



Perspectives On Practice

A Newsletter for Colorado Child Welfare Professionals

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VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2: ENGAGING FAMILIES

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No matter the profession, to be professional requires continued learning in your field. But who in child welfare has the time to keep up with the latest research on policy and practice issues? Who can hope to know what CDHS is up to let alone what innovations "other counties" have implemented?

Perspectives on Practice is a quarterly newsletter written specifically for Colorado Child Welfare Professionals. Published by staff at the Institute for Families at the Graduate School of Social Work (responsible for New Worker Core, Supervisor, Advanced worker and Foster Parent Training) the newsletter is designed to keep Colorado Child Welfare staff up to date on the

latest research, trends and policies.

The newsletter is also designed to ensure it addresses the concerns of readers. Future issues will include a "Dear Perspectives" column where, if we don't know the answers to your questions, we will search out someone who does. By clicking on "Suggestions" at the top of the page, there is information for readers on how to suggest topics they would like researched and presented. There is even an opportunity to submit articles you feel are of interest to others in the field.

Please feel welcome to contact us with your suggestions, comments, and questions.

TIPS ON ENGAGING CULTURALLY DIVERSE FAMILIES

I enjoyed a privileged life growing up in both a family and community where I felt loved, safe, and well cared for. My family members, including extended family, were and continue to be strongly connected with one another, maintaining regular contact either directly or indirectly (through other family members). While we lived very simply, I have no memory of a time when I had a need (versus a want) that was unmet. I have never been arrested, I don't smoke, don't care for the taste of alcohol, and I have never experimented with drugs. And, for the most part, this upbringing took place in the heart of north-east Denver, referred to by many (with condolences) as, "the black part of town!" This serves as the backdrop for my work in a public child welfare agency that continued for almost 20 years.

During that time, I interacted most often with parents and children who were different from me in ways such as life experiences, ethnicity, educational level, economic status, and regionality. However, I was also aware of some fundamental differences in perceptions from that of some of my European American colleagues, as well as the client families I came in contact with. For instance, when colleagues described children who were being openly defiant and disrespectful toward their parent as, "behaving nor-

mally," I disagreed. I found myself thinking, "If an African American kid were to try that behavior with an African American parent, some sort of 'out-ta body' experience could be expected." In other words, the child could expect to be thinking, "I wish I were 'out-ta this body!'" Typically in African American culture, the disrespect of elders is considered unacceptable and warrants serious consequences for the violator.

Also, I recall meeting with a client family who lived in a rural area of Colorado and being shocked by the open admission of "neglect" when the parent described permitting children as young as six to play, without direct adult supervision, near a pond. The parent looked at me with stunned disbelief when I explained that she would have to construct some kind of enclosed area that the children could play in safely while outside. Needless to say, our relationship struggled from that point on.

My awareness of these and other perceptual differences lead me to question, "How might my colleagues react to hearing that our perceptions differed in some important ways?" Further, "How were my perceptions influencing the assessments I made and interventions I believed appropriate?" This reflects the experiences that fueled my ongoing interest in intercultural communication.

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TIPS ON ENGAGING CULTURALLY DIVERSE FAMILIES *continued from page 1*

It is important to define the term, "culture", since there are a variety of definitions. In this context, culture is shared language, beliefs, values, perceptions, etc., by a large group of people (Martin and Nakayama, 2004). This definition refers not only to groups who share ethnicity but also to those who share economic status, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, gender, regionality, and so on. Thus, people have multiple cultural identities. It is also important to clarify that an examination of cultural difference should not be focused on sorting groups of people into various categories but rather on understanding and appreciating the differing perceptions/worldviews people have as representations of co-realities rather than as dichotomized notions of "right" versus "wrong".

