

OJJDP Training, Technical Assistance and Evaluation Protocols

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, which established the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) specifically mandates a training and technical assistance function. OJJDP meets this mandate largely through awarding grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements through a competitive process, as well as through direct initiatives, such as conferences, seminars, and workshops.

Currently, OJJDP's grantees and contractors use a variety of protocols to provide training and technical assistance and to evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts. OJJDP determined that there is a need to develop protocols representing standards for best practices in these areas to ensure consistency and quality in the provision of training and technical assistance, as well as the evaluation of program initiatives.

OJJDP requested its National Training and Technical Assistance Center (NTTAC) to administer a process, involving its grantees and contractors, that would establish these protocols of best practice. They convened grantees and contractors in a national meeting in December 1997 in order to involve them in the development of such standards.

NTTAC then requested JJTA to develop the protocols, incorporating materials and suggestions from grantees and contractors. Gale Smith, Executive Director of JJTA, and Judith Blair, a founding member of JJTA, agreed to take on this challenge and have been busy working with NTTAC and OJJDP to produce a "Primer" containing these standards of best practice. It is a real tribute to JJTA that our association was chosen to produce a document which will set standards for juvenile justice technical assistance, training, and evaluation. This work certainly fits within JJTA's mandate to "advocate for quality standards in training"

Karen Francis, former Project Director for NTTAC, and Michael Goodnow, Program Specialist from OJJDP, recently met with Gale and Judith to review comments from OJJDP and grantees and contractors in preparation for producing a final document. OJJDP intends to distribute the "Primer" to grantees and contractors late fall 1998. ■

Strength-Based Practice: *Tips and Techniques for Line Staff & Managers*

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Asset-building is an approach that is gaining fast in popularity. However, most asset work is geared for community building or towards policy-level and agency development. Field workers have not been considered or allowed a "seat at the table." Strength-Based Practice has recently been developed with line staff and supervisors in mind. It is an asset—a building approach that has been transitioned from the family therapy field to criminal justice work and offers "one-to-one" practice methods. Staffing groups will find it offers great strategies for raising motivation and cooperation with offenders and families. Here are just a few solution-focused interviewing techniques that will increase motivation and help build solutions:

1. Pre-Session Change Questions. "After being arrested and petitioned, many people notice good changes have already started before their first appointment here at the court. What changes have you noticed in your situation?" "How is this different than before?" "How did you get these changes to happen?" These are questions that a field worker can use to

JJTA Members Working on "Disproportionate Minority Confinement" Project

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, as amended in 1988, directed States to address the overrepresentation of minority youth incarcerated within the juvenile justice system. As part of this effort, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has contracted with Cygnus Corporation to provide technical assistance and training. Cygnus Corp., in turn, has contracted with JJTA members, Gale Smith, Sue Yeres, Margaret Davis, and Judith Blair to assist them in the development of training curricula for law enforcement officers and supervisors, detention workers and supervisors, juvenile prosecutors, and probation officers and supervisors. It is expected that the curricula will be ready for pilot testing by mid-1999. For additional information and technical assistance, contact Karen Francis, Co-Project Director, Cygnus Corporation, 301.231.7537 (e-mail: karenfrancis@cygnusc.com). ■

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elicit strengths and quickly find new, productive changes when first meeting an adolescent or family members.

Numerous studies (Wiener-Davis, et al., 1987, Talmon, 1990, Bloom, 1981) from the family therapy field have found that a majority of mental health clients made significant changes in their problem patterns from the time they set up the initial therapy appointment to actually entering treatment. Just telephoning or making the effort to begin treatment was enough to start positive changes. This is also true of criminal justice populations that have experienced trouble that ended in an arrest or detention. I found similar responses from teens and families newly assigned to my juvenile probation caseload. These family therapy studies found almost 70 percent of their clients reported positive changes when they were asked, but only 20 percent reported these changes spontaneously. The most important idea to remember is that workers must remember to ask to find these changes or they remain obscure.

2. Exception Questions. "Have there been times recently when the problem did not occur?" "When was the most recent time when you were able to [perform the desired behavior]?" "What is different about those times?" "When did this happen?" "Who was involved?" "How did this happen?" This approach holds to the adage "nothing always happens" to convey that there are always times when the problem does not happen or is not considered a problem by the family.

Offenders and their families typically view the complaints that they bring into our courts as constant and therefore usually to not notice exceptions. My experience with this model has shown that there are times when the truant attends school, the angry/assaultive child walks away from a fight, the follower has said "No" to the group, or the parent did not berate or harp on the negative.

The idea is simple: Look for what teens and families do when the problem is not occurring and get them to repeat those same strategies in the future. Here, the profound difference between strength-based work and problem-focused models is obvious. In the latter we are asking, "When does the problem happen?" "When does it get worse?" In strength-based work, there is greater utility in amplifying what is occurring during times when the problem does not happen than when it does. It is very important to note that exceptions need to be purposeful. To find out that during a certain period of time, a substance-abusing teen abstained from using drugs only because the local "dealer" was out of town is certainly an exception that is of no use!

3. Scaling Questions. "Numbers help me understand better. On a scale of 1 to 10 where 10 is your problem solved and 1 is when it was at its worst, where are you now?" How do field workers know that the offenders they work with are getting better or moving in more productive ways? Scaling questions can gather subjective appraisals quickly and easily.

These types of questions are favored by the managed care industry because they are vital to helping workers know what progress clients have already made and what further work needs to be addressed. Scaling questions help establish a baseline against which future progress may be measured. They are used at the end of the initial session and all subsequent meetings. These questions also help field workers to know when someone is satisfied without the workers having to define vague terms such as "communicating better" or "feeling better."

Once a baseline is established, follow-up questions can be used to identify what first steps or small efforts the offender and family believe are important to initiate. The brilliance and practicality of this model is evident in this

line of follow-up questions: "You said a moment ago you were at 3, what would have to happen for you to move to a 4, just up one step?" "Gee, that answer sounded more like when you'd be a 10 and the problem was solved. Think again to what just a 4 would be like. What will you be doing when you are at a 4?" "What will your friends say you are doing differently when you are at a 4?" "What would be the smallest (first) sign if you were moving to a 4?"

4. Percentage Questions. "Mom, how much of Mary's mood is that she's 'turned against you' or 'hates you' and how much of it could just be normal teenage ups and downs? 70/30? 50/50?" "Billy, how much of this problem is one that's 'never going to change' or could it be that things just aren't going very well for you right now and may get better in the near future? 80/20?, 60/40?" I love this technique offered by Selekman (1993) because you can introduce an idea or a different view of the problem very easily with just one question. One must be careful not to condone, such as reframing drug use as "just experimenting." Helping teens to think differently about a problem is a great accomplishment.

People should never underestimate how helpful it can be to change someone's "thinking" or how they perceive a problem as it can be fertile ground for solutions. One frustration often encountered is that people can get stuck in how they conceive a problem. Their conception of the problem is often very negative and singular, allowing no other explanations. The problem intensifies because they become stuck in a limited view. The percentage question can introduce other competing realities or explanations that are more optimistic and promote change by loosening the problems "stranglehold."

Look for more strength-based techniques in the next issue. ■