

Stephen Gray

Appreciative Inquiry Facilitator Practicum Report

Community Assistance Program

At

Truman Medical Centers – Behavioral Health

Kansas City, MO

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with Rebecca Blackwell, BSN

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2. I attended the Appreciative Inquiry Facilitator Training at Truman Medical Center in Kansas City, MO from March 22, 2011 to March 25, 2011. It should be noted that Rebecca Blackwell also attended the same Appreciative Inquiry Facilitator Training in March 2011 and co-facilitated this practicum with me.

3. I worked with the Community Assistance Program, which is a community support program for clients with severe mental illness within Truman Medical Center-Behavioral Health. The program consists of a director, four team leaders, four qualified mental health professionals, about 18 community support specialists, two nurses, and two administrative support staff. The program provides rehabilitation-level services to individuals with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression amongst others to assist these individuals with becoming more independent and meeting their goals within the community.

4. This is the list of stakeholders included in the Core Group for Community Assistance Program's Appreciative Inquiry:

Andrea Lopez, Team Leader; Carol Gordon, Community Support Specialist (CSS); Patricia Reed, CSS; Cassandra Davis, Qualified Mental Health Professional (QMHP); Marco Katada, Team Nurse; Katherine Jackson, QMHP; Tara Knutsen, Team Leader; Trena Willich, CSS; Keith Williston, CSS; Mollie Parker, CSS; Crystal Haynes, CSS; Gertha Faye Brooks, Administrative Assistant

5. The Community Assistance Program's Core Group identified Support, Appreciation, and Positive Communication as their core topic. Although the Core Group did not wish to participate in a visual representation, the Roots and Leaves of a Tree method was used to help identify the topic. Co-facilitators started by inquiring about root problems within the program and asking what kind of

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outcomes (leaves) these root problems create. Then, the Core Group was asked to identify more desirable outcomes for the program. The final piece to this was to have group members identify the roots that would grow these more desirable leaves. From the ten or so suggestions that were offered, the Core Group selected Support, Appreciation, and Positive Communication as the topic for the day of Appreciative Inquiry. They chose not to narrow beyond this.

6. The Modified Interview Guide:

Interview Guide

Best Experience:

Tell me a story about the best times that you had in the workplace (not necessarily TMC but it can be). Looking at your entire experience, recall a time when you felt the most supported, felt the most appreciated, and experienced the most positive communication. What made it a healthy and positive experience? Who was involved? Describe the event in detail

Values:

Let's talk for a moment about some things you value deeply; specifically, the things you value about yourself; about the nature of your work; and about Community Assistance Program?

- a. Without being humble, what do you value most about yourself – as a person and as a member of the CAP team? What qualities do you most appreciate in a co-worker? In a supervisor? (Maybe think of your favorite co-worker and supervisor and describe their qualities.)
- b. When you are feeling the absolute best about your job, what does your work experience look like? Describe. What does your life look like? What are you doing for personal wellness?
- c. Tell me about a time when your work on CAP was a boost to your own life? Describe a time when you felt most energized by this work.
- d. What is the single most important thing that Community Assistance Program has contributed to your life and the world?

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Core Value:

What do you experience as the core value of the Community Assistance Program? Give some examples of how you experience this core value?

Three Wishes:

What three wishes would you make to heighten the vitality and health of the Community Assistance Program? (To build on support that is happening, to take current appreciation to a higher level, and use examples of positive communication to create more examples- remember that support, appreciation, and positive communication are happening and that the wishes pertain to how to have more of these things.)

7. Face-to-face paired interviews were used to inquire about exceptionally positive moments.

There was one group of three since there was an odd number present from Community Assistance Program. Pairs were allowed to interview each other for 60 minutes. (The Appreciative Inquiry Day was held in large, cavernous house that was allowed us for free. This gave pairs freedom to meet in different rooms, each having its own unique aesthetics. The large group would reconvene in a theater to present ideas.)

8. There were about twenty life-giving forces identified between five groups of 2-3 pairs. The five life-giving forces that these groups selected to focus their energy on are as follows:

- Camaraderie defined as having more quality time as a team and improved staff relationships
- Confidence and Competence defined as being confident and competent in one's role on the team and having professional trust in one's colleagues to be competent in their varying roles
- Laughter/Fun in the workplace
- Quality interactions and wellness
- Mentoring and taking new staff under one's wing

Some very creative and funny visual images came out of these life-giving forces. The camaraderie group performed a scenario where everyone on the team was invited to lunch, asked how they were doing, and reinforced for being an important part of the team. The confidence/competence group performed a play with finger puppets from behind a wall that included different animals of the jungle describing their roles and how they fulfill them while trusting others to “complete the circle”. The toucan keeps repeating, “Toucan do it!” The Laughter/Fun in the Workplace group performed a skit where some daily doldrums are suddenly whipped into a frenzy of dancing and laughter by a particularly inspired individual sporting a blue bowler hat. The Quality Interactions and Wellness group created a large format drawing that depicted positive interactions, healthy activities, and a peace sign tipping a scale and outweighing numbers, checklists, and money on the other side. The Mentoring group performed a skit highlighting the different ways that people receive information using a blindfold, earmuffs, and a muzzle to effectively make its point.

9. Despite coaching the groups at length and providing numerous examples from the Appreciative Inquiry materials, the groups struggled with making *Provocative Propositions*. They are positive propositions certainly but did not necessarily push the boundaries of provocation:

Camaraderie Group: We have a great work environment that promotes companionship between co-workers.

Confidence/Competence Group: We are always trusted to do our jobs competently (and always trust others the same).

Laughter/Fun in the Workplace: We value the benefits of humor in the workplace and look for opportunities to reduce stress and increase positive communication through laughter.