When individuals from different cultures interact with one another, differences in such areas as values and beliefs are often encountered. An awareness of these differences and worry about their potential consequence (i.e., Will confusion, fear, anger, or hostility result?) is believed to create an increased sense of anxiety. This is of particular concern during the child welfare interview when both the parent and caseworker are meeting, often for the first time, to discuss allegations of maltreatment. Therefore, when encountering an intercultural child protection interview the engagement phase of the interaction is critically important. A caseworker's ability to effectively engage the parent is heavily reliant upon an ability to reduce anxiety. Certainly, there are several factors that are important for reducing anxiety levels in intercultural interactions. However, the ability to convey empathy is one of the most important.

Chung and Bemak (2002) offers several tips for establishing empathy specifically in an effort to engage culturally diverse clients. They include the following:

- Exercise a genuine interest in learning more about the client's culture. This includes not only gaining knowledge about group tendencies through direct experience and readings but more importantly understanding how contextual factors may influence interaction (i.e., power dynamics related to differences in class, gender, race, etc., as well as the clients' values and perceptions).
- Help the client understand that as the caseworker, you have an awareness and sensitivity about some aspects of the clients' culture but not in all areas. Therefore, ask direct and open questions about perceived differences. (i.e., "You seem to be living in a situation where money and other resources are very limited and that's different from my experience. What do you

want me to know to help me understand your situation/experience?")

- Maintain a genuine appreciation for cultural differences between yourself and the client. Difference is not inherently negative and can be used positively to broaden ones perspective.
- Acknowledge that when needed, culturally appropriate help-seeking behaviors and treatment outcome and expectations will be incorporated into the counseling process. To do so validates the worth of alternate options.
- Understand and accept the context of family and community for clients from different cultural backgrounds. For example, a common value among Asian cultures is, "Everyone and everything are interrelated across space and time" (Miike, 2003). It is important to value this position as one that is as reflective of truth as the notion that values the separation and individuation of people.
- Become knowledgeable about the historical and sociopolitical background of clients in an effort to understand the transgenerational trauma experienced by groups of people. This increases the understanding of defensive reactions that occur when child protective service intervenes.
- Be knowledgeable about the psychosocial adjustment that must be made by clients who have moved from one environment to another. This minimizes the chance of misinterpreting the resulting behavior as pathological.
- Be highly sensitive to the oppression, discrimination, and racism that are encountered by many people and often on a daily basis as a way of better understanding the nature and impact of these experiences on human behavior.
- For those clients who feel underprivileged and devalued, it is essential to know and access community resources and services that support, empower, and promote social change.

I recall meeting with a client family who lived in a rural area of Colorado and being shocked by the open admission of "neglect".

Effective casework practice with culturally diverse families relies heavily on the caseworker's ability to engage the family and develop a collaborative relationship. To do so greatly increases positive outcomes both for the client family and caseworker as well.

INCREASING FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN CHILD WELFARE

Most children in the child welfare system are living apart from their fathers at the time of intervention. According to the Urban Institute, approximately 72% of children served by child welfare agencies have noncustodial fathers, and approximately 80% of children in foster care have noncustodial fathers. Although paternity is known for more than 80% of foster children with noncustodial fathers, only 54% of these children have had contact with their fathers in the year following placement.

Paternal absence may be due to incarceration, unwed pregnancy, separation or divorce, substance abuse, death or abandonment. But regardless of the cause, it is important to understand the consequences to children of growing up without their fathers.

Compared with children who have contact with their fathers, those who live without paternal contact are:

- five times more likely to live in poverty,

- more likely to bring weapons and drugs to school,
- twice as likely to engage in criminal activity,
- twice as likely to drop out of school,
- twice as likely to be abused,
- more likely to commit suicide,
- more than twice as likely to abuse drugs or alcohol, and
- more likely to become pregnant as teenagers.

The father's role is more than just an economic provider. Having a good father correlates with healthy child development, responsible sexuality, emotional and social stability, strong gender identity and financial security.

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HOW DO YOU TALK TO THOSE HIP HOP TEENS?

