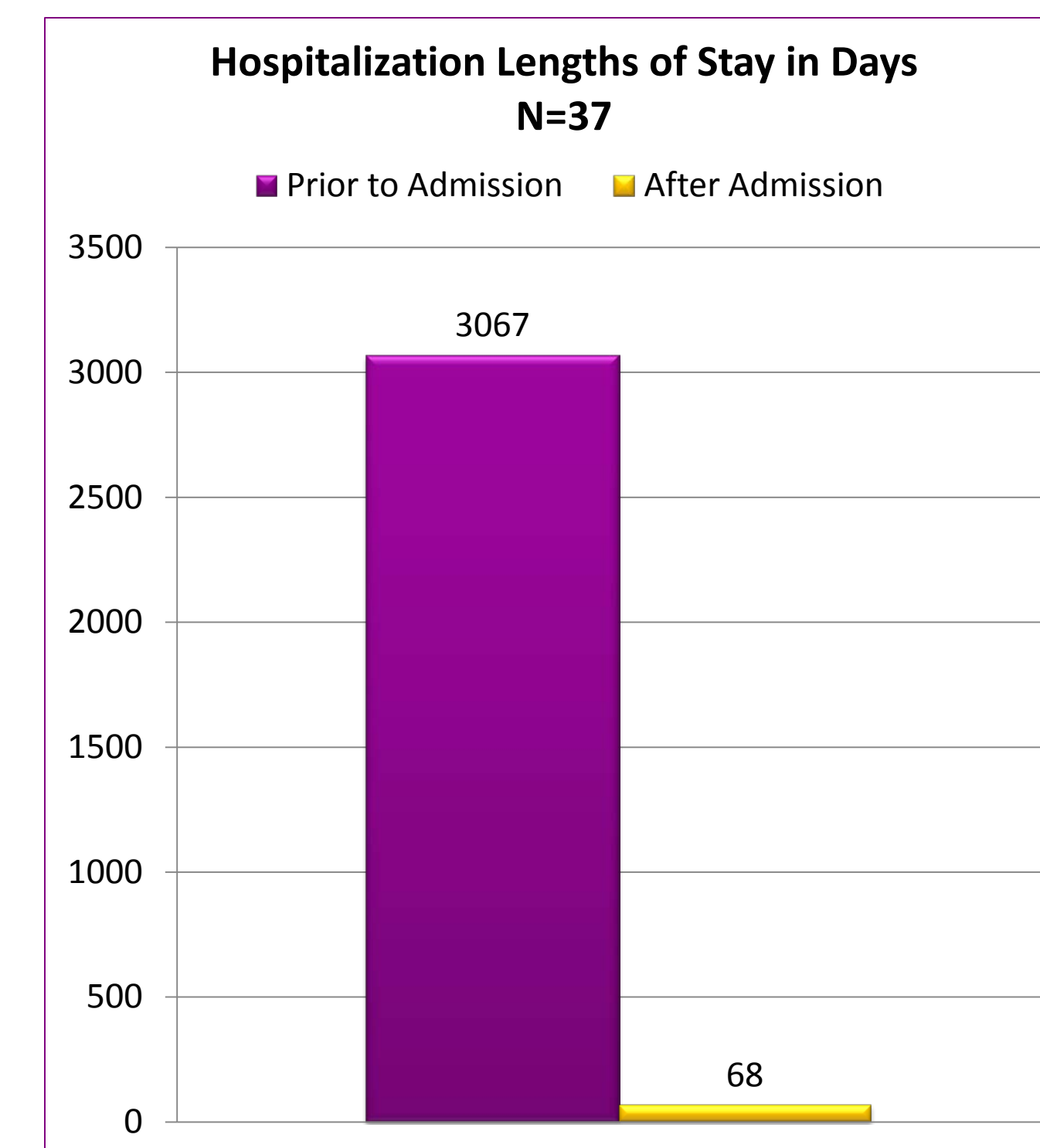
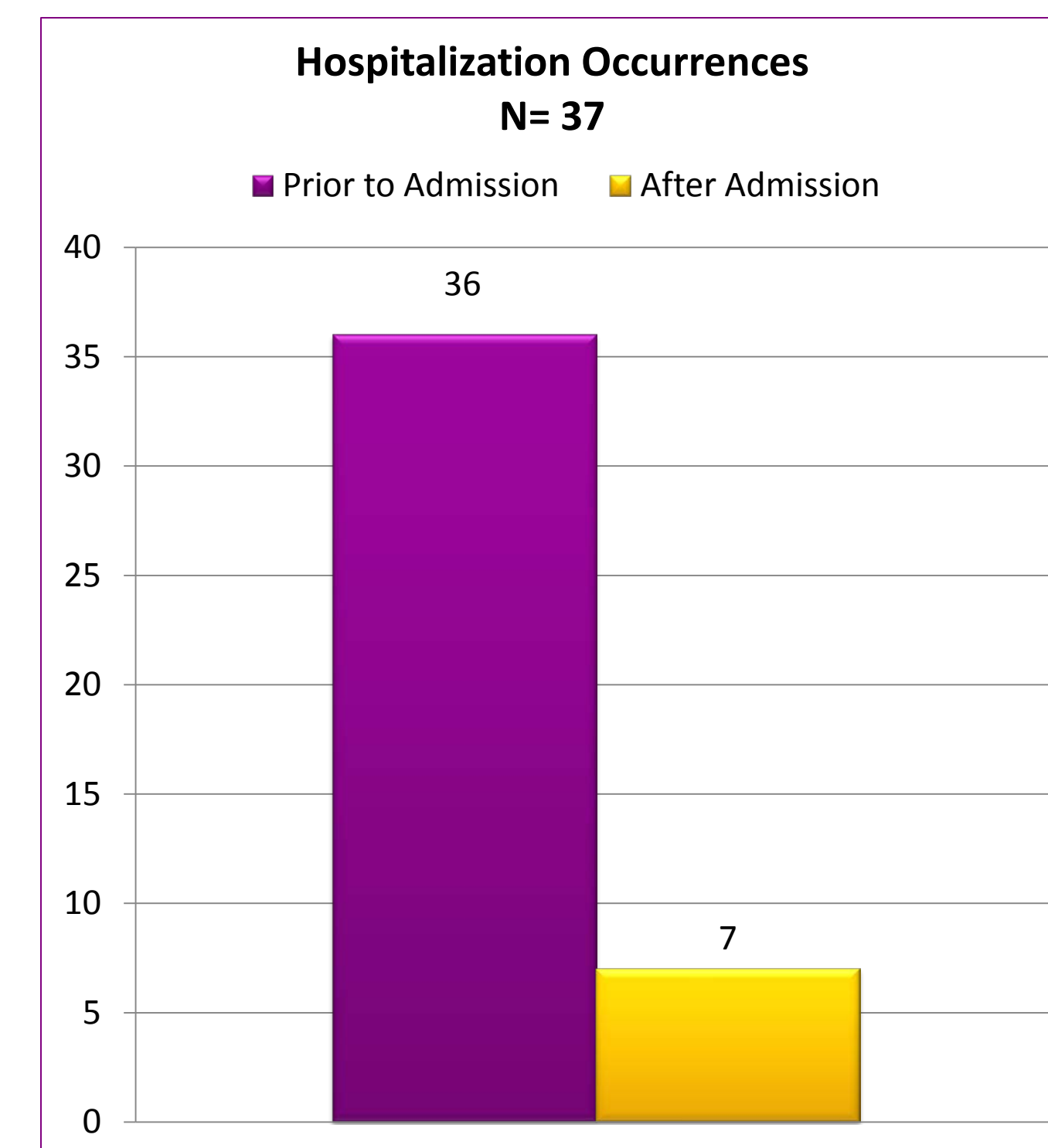
## From a consumer's perspective: What is it about the group homes that are helpful to this population in maintaining good mental health?