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Quality Interactions and Wellness: We have positive attitudes because we focus on quality interactions with clients and each other.

Mentoring: We mentor to encourage an environment that supports reaching, teaching, growing, showing, going, and knowing.

10. The program came up with a number of bold ideas for strategic intentions to realize the created propositions.

- Focusing on strengths when implementing supervision, writing policies, and developing tracking processes

- Having a 10 to 1 ratio for positive statements to negative statements in communication

- Lunch with other team members last Thursday of the month

- 1 Team meeting a month dedicated to recognition and team building

- CAP theme song played to start team meetings (maybe multiple songs)

- Daily joke page or email

- Joke of the Day and Joke Jar in the Admin Office

- Solicit volunteers and ask new hires which staff were most helpful in orientation

- Community scavenger hunt for new employees

- Revise new hire handbook – “things I wish I knew on the first day”

- Schedule shadows in Outlook calendar and Day Planner before new hire starts

- Develop cheat sheets for quarterlies, community resources, RCF's, etc.

11. The Community Assistance Program has had great success implementing team building and appreciation/recognition activities since the Appreciative Inquiry session in August 2011. Six months

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into working on the initiatives, CAP has implemented a team lunch on the last Thursday of the month where team members celebrating their anniversaries with the agency are recognized. Those celebrating their anniversaries are treated to lunch as well. The program held a holiday potluck that included a Secret Santa/White Elephant component. There is also a Spring/Summer 2012 picnic in the planning process. Overall, the theme of appreciation and camaraderie has taken off. For a community job that can lend itself to operating on an island at times, the focus on cohesion has been important to building team chemistry.

The mentoring group has developed "common usage cheat sheet" for new staff that explains the appropriate process for a variety of tasks one encounters in the job. The cheat sheets provide simple instructions for necessary tasks and information on resources. The aim is to decrease acclimation time for new hires for the program. This group is still in the planning stage with regard to identification of go-to staff for mentoring and development of a community scavenger hunt for new employees. They meet every two months to discuss progress on these fronts.

The "laughter in the workplace" group has obtained a joke jar and begun collecting jokes. The group has also coordinated some after work social activities for program members. There is also a recognition process that has been implemented by the Confidence/Competence group. During the last team meeting of every month, program members are allowed to submit Applause forms for co-workers that will be read at the first meeting of the next month. Still on the to-do list is the development of a supervisory tool that focuses on strengths and accomplishments.

12. As the Appreciative Inquiry facilitator, I have planned to attend the next team meeting devoted to Ai initiatives to revisit provocative propositions and strategic initiatives with the Community Assistance Program. One important part of attending this meeting will be to recognize and reinforce accomplishments that the program has already made toward its ideas for a more appreciative,

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supportive, and communicative work environment. During this part of the gathering, I intend to ask CAP members to share their experiences with the initiatives and how they accomplished their goals. The other idea is to revisit some strategic initiatives that have not gotten off the ground to see if there is still some energy to work on them. There were several initiatives identified on the day of the Ai session, and some might have been lost in the shuffle while beginning work on the others. If there is energy with regard to some initiatives that did not get under way in that past six months, then my co-facilitator and I will help explore the potential for implementation with the stakeholders. Celebration and recognition of individuals who advanced specific initiatives will happen with core group's input. Refreshments will be provided as another way to celebrate successes. This is for the 6-month review of progress. After this review, I plan to stay in contact with the chairs of individual initiatives regarding further progress made toward realization of desired future.

13. My greatest wish from the inquiry was that the stakeholders would both understand and accept, whether it be intuitively or radically, the principles of Appreciative Inquiry and that my presentation would aid in this process. I mostly wished for enthusiasm and energy, as there was some fear on my part that stakeholders might be skeptical or apathetic. I learned that I am able to provide material in a way that is interesting enough to maintain focus. The facilitating experience also confirmed for me that people respond well to me in a presentation and that I am adept at lightening the mood with laughter. This was important to ease people in to the energy and enthusiasm because I had heard from co-workers that stakeholders were skeptical about the Appreciative Inquiry session in the days before the presentation and experience. However, my personal best experience probably came later in the day while making rounds to different groups as they worked on creative/visual metaphors for their life-giving forces. To see team members really engaged in the creative process with others who might not be in their normal work social circle, it was a great experience to witness a team connecting in a way

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that they do not normally. My co-facilitator and I were able to provide guidance and encouragement without directing or stifling creativity of the groups.

One group in particular was struggling with the concept, saying essentially that there was no way to improve the program without fixing the problems that exist. Every road seemed to lead back to the fact that production and billing were down, so they could not have the work situation that they wanted because finances would not allow it. Being financially successful and feeling satisfied and excited about work were mutually exclusive in their minds. It was received positively but also as a semi-radical idea that financial success and satisfaction/excitement could potentially fuel each other. I went back to the interview guide with them to re-elicite exceptionally positive moments from their work within Community Assistance Program. (When were things working at their very best?). After we identified positive moments again, the creative process opened up to develop a visual metaphor and a provocative proposition. The process of refocusing and reframing to things people appreciate about their work was necessary to keep energy moving in that direction. However, the more important piece was to go one step further with the group and ask how they could have more of what they appreciate in their work. The group members were good at identifying things that they liked about their job and the program. The struggle came in identifying ways to create more of the things that they liked without specifically addressing/fixing problems.

Lastly, I hoped that I could manage to keep interest and have enough material for the day. When I arrived in the morning, several stakeholders asked me how early I would be able to get them out for the day. The impression was made that getting done early was maybe more important than the Appreciative Inquiry being beneficial. However, at the end of the day, we actually ran over on time, and most individuals were still highly engaged and interacting with facilitators and each other.

14. The Community Assistance Program gave permission for their story to be shared with others.