HOW DO YOU TALK TO THOSE HIP HOP TEENS? continued from page 3

As I sat in my workshop at the 2004 Child Welfare Conference, I could hear people on the other side of the partition talking loudly and laughing. Then, when music began to blare, I knew that was a workshop I had to attend! David Miller and LaMarr Darnell Shields from the Urban Leadership Institute were conducting a session entitled "Using Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture as a Tool to Engage Youth and Their Families."

As I expected, I learned some new lingo that could help me decipher what those teens are actually saying. For example, "I think you dropping a dime on me to my mom" means someone thinks you are informing on them or letting information leak out. If someone says "Word is bond," they mean that what you are saying is absolutely correct, and you do not have to put up money to prove it. "He said you were a nickel, but I think you a dime" means you are a ten on looks on a scale of 1-10. "I did a buck 50" means to get out of a bad situation. And "It ain't no elbow" refers to a pound of marijuana.

But this ability to translate the new lingo is only a part of the whole new world that opened up to me during this workshop and my newfound appreciation for Hip Hop culture. For it is, in fact, a culture. Miller and Shields define Hip Hop as a "subculture of generations of alienated youth and adults who subscribe to non-traditional norms and values. It is shaped by its own distinct language, culture, fashion, hairstyles and worldviews."

INCREASING FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN CHILD WELFARE continued from page 2

With children's well-being so closely tied to father involvement, we might expect that the child welfare system would work hard to engage fathers, involve them in case planning and service provision, and provide them with the skills necessary to parent effectively. Unfortunately, the limited studies that have been completed on father involvement in the child welfare system show that this is usually not the case.

According to Kieran O'Hagan, "Men are sometimes avoided or ignored in all the specific phases of child protection work, i.e. in referral, investigation, intervention, case conference, care proceedings and fostering." Other studies have shown that fathers had to demonstrate to caseworkers their connection to their children, whereas the mothers' connection to their children was taken for granted. These same studies showed that birthfathers often were ignored as resources for discharge planning.

During a focus group of fathers and caseworkers funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, workers in the child welfare system admitted that it was easier to work with families made up of single mothers and children. One worker stated that "a father in the family makes it harder. It's easier to let dad stay in the background and not deal with him". This focus group, along with a number of other studies, also revealed the role that mothers play as the "gatekeepers" of fathers' involvement. If the mother doesn't believe the family will benefit from the father's involvement, she is less likely to share information about the father and will make it more difficult for the child welfare agency to locate and work him.

There are many reasons why fathers are "missing" from the child wel-

Nevertheless, many people think the music is crass and full of nonsense. To help the participants get a better grasp of what is going on for these teens, Miller and Shields had participants recall the music they listened to as teens. The responses ranged from Elvis Presley to Peter, Paul and Mary to Morrissey. Everyone knows the ruckus Elvis caused in his day. Peter, Paul and Mary sang antiwar songs during the Viet Nam era, and Morrissey sang about the woes of life. In each instance, the adult generation hated the music, and the adolescent generation believed the artists were addressing complex social issues. Miller and Shields contend that Hip Hop music is no different, covering subject matter like teen pregnancy, poverty, politics, parenting, substance abuse and spirituality. Consider these examples:

"I got no time for games 'cause I'm all grown up; You wanna joke, nigga? Laugh when you get blown up; See how funny it is when your kids ain't got no father; cause you played it sweet, now you floating in the harbor" Nas f/ DMX: Life is What You Make It/1 Am...

"If you investigate, you'll find out where it's comin from; Look through our history, America 's the violent one" 2Pac: Violent/2Pacalypse Now

"My little brother's trying to learn his mathematics; He's asthmatic, running home from school away from crack addicts; Kids attract static, children with automatics; Taking target practice on teens for Starter Jackets; I'm using smarter tactics to overcome this slum; I won't become as dumb as some and succumb to scum; It's cumbersome, I'm trying to do well on this earth; But it's been Hell on this Earth since I fell on this Earth" Eminem/Eye-Kyu: It's OK/Infinite

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fare system. Yet it is also clear how important it is that we work to achieve increased involvement of fathers in the lives of their children.

