

# APPENDIX E: SOCIAL WORK TECHNIQUES

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## SOCIAL WORK TECHNIQUES

### I. The Importance of the Social Worker for the Blind to a Service-Oriented Program

To be effective in the delivery of services, a Social Worker for the Blind must be service oriented. This requires not only the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but also the development of certain personality traits and characteristics. Basic to any helping profession are the following traits:

#### A. Concern

First of all, the social worker should care. The consumer's problem should be given fair and prompt consideration. By the very knowledge that someone cares, a consumer may be helped and his/her confidence in the worker will increase.

#### B. Patience

It requires endless patience for a social worker to listen time and again to the statement of the same problem, yet the process of listening is a part of his/her job. Consumers often do not move in a situation as workers think they should and, in many instances, it takes months to achieve what was thought to be possible in a matter of weeks. Yet, the conscientious worker stands by until the goal is reached.

#### C. Insight

In dealing with so many complex problems of life, a social worker needs a keen insight which will give direction to the service delivery to be made.

#### D. Imagination and Creativity

In rendering service, either to individuals or groups, a social worker needs a well-developed imagination to bring together the available services and the people who need them. It is also helpful for a worker to use what he/she has at hand to enable his/her consumer to achieve some measure of success. To be constantly aware of the availability of resources and alert to new ideas will help a worker in building a strong service program.

#### E. Initiative

A mature worker will not need to be told step by step what to do in bringing about a desired development in a consumer's situation. Rather, he/she will be on his/her own to use his best judgment and, along with the help and cooperation of the consumer, help the consumer strive for and achieve the consumer's desired goal.

#### F. Enthusiasm

The worker who approaches his/her work with enthusiasm seems far more accomplished than the one who is apathetic. As everyone knows, enthusiasm is contagious and the Social Worker for the Blind who has this attribute will gain pleasure from the job and consumers who are served will become happier and more responsive people.

## II. Counseling

Most consumers feel that to be "counseled" means to be given advice or to be directed toward a prescribed solution of his/her problem. However, in counseling, there are no "right" or final answers. Counseling focuses primarily on emotions or how the consumer feels about a given situation; therefore, the Social Worker for the Blind will pay as much attention to that which is not said as to what is said.

In the initial stage of counseling, the social worker needs to concentrate on fact finding by assuming the role of a listener. The worker will attempt to learn what the consumer sees as his/her problem; how he/she feels about his/her own ability to cope with it; and what he/she feels may be the best possible solution.

The consumer may not be accustomed to expressing his/her feelings. He/she may need verbal encouragement to show that the worker understands. What the consumer actually feels may be different from what he/she in fact says. At first, he/she may desire agreement or praise from the worker or he/she may be afraid of rejection. Often, he/she may avoid certain subjects and the worker may need to make statements to crystallize the person's feelings and faults regarding a particular subject, to focus his/her attention on something requiring further examination. It may be necessary to summarize some of the things that have been discussed during an interview. The worker may ask questions or may restate what the consumer has said. In helping a consumer appraise his/her situation, the worker may make comparison by placing two sets of events, faults, or feelings side by side to draw inference. These may show similarities or contrast. (One caution: **never** contrast or compare two **actual people**, that is, two different individuals). Comparisons may be made between past and present behavior, reality and fantasy, self and others (but again using only concepts in general comparison, not comparing an individual, by name, with another individual), childhood and adulthood, etc.

Interpretation may take the form of a tentative suggestion such as "my feeling is that you are trying to excuse yourself because you are blind and you feel that a blind person should not be expected to do this."

Or, interpretation may be the worker's pronouncement such as, "you are excusing yourself because you are blind and you feel that blind people should not be expected to do this". It should be emphasized that any interpretation should be concise and very simply phrased.

In all situations, the consumer should do more talking than the counselor. In the counseling process, it is important that the worker continually assess the effect of the counseling. Your agreement or disagreement from the consumer is not the best evidence in determining this effect. The worker needs to be aware of how much thought is being given to a particular suggestion, or if the question is being acted upon.

Throughout the counseling, the consumer may show resistance. The social worker needs to be able to overcome resistance. Some examples of resistance may include a change in the clarity of the consumer's speech, a change of subject, excuses or rationalizations; the consumer may even avoid the worker. To overcome resistance, the worker needs to determine what is being resisted and why. This may be done by asking a simple question such as "does it make you uncomfortable when people use the word blind in describing you?" Another way of overcoming the resistance might be to call the resistance to the consumer's attention, such as "I have noticed that you have never been able to use the word blind."

The worker needs to be aware that in some cases the consumer may become hostile when confronted with the truth about himself/herself. Feeling hostile toward oneself, he/she may transfer his/her hostility to the worker and feel that he or she is against him/her; therefore, the worker must not take personally statements which may be made in anger. In essence, you say to the consumer, "I'm not angry with you; and you do not need to be angry with yourself."

The primary objective of counseling is to help the consumer gain self awareness. By learning self honesty, the consumer has gained a valuable tool in effectively solving his/her own problems and reaching his/her goal of more independence in his/her daily living.

