

4/2/00

Some Thoughts on The Francie Kendall Training

On Thursday (3/30/00) Tim Otis and I participated in a training with staff members representing all programs at The Mental Health Center. The subject was "Power and Privilege as it Relates to Race" and the facilitator was Francie Kendall, a nationally respected trainer/consultant who has worked with the supervisors' group on a number of occasions. First, I want to commend Terri Pellitteri and Francie Kendall for designing an unusually stimulating and thought provoking training experience. Secondly, I commend the participants whose honesty, persistence and courage allowed us to delve beneath the surface of this complex and controversial subject matter.

During the course of our wide ranging discussion, the question was asked, "Why is it important for the Mental Health Center to become a culturally competent organization?" I think this is a legitimate and timely question. These are some of my thoughts on the subject.

Cultural competence is increasingly recognized in all helping professions as a cornerstone of sound practice. Everyone has at least one culture. It is the context in which their unique personality is developed. As change agents, we maximize our effectiveness with our clients/consumers when we get to know them culturally as well as personally. Cultural knowledge helps us to identify and use strengths and coping strategies that are already within the consumer's repertoire. Likewise, knowledge of our own cultural framework helps us to remove barriers of prejudice and ethnocentrism.

The 2000 census will confirm what our daily experience has taught us, namely that Dane County is becoming a more culturally diverse community. As a comprehensive Community Mental Health Center we must adapt to the strengths and needs of the people we serve. This means making sure that we are effective in working in cross cultural contexts and that our staff members reflect the diversity of our consumers.

The consumer Recovery Movement is growing in strength and influence. It demands mutuality, respect and a shared sense of hope from helpers in all disciplines. The pursuit of cultural competence is entirely consistent with these demands and is consequently embraced by the Movement. An empowered educated consumer population will "vote with its feet" assuring the eventual demise of agencies that offer culturally destructive or culturally blind services.

Finally, cultural competence standards are currently being developed at the Federal and State level. In the next two to five years, I predict that meeting these standards will become prerequisites for licensure and certification of helping professionals and the agencies for which they work. The Mental Health Center has the opportunity to play a

leading and defining role in this campaign. To use our organization's power and privilege in this manner will benefit our community now and for generations to come.