## Methods:

There were 11 group homes where residents were selected from; these homes are located in Alexandria, Morris, Hancock, Spicer & Benson, MN. In order to be considered for participation, the residents needed to have a main diagnosis with severe and persistent mental illness and living in the group home. Of the 48 total residents residing in the selected group homes, 44 consent letters were sent out to guardians for permission for the residents to participate (Some were excluded for having a main diagnosis of Traumatic Brain Injury); 37 consents were received back to participate. After this permission and consent was obtained from the guardians an informational letter was sent to case managers, informing them of what this study was about.

Next there was a two step process. The rates of hospitalization was looked at first, this was done for all 37 residents that consent was obtained. Rate of hospitalization was figured by a record review, to get rates prior to the resident's admission into the group home, going back the equal amount of years regarding placement, and rate after admission until present. The length of stay of each hospitalization was also recorded. Once this was determined, the residents were interviewed. Prior to the start of the interview, verbal consent was granted from the resident themselves, 29 agreed to continue. The 15 minute semi-structured interview allowed for freedom of open ended questions and to let the residents state their own opinions and allow the interviewer to seek clarification if needed. The interview consisted of five questions:

1. What helps you maintain good mental health?
2. What keeps you from being hospitalized?
3. How does the group home help you maintain good mental health?
4. What is most beneficial to that the group home helps you with?
5. If there was any other thing the group home could offer or provide to you that would help you maintain good mental health, what would it be?



## Results:

Some residents did refuse to do the interview part of the process, but we were still able to get a review of their medical records. There were 37 record reviews done and 29 were interviewed.

- After admission, the hospitalization rate was reduced by 29 occurrence (Average prior equaled 1.03; after equaled .19)
- After admission, the length of hospitalization was reduced by 2,999 days (Average prior equaled 85.19; after equaled 9.71)
- Of the 7 hospitalizations that occurred after admission, they were accounted for by 3 participants (1 had 1, the 2<sup>nd</sup> had 4 and the 3<sup>rd</sup> had 2)
- The most stated helpful service was House Activities (14 of 27 stated)
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> most stated service was help with Medication Management (13 of 27 stated)
- It was also noted that 5 out of the highest rated 6 all related to some form of socialization

## Conclusion/Discussion:

One of the major findings that this study found was the tremendous decrease in hospitalizations after the residents moved in; along with the lengths of stay. Of the three residents that have been hospitalized since their admission, are still at their same number of hospitalizations they had prior to. Meaning, even though they have been hospitalized none of them have been hospitalized more than previous to admission. This still leaves the results that their hospitalization rates have decreased. This finding is consistent with other research studies that have been done (Husted & Wentler, 2006; Rhoades & McFarland, 2000).

It also needs to be considered how the invention and refinement of psychotropic medications could have had an effect on the hospitalization rates prior to admission as compared to after admission. As this study suggests, medication management is an important factor for the residents, so understanding the effect may be helpful.

A wide array of services were reported to be helpful, more significantly five of the six most frequently reported involved social support and social interaction with staff, peers or in the community. This finding is consistent with Husted & Ender (2001) when they stated that socialization with friends and family was the most significant factor in helping them stay on their road to recovery.

The residents were from homes that are based in small or rural communities. Leaving it hard to generalize this information to all individuals with mental illness, because it is not a representative sample for all, but more of a convenience sample. But it is good information for PCS, which can help them with their training of staff, how their supervisors create behavioral programming, and how it can dictate their activities and other socialization events they have.

## Areas to be considered for farther research:

- Differences between urban area group homes to rural area group homes
- Effects of psychotropic medications on hospitalization rates
- Differences in perceptions between case managers and residents on stated helpful services
- Consider a larger mentally ill population who are living independently and see what services or what aspects are most helpful to them

## Implications for Social Work:

The main thing that social workers can draw from this study is how beneficial socialization can be for individuals with mental illness and the effect that group homes have on hospitalization rates. Because social workers are advocates for individuals with all different types of needs, it is important to know what services are helpful and what services are evidence based. Also along with socialization we need to understand the importance of medications for these individuals and how it can help them control their symptoms. With control of their symptoms, it allows them to have control over other aspects of their lives.