The Consumer Dialogue Project: Changing MSW Students’ Attitudes Towards People with Mental Illness

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Project supported by the Adult Mental Health Section of the NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, Substance Abuse Services
Stigma

- Societal
- Mental health professionals often share general societal attitudes about consumers
- How to create partnership for recovery?
**Changing Attitudes**

- Community education: mixed results
- Academic education: seminars and classes some positive results
- Proximity to consumers: some positive results
- Contact: positive results
- Structured contact: positive results
  - equal status
  - pursuing common goals
  - cooperative activity
Dialogues

- A form of structured contact
- Meaningful exchange of information
- Relationship builder
- Supported by Federal Consumer Affairs Office, Center for Mental Health Services, SAMHSA (www.samhsa.gov)
- Sponsored for consumers and psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric nurses, social workers
Dialogues and Social Work Students

- Student attitudes towards consumers often similar to society’s

- Goals were:
  - to create an experience to shift attitudes towards consumers
  - to begin partnerships between students and consumers
  - to provide experience real relationship
University of North Carolina
School of Social Work

- 10 volunteer MSW candidate students
- 10 consumers from across the state
- Facilitator
- Full day (10am to 4pm)
- Two areas of discussion
  - understanding and partnership
  - recommendations for change
Dialogue Themes

- Experiences of consumers and social work students with each other
- Issues of identity, personhood, stigma, culture, roles
- Consumers and social work students in relationship and partnership
- What is needed for recovery, what gets in the way?
- Recommendations
**Dialogue Research**

- Pre and post test of students
  - social distance scale
  - perception of dangerousness scale
  - affective reaction scale

- Post interview of students
  - What did you learn?
  - What was valuable?
  - How might your practice be different?
**Scales**

**Social Distance**
- 7 questions about interactions with consumers
- e.g. “would you rent a room to a person with MI?”
- 0-4, 0=definitely willing, 4=definitely unwilling

**Perception of Dangerousness**
- 8 statements about dangerousness of consumers
- 1=strongly agree, 7=strongly disagree

**Affective Reaction**
- 10 pairs of adjectives, rate where they fall
- 1=most positive, 7=most negative
Results (Average change)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>pre</th>
<th>post</th>
<th>sig.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social distance</td>
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<td>Affective</td>
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Post Interview Themes

- Awareness of the importance of relationship
- Hopefulness about recovery
- Awareness of consumer strengths
- Empathy around stigma
- Importance of listening and honesty
- Desire to work with consumers
- Need for more consumer involvement in education
Recommendations

- Support for consumer/student experiences
- Consumer developed educational materials for students
- Much more consumer content in classes
- Consumer mentors/student shadows
- Consumer instructors
- Consumer consultants for curriculum
Applications

- Potential benefit in advanced mental health HBSE and practice classes
- Potential benefit in classes on discrimination
- Extrapolation to other end users?
- Ongoing evaluation
  - larger group
  - integration or “drift”? 
**Resources**


Resources


Resources