### **III. Education**

Education, or the imparting of knowledge, may be an important part of the worker-consumer relationship because the consumer may lack factual information in many areas. The Social Worker for the Blind needs to become knowledgeable in many areas, including: medical and physical conditions, homemaking skills, money management, etc., and share this information with the consumer in understandable terms.

The Social Worker for the Blind should make use of a wide variety of printed brochures and pamphlets which are furnished by various agencies specializing in these areas of service. It is not enough merely to give these pamphlets to the consumer since he/she may not be able to find someone to read them for him/her and since it may not be written in language which he/she can understand. In sharing the information with the consumer, the worker needs to use examples and illustrations which are meaningful and within the consumer's experience. The social worker must avoid the tendency to substitute gestures for verbal explanations. Ask questions and encourage the consumer to ask questions in order to make sure that proper inference is made. Avoid using visual comparison such as describing as L-shaped room as "L-shape" as the consumer may have no idea how the printed L looks.

It must be remembered that in most cases, counseling needs to occur parallel with the educational process since the consumer may have strong feelings concerning the new information he/she is learning. Often, this information may run contrary to cherished beliefs. Many types of instruction may be given in a group setting where group members can profit from opinions and reinforcement from other group members.

### **IV. Advocacy**

The term advocacy implies that the social worker enters into a partnership with the consumer to help him/her secure his/her rights. This partnership involves a commitment to the individual rather than to the existing system. The consumer's age, lack of education, verbal inactivity, and cultural background may limit his/her own effectiveness in attaining his/her individual human rights. It is the worker's responsibility to inform him/her of his/her rights, help him/her understand appropriate means for appeal, and assist him/her with the complicated procedures involved in securing these rights. The worker may serve as an advocate of a group of individuals or consumers by making known existing injustices as well as hardships. **At no time does the worker take over and do those things which a consumer may be expected to do for oneself nor does a worker act without the full knowledge and consent of the individual. Instead, a worker enables the consumer to do for himself/herself.**

### **IV. Co-Planning**

Co-Planning is an active process in which the social worker allows the consumer to examine his/her situation clearly, consider possible choices, and decide on a course of intermediate objectives directed toward achieving his/her goal. Effective co-planning can result only when the relationship is sufficiently trusting between the worker and the consumer to enable the consumer to feel his/her complete freedom

of choice. The social worker may need to point out realities within the situation regarding the extent to which the agency can help, and the worker provides the kind of emotional support that lets the consumer know he/she will stand by regardless of the outcome of the consumer's decision.

The social worker and the consumer should decide jointly on goals to be achieved and review these goals as progress is made. The worker may need to help the consumer understand that his/her present situation is suffering because of past ineffective behavior. At this point, the consumer may direct his/her anger and frustration against the worker. By understanding this process of transference, the worker does not become angry with the consumer but continues to show interest and concern for him/her.

As the consumer works through the process of examining his/her problem or problems and deciding on a course of action, the worker needs to be aware of changes in his/her behavior. When the consumer's desired goals are achieved, the relationship should be terminated and the consumer should be encouraged to continue on his/her own.

## **VI. Opportunity to Present Views**

Recipients and applicants of services must be given an opportunity to present their views about the service program. Social Workers are to let the consumer know at the time of application, at the re-determination of eligibility, and at the time of evaluation of service plan that they may discuss with the Social Worker or write to the Social Worker about their views of the program. The consumer should also be given the opportunity by the Social Worker to present his/her views on the program to the Area Supervisor, Field Services Manager, or Chief of Independent Living Services when the consumer requests to discuss the program with someone other than the Social Worker for the Blind.

## **VII. Helping the Consumer and His Family Accept the Fact of Blindness**

The loss of vision, is without a doubt, a traumatic experience. So is the loss of an arm, a leg, or any part of the body. It is at this point that the social worker should support the consumer with empathy and understanding rather than sympathy and coddling.

The sooner the blind person can recover and engage, as far as possible, in independent activity the better off he/she will be. The consumer cannot make this move alone. He/she not only needs motivation but support in taking this first step. If the worker can awaken a former interest, this may be the open door to the consumer's adjustment. For example, a man who once enjoyed reading might be introduced to the talking book. The woman who feels that the pleasure she once found in simple household tasks is a thing of the past, might be assisted in finding new ways of doing things and provided with the necessary tools to aid her. The young man who likes sports should be told of the various activities in which visually impaired persons engage and be given an opportunity to do the things he enjoys doing. The student who feels that blindness has interrupted his or her education needs to be informed of available services making possible continued education, job training, and employment.

The loss of employment accompanying blindness is very hard for a man or woman to accept, particularly if there is a family to support. They should be referred to the rehabilitation counselor for appropriate vocational counseling and training.

Consumers may be helped with their adjustment to blindness both by individual services and group services in such matters as caring for themselves (eating, dressing, grooming, etc.). Mobility may be made possible through instruction in the use of the white cane and other methods of getting about. Consumers should be helped to return to community activities as soon as possible and to participate when they have something to offer, such as musical talent, teaching ability, etc.

The worker should recognize and reward with praise every step the consumer takes toward the achievement of independence.