Based on available research, a family-centered approach with the following components would enhance paternal involvement in the child welfare system:

- recognition of the fragility of fatherhood and the possible reasons for the lack of the father's involvement,
- use of family group decision-making or team decision-making,
- use of the Federal Parent Locator Service to find fathers and other relatives,
- materials and resources that are geared specifically to fathers,
- working with mothers and children to help them understand the father's role and the benefits of his involvement,
- integrating an employment element into child welfare, in recognition that the highest risk factors for loss of fathers' support and contact are combined unemployment, combined with non-residential status,
- establishing a peer support system of father-to-father mentoring, and
- studying local fatherhood programs to learn how to approach and involve fathers.

For more information on Colorado's fatherhood initiative, contact Diane Skufka at Diane.Skufka@state.co.us.

HOW DO YOU TALK TO THOSE HIP HOP TEENS? *continued from page 3*

As these lyrics make clear, Hip Hop music is exploring struggles and life dilemmas that face our youth. While we adult professionals may think the music venerates violence, disrespects women and glorifies the use of drugs, we would do well to dig deeper into the context. Recognize the elements of questioning and attempts to struggle with the dichotomy in today's society. Consider, for example, 2Pac's song "Violent," in which he explores why violence has escalated in our society and what factors leads to various situations. His words are not that much different than those of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his Speech Beyond Vietnam in 1967 when he stated, "I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today: my own government." Both are looking at our history and questioning

Our profession mandates that we explore, learn, and understand other cultures. This includes the Hip Hop culture to which many teens feel such a strong connection. The Miller and Shields workshop made me realize that we need to ask about the songs, delve deeper into what they mean for teens and try to understand why they connect with certain artists or songs so much. I believe our challenge as professionals is to understand the impact of the Hip Hop culture on our youth, while not appearing to endorse all aspects of that culture.

So the next time a teenager on your caseload tells you they did a buck 50, praise them. If they say you dropped a dime on them, you'd better hope you didn't, considering the new HIPPA regulations. If they say they have an elbow, you should probably be worried. But say thanks if they tell you you're a dime, and try to trust them when they say their word is bond.

MOTIVATION: THE KEY TO CHANGE

Most of us who come to, and remain in, the field of child welfare do so because we believe in people's capacity to change – to grow, to improve and to make different and more positive choices for themselves and their children. Yet our beliefs can be strongly challenged as we journey with clients on their difficult road toward change. We may even find ourselves wondering why change is so hard for them.

The answer, many agree, lies in client motivation, "the probability that a person will enter into and adhere to a specific change strategy." (Miller and Rollnick) But what do we know about motivation? Miller and Rollnick tell us that motivation is a process, that it is influenced by internal urges and external pressures, that it is affected by perceptions about the risks and benefits of change, and that it can be modified.

So, if we work with our clients to elicit and enhance their motivation, we can expect some exciting and energizing benefits results. These may include greater success at engaging and retaining clients, increasing client participation and involvement and improved client outcomes.

Of course, this may not be as simple as it sounds. Discovering a client's motivation is closely tied with understanding where the client might be in the "stages of change." These are described by Prochaska and DiClemente as follows:

- Pre-contemplation (the person is not thinking about change, does not want to change or is in denial),

- Contemplation (the person is thinking about changing the behavior),
- Preparation (self-reevaluation, during which the person begins seriously considering and planning steps toward change),
- Action (the person is actively doing things to change or modify behavior),
- Maintenance (behavioral changes are becoming normalized), and
- Relapse (the person returns to the pattern of previous behavior).

Consider some of the changes you have experienced in your own life, like looking for a new job, quitting smoking or losing weight. You've probably had both successes and failures, according to where you were in these "stages of change."

