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WHERE DOES TRAINING END AND TREATMENT BEGIN?

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At the Third International Child and Youth Care Conference, in a panel discussion entitled, "Child and Youth Care: Profession or Fantasy," Dr. Mark Krueger referred to a comment made by Al Trieschman that went something like, "It only works when you have a twinkle in your eye." To the uninitiated, the comment may seem strange. To those of us who have worked and taught in the field, it seems to make a great deal of sense. Within my team at the Child and Youth Care Counselor Program at Douglas College,we have mused with the idea of asking applicants to tell a joke as part of the screening process. Yet I doubt that this simplistic approach would enable us to distinguish between those applicants with the twinkle and those without.

In this paper I attempt to identify those applicants who, I believe, are unlikely to be successful and who may constitute a significant negative influence and drain on available resources. The ideas expressed are largely my own, having been developed through years of observation and discussion. In this respect I make no claims of empirical validity but I hope that, for people involved in the provision of training and education of child and youth care counselors, the ideas expressed in this paper will have the same type of "face validity" as Mark's "twinkle" had for me.

WHERE DOES TRAINING END AND TREATMENT BEGIN?

Recently, in a discussion with a friend, who is a respected adult educator and child and youth care professional, she said she was amazed at the number of disturbed applicants being attracted by the related training programs. She wondered whether this had always been the case, and we were just now (heaven forbid) starting to recognize it, or whether we were experiencing a genuine and significant increase. My response was that I thought a close examination would show both to be true. We are experiencing an increase in the number of troubled or disturbed applicants, and we are coming to recognize them more quickly. The reason why we recognize these applicants more quickly, I believe, is because we are learning from our mistakes. It is reminiscent of a favorite high school teacher of mine who, years ago, advised me never to let anyone tell me that I was good for nothing, as I could always be used as a horrible example.

From a philosophical perspective, I recognize that we all need to learn, and in a developing profession such as Child and Youth Care, we have had to learn from our experience. From a more human perspective, I seriously lament the pain and frustration experienced when an applicant in need of treatment has been directed to training, and has not been identified until involved in the process. The impact can be enormous. Not only are the applicant's needs left unmet, but he or she is likely to drain teaching resources and have a negative influence on other students and field sites. The reverberations of such an experience may continue to be felt for several years and may, as a result, color perceptions of a training program and of graduates past, present and future.

Why we are seeing an increase in the number of troubled applicants for these programs may be a more difficult question to answer. One could argue that the general level and frequency of disturbance has increased in our society. However, I do not believe that the phenomenon can be explained in such a simplistic fashion, and would speculate that there are also a number of historical and sociological factors at play. For instance, it has been only in the last twenty-five to thirty years that we have made the transition from settings and personnel who were largely custodial, institutional, and frequently insensitive and punitive in their dealings with children and youth, to more normalized settings staffed by caregivers who are knowledgeable of both child development and helping strategies. With this change has come a greater awareness and sensitivity to the emotional stability of workers.

Another important factor may be that we are now speaking openly about many forms of child abuse and neglect. People who as children suffered neglect or sexual, physical or emotional abuse are coming to realize that they are neither alone nor to blame for their situations. Many applicants who have been abused and neglected themselves, feel very deep and genuine empathy for children who find themselves in these situations. The problem arises when a student has not adequately dealt with his neglect or abuse. A lecture or discussion in the classroom or the revelation of the circumstances or details of a child's abuse while on practicum may throw the student into crisis, perhaps causing him to re-experience the feelings associated with his own abuse. Regardless of what the actual inner turmoil may be, the net effect appears to be that the student is effectively immobilized and ceases to learn in the classroom or to function in the role of child and youth care counselor in the work place.

Another factor may be the general democratization of education through the community college system. Education holds wonderful potential for enhancing all of our lives, and I heartily support an open door policy in many, but not all, areas of community college education. Everyone does not have a right to train to work with emotionally and behaviorally troubled children and youth. Our clients are too fragile, frequently having been victimized by adults who were unable or unwilling to act responsibly in caring for them. Our resources are too limited, both in our educational

institutions and in our agency settings; we cannot have students and instructors struggling to cope with a student who, in the final analysis, cannot be successful, while another student who could succeed waits, or worse yet, doesn't wait for a seat in a program. Neither can we have workers, who may in many instances be struggling with problems related to understaffing, be forced into a situation where there is a demand placed on them to put more time and energy into a trainee than into the children in their care. Should this occur and fail to be dealt with in a swift and effective manner, then rest assured that this field placement site will no longer be available when the well prepared student finally gets his seat.

