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CAAP Final Project Letter of Intent

A Facilitator Training Manual for the Families Learning Together Program

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Problem Statement and Project Rationale

In partial fulfillment of my Masters degree in Counselling Psychology, I intend to create a facilitator training manual for the Families Learning Together program (FLT) offered by The Salvation Army Children's Village in Calgary. The Salvation Army Children's Village is a multidisciplinary mental health agency that provides services to emotionally and behaviourally troubled children and their families. The Families Learning Together program is one of six programs offered by The Salvation Army Children's Village. The FLT program began in 2002 in response to the belief that the therapeutic needs of parents and children are met through a two-generation professionally facilitated group format. An important component lacking from this program is a formal training manual for facilitators. It is widely held that training manuals are an important component to any mental health program for it helps guide facilitators to work more effectively, efficiently and uniformly (Casady, 1992). To date, FLT facilitators have been conducting groups with little prior training. Facilitators have expressed a need for a training manual in which they can learn the necessary skills and theory to effectively carry out a two-generation program. The facilitator training manual to be created for the FLT program will encompass the following components: program philosophy, theoretical foundations, facilitation skills, group processes, group goals and objectives, examples of session plans, and references and resources.

Supporting Literature

Most parents agree that parenting is one of life's greatest challenges. Researchers, psychologists, and counsellors conclude that parenting is a major determinant of child well being and that parents are the single most direct influence in their child's development (Prinz & Miller, 1996). The need for effective parenting practices has led to the development of parenting programs to train parents in skills viewed as necessary for creating a strong parent-child attachment and for the amelioration of a number of childhood problems (Pinsker & Geoffroy, 1981). These programs address topics such as discipline, positive nurturing, stress management, family structure, sibling rivalry and effective communication. Most parenting groups are eight to eleven weeks in length for two hours per week, and use group discussion, videotapes, reading materials, role play, story telling, and manuals to teach skills that participants can use in their own homes (Gross & Grady, 2002).

Child groups and programs address the individual child's needs in order to foster appropriate skills to change behaviours and to help establish or reestablish an age appropriate role within the family. There are a number of individual and small group child-treatment programs designed to treat or prevent behaviour problems in children. This treatment approach is promising, but not as effective as parent education groups (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003). This may be the result of narrowly focusing on a single topic (e.g., social skills, anger management, and problem solving) rather than addressing a variety of issues and concerns that include the entire family (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003).

Two-generation groups are designed to meet the needs of both the parent and child (Hood & Eyberg, 2003). They are based, in part, on assumptions derived from the family systems theory in which the major focus of intervention is the family as a whole.

Proponents of family systems theory believe that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, that is, that family relationships are reciprocal and have circular, rather than linear, patterns of interaction (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999). Thus, a change in one part of the system will produce change in another.

Two-generation groups are effective in supporting change in family interactions, relations, cohesion, adaptability, and behaviours of the child. These programs recognize that the relationship between parent and child is interdependent. Programs including both the parent and child have shown positive effects in the areas such as the home learning environment, child-rearing behaviours and attitudes, maternal role as a teacher and sense of parental efficacy, parent-child interactions, and time spent with the child (Alaggia, 2001).

Importance of the Project

Training is about communication. Without high quality and thorough preparation, communication falters and will achieve less than what otherwise might be possible. High quality training documentation is part of that preparation. It will leave little room for questions of ‘How?’ ‘What aspects?’ ‘How long?’ and ‘To what end?’ A well thought-out training manual promotes better professional delivery. It increases likelihood of high-quality presentation every time a group is run (Nilson, 1993). Providing the FLT supervisor with a training manual will not only help guide the training of future facilitators, but it will ensure that the facilitators are trained in an effective, efficient and

professional manner. This, in turn, will help the parents and children within the FLT groups obtain the knowledge that will help their families not only learn together but also stay together.

Description of Methods and/or Procedures

This training manual is intended to be a training tool to support the counselling practice of staff who will facilitate the two-generation Families Learning Together groups. In these groups the parents and children attend separate groups that run simultaneously and focus on the same topic. What makes this two-generation program unique from other groups is that at the conclusion of each group session, parents and children are brought together to practice and share with each other the skills and tools that were discussed and learned in their separate group sessions that evening. These skills and tools are then incorporated into a family activity where the parent and child participate together.

A decision was made to create a facilitator manual after I had met with the current FLT program supervisor, past FLT program supervisor, and final project supervisor. Together we discussed several possible projects, keeping in mind how such projects might be most beneficial to the program. It was decided between the four of us to develop a training manual to help support future facilitators since this important aspect of the program was missing.

There are several steps needed to ensure that this manual will be beneficial not only to the facilitators, but also ultimately to the families who will attend the program. Steps that will be taken in writing the manual include:

- Conduct a literature review. This step will include Internet searches and researching library resources that discuss two-generation programs as well as references on how to write and develop a training manual. To write an effective manual, one must be knowledgeable about its topic (Casidy, 1992).
- Write a manual outline. Make sure to carefully think about and prepare your manual before you implement it (Brandt, 2002). This step will include consulting with past and present supervisors and facilitators in order to conduct a thorough needs assessment to determine training needs. Feedback will be received with regards to information the facilitators would find helpful to them during training in the areas of resources, session topics, goals, the group process, theories supporting the FLT program, problem solving with difficult clients and other related topics.
- Pull together information and documentation that will be used to support the manual (Nilson, 1993). I will meet with the current FLT supervisor to collect any information or resources that have been used in the past for training.
- Once the manual is in draft, the program supervisor as well as my final project supervisor will provide feedback and guidance on any necessary changes or additions required. An effective manual takes into consideration the people, places or things that impact on or will be impacted by the training program (Brandt, 2002).

In the past, facilitators have expressed that it is difficult to provide quality service to their families due to the lack of understanding of theories and adapting lessons to meet

the needs of all ages within the children's group. The facilitator training manual I will create will address such issues.

Potential Implications of the Project

The potential of developing a training manual for Families Learning Together facilitators includes increasing the facilitator's knowledge of essential background information regarding issues and approaches of the FLT program, having consistency between the groups for future research, and providing facilitators with resources helpful in conducting the groups. Other mental health professionals will benefit from this project as well. With the emergence of two-generation programs, there are few resources available to aid in facilitating similar groups. Brandt (2002) notes that training manuals are critical to articulate and share the vision and direction of one's program with other professionals and future similar programs. The goal of the program is to strengthen the family unit. With a well-written manual, counsellors will be more competent to help the families that will attend the group. Families Learning Together is a new program that can help foster success within families. This final project will therefore be an invaluable tool to the facilitators who intend to conduct a group within the Families Learning Together program to help families learn and grow together.

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