Knowing where a client is in this process, and adapting our interventions accordingly, are key to supporting him or her through change. When we struggle, it is often because we expect people to change quickly; the clock is ticking, we think. But the "stages of change" cannot be rushed. Acknowledging this reflects what we already know about "starting where the client is." Thoughtful conversation and relationship-building with a client will provide an understanding of where they are in the change process, what barriers or fears they might be experiencing, and how we can help prepare and support them on their journey toward change.

WHY SOLUTION FOCUSED INTERVIEWING WORKS

In the helping professions today, we hear a lot about using strength-based practices such as solution-focused interviewing. We have read or been trained in the techniques (see more solution focused techniques at www.perspectivesonpractice.org/resources). But why do they work? Try taking off your caseworker hat for a moment, and answer the following questions:

1. You are working on a project with your teammates. At your past job you worked on a similar project on a different subject. You have some great ideas on how to proceed. The person running the meeting presents the problem, explains how they believe the situation got this bad and presents a plan to make it better. She does not open up the discussion for other ideas but starts assigning tasks on her plan for the project. Do you readily raise your hand to take on some tasks? YES NO
2. You go to a therapy session because you are under stress at work. Before you meet with the therapist, you are asked to complete a three-page questionnaire regarding your work experience, past stressful situations and what you have already tried that has not worked. During the therapy session, the therapist goes over the questionnaire, offers an opinion on what is happening with you and tells you what you need to do to make your life less stressful. Are you invested in trying out the therapist's suggestions? YES NO
3. After receiving a parking ticket, you angrily approach the parking official to see if you can get the fine dismissed or reduced. You explain that, on the day you received the ticket, you were running late because your child woke up with a fever and you had to arrange for a babysitter. Additionally, there was a huge traffic jam

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on your way to work, and then you spilled coffee on your shirt. Since you had to testify in court that day about one of your cases and needed to look presentable, you pulled up right in front of a store to run in and buy disposable wipes. When you came out just a few moments later, you had a ticket for parking in a loading zone. The parking official asks what you think should happen, since even though you had a lot going on that day, you did park illegally. You suggest reducing the fine by half, and the parking official agrees. Do you leave feeling reasonably good about the situation? YES NO

4. You want to get in shape, but realize that you lack the motivation to exercise every day of the week. A friend who works out regularly helps you brainstorm various exercise schedules, and you settle on three days per week, something you have been able to manage in the past. You decide that you will begin each week by writing on your calendar the days and times you will exercise, along with the type of exercise you will do. Your friend offers to check in with you at the end of each week and to help re-evaluate your progress in a month. You welcome the month-end re-evaluation but decline the weekly

check-in, because you know that would annoy you. Are you committed to sticking with your new plan? YES NO

So how did your responses turn out? Did you answer “no” to the first two questions and “yes” to the last two? If so, it might be because the first two scenarios portrayed someone else as an “expert” who assumed there was only one correct way to solve a problem. The last two situations allowed you to tell your story and explore a variety of solutions. It builds on your strengths because the solution-focused approach used in these situations gives “as much weight to the perceptions of the client as to the expertise of the practitioner” (DeJong & Berg, 2002)

Solution-focused interviewing is successful because it is strength-based. It assumes that clients can be a part of the solution and it encourages clients to be more invested in outcomes. It allows clients to feel they have been heard, draws upon their strengths and empowers them to be invested in making changes they believe they need in their lives. Instead of focusing on past mistakes, solution-focused interviewing allows people to have hope for future positive change.