I am not advocating, in any sense of the word, academic elitism. I see, on a regular basis, graduates who completed our program with a GPA in the 2-2.5 (C to C+) range who are responsible and skilled adults providing quality care to the children and families they serve. Neither am I suggesting that prospective trainees should be people who have never experienced any major difficulties in their lives. There's a lot to say for "having been there." I think, in many instances, it makes it easier for clients to believe that you actually understand what they are experiencing, and to provide them with some encouragement or inspiration that survival and success are possible. In this manner, the applicant who has been in therapy or counseling may have some very valuable insights into not only the experience but also into the process of recovery.

Neither am I suggesting that we need to have *all* of our issues, problems, and conflicts worked out. Recently, again in a discussion with a well respected adult educator and child and youth care professional (a different one), we talked about a professional school in a related discipline where the belief was that one needed to be a fully functioning human being with all of one's issues resolved prior to being admitted into the program. My response was that I believe that they are probably deluding themselves, and may even be in need of treatment!

Students in my introductory counseling course work in triads as client/helper/observer. I am frequently asked what one should do if one has nothing "to work on." This is predictable, and typically comes from one of two groups of students; it is either tongue-in-cheek from a student who knows me, in which case I respond that, if such is the case, the student is most likely dead and, therefore, does not in all probability need the course. The other group from which this question may be posed is comprised of students who have serious life concerns, and have been made very anxious by the thought that they may be placed in a position where they are expected to share experiences. I respond, of course, that all genuine concerns are valid subjects for discussion with a helper, and it doesn't need to be a life and death, or otherwise urgent or deep seated concern, in order to provide good opportunity for practicing skills.

There needs to be a balance between the helper's own issues and his ability to be of help to the client. There are times for all of us when we need to work a little harder to focus on what our clients are feeling and saying

because it touches on some painful feelings or memories for us personally, but professionals should, by and large, be able to do this. If we can't, or if a student can't do this, particularly if the conflict is related to one of the central themes of child and youth care (abandonment, rejection, neglect, or abuse), then I question whether the student is ready for training.

Now, if we accept that there is a problem, and secondly, that we understand the nature of the problem, then the question becomes how do we delineate between applicants who are ready for training and applicants who need to do some substantial personal work? I believe that the first priority or requirement in this process is having faculty who can understand, articulate, and most of all, respect the distinctions between training and treatment. Simply, I would define training as the process by which we help students develop insights, attitudes and skills so that they may join the child and youth care profession. Personal growth regularly occurs during this process as students (and instructors) are forced to examine and adapt their values, attitudes and behaviors. However, regardless of how substantial this growth may be, it is truly incidental to the process. On the other hand, the primary objective of treatment is to release clients from the grip of their conflicts, and to help them learn how they can promote their personal growth. In a like fashion, where we see personal growth occurring incidentally through training, it is very possible that many of the insights gained through the process of effective treatment may generalize to the helping of others. However, it is important to emphasize that this is not a necessary progression, and to recognize that those things which could conceivably generalize to the helping of others are truly incidental to the process of treatment. The distinction then is, in many ways, one of balance or relative needs. We all have ongoing needs for both personal growth, and for the acquisition of knowledge and skills to further our work as helpers, and the two are by no means mutually exclusive. However, if our need for personal growth in any given area is greater than our need for training, then we will, I predict, be unable to avail ourselves of the benefits of that training until such time as that need has been met.

I know that frequently, upon learning and understanding what was happening for a student in his or her personal life, we would connect a student with a member of our counseling staff, by-passing the normal process, and wait. To do otherwise would compromise the position of the instructor and the student. As many instructors in this field have been, and continue to be helping professionals, the temptation is always present to blur the distinction between trainer and helper. The word "temptation" is used because I do not believe that people become helping professionals by chance, but rather from the need within each of us to help others. The trainer or instructor who violates this role distinction is either ignorant of the differences between training and treatment or is actively indulging his or her need to help, and to perhaps be prized and praised for doing so, over the right of his student to be helped by someone who is not in a position of authority over him.

