

Making Meaning Together: The Downtown Community Initiative

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Overview

- Downtown Community Initiative
- Therapeutic conversation
- Making Meaning Together study
- Relevance to community health nursing practice



Downtown Community Initiative

- A community-university partnership
 - between The Salvation Army Centre of Hope and the University of Calgary Faculties of Nursing and Social Work
 - that aims to promote the health and well-being of residents of the inner city through education, research, and service



Interventions for Optimizing Health of Homeless Persons

Three predominant intervention strategies in the literature:

- Outreach services
- Health advocacy
- Intensive case management



Therapeutic Conversation

- Therapeutic conversation with homeless persons, from steps of engagement to communication, requires trust and the formation of a common language between the client and helping professional (Levy, 1998; Seikkula & Olson, 2003)
- A conversation becomes therapeutic when meaning (and thus, intimacy) is created together by both the client and the helping professional (Weingarten, 1992)



The Making Meaning Together Study

- What is meaningful conversation from the perspective of clients/residents?
- What are the facilitators of and barriers to therapeutic conversation?



Methods

- Exploratory qualitative research method to enhance understanding about therapeutic conversations with homeless persons
- Qualitative individual and focus group interviews
- Prolonged engagement
- Field notes



Sample

- Individual client interviews (n=10)
- Focus groups
 - Men (n=6), (n=14)
 - Women (n=7)
 - Shelter Staff (n=9)



Data Analysis

- Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim
- Independent coding was done with ATLAS.ti
- Emergent themes were cross-compared to ensure consistency



Therapeutic Conversation

- **Clients:** “...beneficial ...there was help, and feeling comfortable...understanding...they come to mind.” (IM1)
- **Staff:** “...there’s that emotional connection. You have to be able to have an emotional connection.” (FGS1)



Facilitators

- **Respectful Engagement** *“...one of the basic things is that, uh, this is not a gimmick, or not to approach us as ‘clients’ but as a person.” (IF1)*
- **Casual Conversation** *“...approachable, maybe kind of casual, not look too professional because that way they’ll sense you as a corporate person kind of, and they’ll say, ‘well, these people snub me off on a daily basis, do I want to talk to this person.” (IM3)*
- **Effective Listening** *“You guys just have a good ear for me just to let off whatever I’m.. it is. I can leave here and I can feel good. You know what I mean?... You sit and listen. That’s fair enough for me.” (IM5)*



- **Alternative Settings** *“The one gentleman comes in opens up the gym and gets a couple of the guys and plays basketball. It’s not like sitting and talking ...sportsmanship, leadership, . . . At the same time, it’s spiritual...like taking time after the game last night to talk to him a little bit. . . for me at the time, it made me feel more real.”* (FGM1)
- **Establishing Trust** *“A lot us...due to our situation we have trouble opening up to people and trusting people again, you know, ‘cause the reason I’m here is I trusted people and ended up going down the tube, so it’s hard for me to open up to somebody else, thinking in the back of my mind it’s just going to end up...”* (FGM1)



Barriers

- **Prejudging** *“...they got to get to know their clients as well, without using the general guidelines that they use on everybody, regardless of who they are, where they come from, what you’re doing.” (IM2)*
- **Fear of Punishment/ Authority** *“Just due to the fact that it’s an authority figure or whatever, and I prefer to keep to my own. Be polite and whatnot... Ultimately, they’re the ones that pass decisions on us if we can stay or if we can go.” (FGM2)*
- **Academic/Professional Intimidation**
“Sometimes I don’t understand what you guys [RAs] are saying. Like my brain is still mixed up from drugs, I think, and that’s what makes me feel stupid sometimes. Some of the words that are in there...” (IM5)



Implications for CHN Practice

Relinquish:

- prejudgments
- preconceived agendas
- incongruent professional roles and techniques

Acknowledge:

- personhood
- kindred equality of shared humanity



Personhood

- Endowment of respect, trust, significance, identity, and unique existence afforded one person by another within the context of relationship

(Kitwood & Bredin, 1992)