### **VIII. Family Support and Understanding**

In order to make a complete adjustment to his/her new world, the blind or visually impaired person needs the help and support of his/her family. A worker should counsel with the entire family and point out some of the difficulties encountered when one loses his/her sight, such as poor sense of balance, loss of direction, early difficulty in locating and identifying objects, fear of running into walls, furniture, etc., and falling down stairs. All of these things have the tendency to cause the newly-blind person to become stiff, tense, and often irritable.

Members of the family have problems, too. They are not sure how to cope with something they have never experienced before. The family is also emotional and often frustrated because they do not know what to do. Confronted with these problems, the worker can offer suggestions which will prove helpful to all concerned. Family members should be encouraged to be patient with each other during this period of adjustment for both the family and the consumer are in the process of learning something new. Specific suggestions might be given to the family such as allowing the blind member to do whatever he/she can for himself/herself, refraining from frequent moving of furniture, remembering to close all doors and drawers after opening them since either of these can cause needless bumps and bruises if left ajar. It should be explained to the family that it is very important to the severely visually impaired person to take care of his/her own personal belongings. He/she will develop his own system of arranging things and well-meaning assistance from someone else can often hinder rather than help him/her. The technique of human guide service should be demonstrated to each member of the family as well as useful tips on serving food to the severely visually impaired person.

The social worker should let the family know that his/her services are available if any problem should arise relative to the adjustment to blindness or visual impairment.

### **IX. Use of Group Work as a Social Work Technique**

What is a group? A group is composed of two or more persons interacting together and yet apart from any other group. The group has definite goals and needs that it seeks to fulfill together. They have a bond which holds them together and also separates them from any other group or individual. All individuals are members of one or more types of groups such as family, church, club, informal or formal social groups. An individual, as a member of several groups, has a different role in each group.

What is social group work? This is a service provided by many agencies to enhance the social and emotional growth of persons needing this type of experience. In order to be successful, social group work requires a skilled group worker and the ways in which the worker helps the group depends upon the specific purpose for which the group was formed.

### **X. Service Delivery Possibilities Through the Use of Groups**

In many instances, service can be rendered to persons through groups which would not be possible in a one-to-one relationship. Persons in a group can gain support and strength from one another. Through the very act of getting out of their homes, they can broaden their horizons and apply new insight into the areas of day-to-day living. To be specific, let us examine some of the services which can be delivered through organized group activities. Picnics, parties, games, talent shows, bowling, field trips, and swimming are examples of activities for recreational purposes.

#### **A. Recreation**

Persons who are blind or severely visually impaired, like their sighted friends, enjoy relaxation and fellowship with one another. The Social Worker for the Blind may assist in arranging such opportunities for persons who are blind or severely visually impaired. Examples of such activities are arranging for participation in Camp Dogwood and the VIP Fishing Tournament.

#### B. Household Duties

When blindness or visual impairment occurs, people often feel a sense of helplessness in managing their usual household affairs. They need help and suggestions of new ways of doing tasks that they have been accustomed to doing with the use of vision. Those who have experienced blindness several years can often share helpful hints with their newly-blinded friends and enable them to carry on their household tasks with less difficulty. It is recommended that groups dealing with this type of information be limited to 10 to 12 people. This type of groups may give consideration to such things as how to separate an egg, turn meat while it is cooking, roll a pie crust, organize the kitchen for efficiency, label foods and other items in the home. Suggestions may also be given in matters of house cleaning, ironing, simple sewing and methods of carrying on household tasks.

#### C. Educational Groups

It has been found that most individuals learn better in groups. The discipline of regular attendance, competition with other persons, as well as motivation gained through participation contribute to an increased desire to learn and the ability to participate. Educational groups may be formed with the assistance of local community colleges and technical institutes. Actual courses may be conducted in areas such as Braille reading and writing, typing, cooking, knitting, crocheting, ceramics, mobility, and other areas of special interest to consumers.

#### D. Problems Related to Blindness

By sharing with each other problems faced as a direct result of blindness, consumers tend to gain strength in facing their own problems and gradually become better adjusted to their loss of vision. In these groups, the social worker may offer suggestions and provide helpful information through tapes and films which will prove beneficial in guiding the consumer to a better understanding of unmet needs and the manner in which they may be met.

#### E. Groups to Serve

In order that blind and visually impaired persons might have the experience of being "helping persons" rather than merely recipients, opportunity should be given for them to work together on projects that are related to services for other people. Although this could be done by individuals in their own homes, much may be gained through group experience. Examples: assisting in the annual fund raising for the Heart Fund, Cancer Drive, Crippled Children's Fund, or the United Way campaigns. Through these contacts, consumers who are blind may be stimulated to go on into further services where they can offer themselves and their talents to help other people. When the Social Worker for the Blind sees a need for delivering services, he/she should be aware of every possibility to deliver service through the group work technique.

### **XI. Volunteer and Other Community Resources**

The social worker cannot carry out a good service program single-handedly. It is often necessary to request volunteers to assist in such matters as transportation, shopping services, and reading printed material. Volunteers may also help with various recreational programs, crafts, and other group work.