What is needed is a process that will allow faculty to distinguish between applicants who are ready for training and those who are not, and which will, while not depriving applicants of due process, support faculty in their professional judgments. This can be difficult, as many institutions, particularly in the community college system with which I am familiar, have an open door policy which essentially means, "first come, first served." I think it is admirable, and I know I risk being accused of playing NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) when I say, "But you've got to set a different standard when you're accepting students into a child and youth care counselor training program." The challenge is not an easy one. Senior administrators or college board members usually don't have an applied child and youth care background. Therefore, it is unreasonable to expect that people in these positions will somehow automatically understand the importance of the use of self in our therapeutic endeavors with our clients.

They need to understand that, while their intent is to be democratic and egalitarian, they are, in all probability, being at least irresponsible, and at worst actively destructive through acts of omission: irresponsible in terms of the applicant who needs treatment and gets instead another failure experience; irresponsible in terms of the applicant ready for training who did not get that seat; irresponsible in terms of the instructors who pour so much time into this individual that the rest of the class is short changed; irresponsible in terms of the agency, their clients and staff who experience failure and who may subsequently decline to participate in college training programs; and irresponsible in terms of graduates who will not be hired by employers because of the program's reputation.

When I hear instructors venting their frustrations about students who should not be in their programs, but are, and hear agency directors complain that the students that were sent to them on placement were candidates for treatment, not training, then I know there is a problem. I, indeed, consider myself fortunate to work at an institution which supports its faculty in their endeavors to screen out prospective students who are not ready for training, and to direct these applicants to other "next steps." I believe that my position is also supported by the fact that our attrition rate is typically very low. For example, this year one student, who was doing well, left the program at Christmas, and the other 23 stayed to the end. Of those, three will need to repeat or complete courses or practice while the rest will graduate in June. Our employment statistics are high, with (in the years in which we followed up) over 80% of graduates securing employment within one month of graduation. I do not believe that we would have the applicants, attrition rate, or employment rate if we were unable to do our screening up front.

I have little doubt that some colleges, in addition to wishing to be democratic and egalitarian, may also be reluctant to implement procedures to screen applicants, for fear of appeals and challenges. Although this may indeed happen, I firmly believe that the advantages far outweigh the risks. Risks can be minimized by ensuring due process and careful handling of the

applicants who are not ready for training, some of whom are undoubtedly disappointed or upset by the decision, but many of whom agree with the decision, and may even express a great sense of relief. Some of the applicants who are screened out take the feedback from the process and, with the aid of student services or community agencies, pursue work which will help them make the transition to being "ready for training."

In the sixteen years in which I've been involved with the process, it has produced one formal appeal within the college system, which was resolved in support of the original decision that the student was not ready for training. It has produced one irate letter from an officer of a government agency sponsoring an applicant, demanding that his client be admitted to the program immediately. This received a polite response, ensuring him that our intent was to plan, as best as possible, for the success of his client, who followed the suggestions set out for her, and is now progressing quite successfully through our part-time program, as advised.

Our process, which has been developed and refined through the close working relationship we enjoy with our professional community, works as follows:

Applicants for our program are invited to a two-day orientation: one evening and one full day. They are advised in writing, by the Office of the Registrar, that attendance at the process is mandatory, if they wish to be considered for a seat in the program. Applicants with conflicts can request that they maintain their current date of application, and be invited to the next screening process.

Our demand is consistently high, with this year producing one hundred and seventy-five applications for twenty-four full-time seats. Of these, approximately half (85) will actually attend the orientation and screening process, eight to ten will eventually be found not ready for training, and approximately 20 will typically self-select out, based on information received about the career or program. The remaining will go forward to the Office of the Registrar to await the clearing of the backlog from previous years, and be offered a seat.

Alternate arrangements are not regularly made for applicants who fail to attend the process. Our experience with applicants in the early years of our program, who were able to negotiate their way out of this experience, was very poor. However, individual consideration will continue to need to be given to exceptional circumstances.

The applicants proceed into a lecture theatre and are given an hour to answer questions, in essay format, regarding their perceptions of child and youth care, and their personal/professional reasons for pursuing a career in this field. While the applicants are doing this, they are supervised by current students.

During this time, the 25 volunteers from our child and youth care community are provided with a light dinner, and review both the process for the next day and a half and the behavioral criteria which we ask them to utilize in determining the applicant's readiness for training. These volun-

teers are formed into teams comprised of a team leader, who will manage the process during the small group components of the orientation and screening process, and two raters who observe and record the relevant behavior of the applicants during the small group components of the ensuing process. Any team that does not include a fairly recent graduate of the program, is joined by a current student, so that up-to-date information about the content and process of the program can be available.

