Introduction to the Dignity versus Dehumanization in Long-Term Care Settings for Older

Persons: A Training Outline

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The Dignity versus Dehumanization in Long-Term Care Settings for Older

Persons: A Training Outline (1990), is designed to include a great deal of participant

involvement (i.e., input to the trainer during the lecture phase, short individual self-

observations, short individual paper-and-pencil contemplation, group sharing, group

problem solving). It can be completed in 2 to 3 hours or over several days. Each exercise

can be shortened or lengthened, depending upon the amount of time set aside for the

training. The training outline is comprised of three modules. The counselor/trainer can

feel free to use or discount any aspect of the modules. The training outline is located at

http://eric.ed.gov/. It's record locator is ED317917.

The first module is a lecture/participant format in which the trainer discusses the

concepts of dignity versus dehumanization, gives examples of dehumanizing behavior on

the part of service providers, and invites input from participants regarding dignity

enhancing or dehumanizing practices. This module includes discussions of dehumanizing

communication between staff and the older people they serve; problems associated with

lack of privacy for older people in institutions; and general issues of disrespect that

convey to older people that they are either unimportant, mentally incompetent, unable to

make their own decisions, or all of these. The module ends by asking participants to

identify situations in which a person's sense of worth/dignity/pride can be enhanced.

Throughout this module, participants are invited to share their own experiences and ideas

with the group.

The second module invites participants to reflect, more personally, about the concept of dignity versus dehumanization. First, participants are asked to sit quietly and list 5 things that have been dehumanizing to them, personally. This is followed by small group sharing (two or three people) and then a large group discussion. Next, participants are asked to sit quietly and list 5 things that have contributed to their own sense of self-worth. This is followed by small group discussions and then a large group discussion. Next, each participant is asked to list 5 things that they have done to another person (e.g., persons who are older, clients, their mates, their parents) that have been dehumanizing. Again, this is followed by small and large group discussions. The final activity in the second module involves asking each participant to look back at this last list and to consider how each situation could have been handled differently. This activity is followed by group discussions. Because the second module asks people to "dig" into their own personal experiences, they are often touched at a very different level than they would be by a lecture; therefore this experience often brings out emotions and speculations of change.

The third module asks participants to examine their own service delivery programs to identify the degree to which the practices encourage dignity or dehumanization of the people they serve. Participants are divided into groups of two to six people. These groups can be based on the type of program people work in or on specific programs that they all work in. After a list of dehumanizing practices has been developed, each group is asked to use brainstorming to list ways that each of these conditions can be changed and/or how workshop participants can be effective change agents. Brainstorming rules typically need to be described (i.e., no idea is a bad idea; go

for quantity of ideas; think positively; think "this can be done"). This training module is typically difficult for participants. Often, they get "hung up" on all the reasons, rules, guidelines, or people that will not allow for change, rather than creatively seeking ways to change a situation. This is why it is good to include all levels of employees in such an exercise. After brainstorming, small groups report back to the larger group to describe potentially dehumanizing practices and strategies for changing these. It is good to ask the entire group of participants to continue brainstorming on these issues. If time permits, each group can be asked to continue working on the changes they have suggested; and at this point to include goals, steps, procedures, responsibilities, and timelines associated with the suggested changes.

I love doing this training! It is sometimes frightening because it asks participants to review their own perceptions and actions to determine whether they and their programs are providing a dignity enhancing environment for their clients. It is often a real eye-opener, and results in program and staff changes that enhance their clients' environment.