In addition to the screening or threshold criteria, volunteers are acquainted with their different roles (team leaders are definitely not group facilitators); some characteristic profiles of "not ready" and "questionable" students are provided, and suggestions are made about impromptu modifications that can be made, should the process bog down or otherwise go awry. It is emphasized that the applicants are not in competition, and that we are not looking for the best candidates, rather, we are looking for applicants who, after careful consideration of their performance, we do not believe stand a good chance of success in the Child and Youth Care Counselor Program, the child and youth care profession or, in all probability, either.

The community and student volunteers and program faculty then join the applicants. The applicants are welcomed and the volunteers and faculty are briefly introduced. The purpose and process of the two days is reviewed again, making sure that the applicants understand that they are not in competition. It is pointed out to the applicants that, although the demand is high and the supply of seats low, their prospects of being successful has just increased by 100% as 50% of the applicants failed to show. A few "business" details are reviewed, and the applicants, faculty, and volunteers find the other members of their group.

The groups then proceed to their assigned rooms and engage in a general question and answer session with the volunteers and current students, about the Child and Youth Care Counselor Program and the child and youth care field. The applicants are then provided with the information required for them to complete a simulation exercise conducted without facilitation, as a child and youth care staff team. The goal is to achieve consensus in selecting from a list of referrals (provided) the children who should be chosen to fill the vacancies in their residential program.

When this step is completed, the group leaders provide the applicants with homework instructions for the next day, asking them to prepare for presentation to the group, lists of the strengths which they will bring and expectations that they have of the program and the child and youth care profession. Upon arriving the next morning, the applicants are given a brief overview of the second day. They are then introduced to the Employers' Panel, a group of four senior child and youth care professionals, who participate regularly in the hiring of employees for their respective agencies, and who provide the applicants with a general overview of what will get them hired and fired as well as what they perceive to be the current employment trends in the field.

The applicants then proceed back to their small groups where they each share, in the manner of their choice, the strengths and expectations that they bring to the program and profession. In the final experiential exercise the applicants view a video tape, in their small group, which deals with family break-up, single parenting and child discipline. They are presented with a set of questions as guidelines and are asked to discuss the tape.

Following the discussion, the applicants are given a short period of time to debrief with their small group. They are then asked to sign up for individual interviews and dismissed.

The teams meet over lunch and compare notes on each applicant to arrive at consensus as to whether or not the applicant is ready for training. If they are unable to do so, either because of conflicting indicators or because of a lack of relevant information, the applicants may be rated as questionable. The teams then meet individually with their applicants and inform them whether or not they are proposing to put their name forward. Applicants, regardless of the assessment, are given feedback about their performance in the group, questionable applicants sign up for an interview with program faculty in order to resolve the ambiguity. These interviews, which are normally scheduled within a day or two of the process, usually result in approximately fifty percent of questionable applicants being judged to be ready. Faculty have recognized that applicants who were seen as questionable in the screening process and subsequently given "the benefit of the doubt" after a less than totally impressive individual interview, frequently experienced a great deal of difficulty in the program. For this reason, applicants need to make a strong showing in the interviews if their names are to go forward as ready for training.

Applicants who are seen as not ready for training are sent to speak to faculty and, should they wish to avail themselves of the option, we pre-book a number of time slots with college counselors so that they can discuss "next steps." These next steps may include ways in which to prepare for another attempt at the screening process and how to improve their chances of being seen as "ready," alternate career paths or an appeal of the decision. As noted earlier, although during the plenary session it is explained that this process, as with any decision at the college, is subject to appeal, we do not regularly encounter this reaction. This suggests to me that the process has a great deal of face validity for community volunteers and applicants alike. This appears to be further substantiated by my observation that those applicants who are seen as most troubled or the least ready for training, are also the least likely to be able to understand or accept the feedback and decision.

In summary, what we attempt to do is to place the applicants in an anxiety provoking situation which will, as much as possible, replicate the types of situations and issues to which they will find themselves exposed during the course of the program and in their work. We have attempted this in the hope of identifying any potential difficulties prior to program entry.

The issue and the process are both very complex. As educators and helping professionals we all want to give people a chance to learn, to succeed, to achieve meaningful employment and to subsequently provide that chance for their clients in turn. What we need to come to grips with is that taking the applicant in need of treatment into a training program is not providing him with a chance. Rather, it is setting up a no-win situation for everyone involved in the process.