- On October 1, 2004 The Colorado Child Welfare Fatherhood Initiative) convened a Stakeholder’s Summit , “A Quantum Leap: What About Dads?”. Funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and CDHS “Promoting Safe and Stable Families” program, the summit was aimed at building partnerships to support fathers and paternal family members and to use them as family resources for child welfare. Discussion topics included the current state of father involvement in Colorado child welfare, coordination of services across agencies, how to make organizations father-friendly and strategies for integrating support for fathers and paternal relatives throughout the work of child welfare. Nearly 60 individuals participated, representing 31 different state, county and community-based organizations.
- On November 15, 2004 the third annual “Shout Out for Colorado’s Waiting Children” was held on the west lawn of the State Capitol. Lieutenant Governor Jane Norton hosted the candlelight vigil. She joined with community leaders, adoptive parents, adoptees, legislators and others to call out the first names of 400 of the children waiting in foster care for a “forever family” to adopt them. The event was co-sponsored by the office of the Lieutenant Governor, the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) Division of Child Welfare, The Adoption Exchange and the Rural Adoption Cooperative.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Children, Youth, and Families awarded a \$1.5 million, five-year grant to the Colorado Coalition of Adoptive Families (COCAF) to provide, in collaboration with the CDHS Division of Child Welfare, post-adoption services and marriage-strengthening to adoptive families in eight Colorado counties. Other key partners in the “Colorado Communities for Adoptive Families Initiative” include University of Denver Prof. Howard Markman , a national marriage-strengthening educator and researcher; Dr. Richard Delaney, a national specialist in special needs adoptions; and the Institute for Families at the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work. Ultimate objectives of the project are to: 1) decrease adoption disruptions and dissolutions; 2) decrease marital distress and divorce among adoptive parents; 3) increase marital and family well-being; 4) create self-sustaining networks of support for adoptive families and 5) develop tools for disseminating program learning, founded on evidence-based practice.
- The CDHS Child Welfare Division, along with the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, is sponsoring one-and-a-half-day training sessions called “How to Develop Effective Visits.” This training is highly interactive and allows participants to apply knowledge and skills to cases involving different age groups and developmental levels. Anyone who is involved in the decision or planning process for developing visits, or who helps families have successful visits, is invited to attend this workshop. This may include social workers, supervisors, judges, CASA’s, foster parents, GAL’s, case aides, attorneys and other community partners. The first training sessions were held in the Denver area in January and in Colorado Springs in February. The last training will be in Grand Junction , Colorado on March 10th and 11th. For registration information, please contact Joann Kanost at Joann.Kanost@state.co.us.

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LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK!

If you would like to submit your suggestions for topics, stories, or articles you feel others would be interested in, please email: cdoty@du.edu

We value your opinions and appreciate your interest, so don't hesitate to give us your ideas!

"STATE" ments continued from page 5

- On January 4th, State staff from the Divisions of Child Welfare and Field Administration attended the first faith based community recruitment orientation meeting hosted by Project 1.27 at the Chambers & Iliff Campus of Colorado Community Church . Approximately 300 church members turned out to learn about Colorado 's waiting children. Four county departments (Adams, Arapahoe, Denver and Jefferson) are actively working with Project 1.27 to identify prospective adoptive families.

The Colorado Community Church has developed an adoption ministry. They are targeting children in the foster care system aged 10 to 17 who are free for adoption. They established the goal of adopting 40 children this year. The program they established has three distinct components: recruiting adoptive families, recruiting resource families, and developing and delivering a training component. Recruitment of adoptive families began in December, and by the end of December, 100 families had signed up to be adoptive families and 200 families had signed up to be resource families.

- On January 26th and 27th, The Institute for Families at the University of Denver held a Summit , focused on child welfare staff recruitment, selection and retention. The Western Regional Recruitment and Retention Project, administered by the Institute for Families, is a five-year federally funded project with the goal of developing, implementing, evaluating and disseminating effective and comprehensive training strategies to improve the recruitment, selection and retention of a quality child welfare workforce. This Project includes 6 sites in Colorado , Arizona and Wyoming . During the Summit , a number of experts presented information on new and innovative ideas related to recruitment and retention. Through the course of the grant, IFDU staff will be working with the six sites to implement the ideas from the summit as well as other innovative strategies to recruit and retain qualified workers in the child welfare system. For more information on this project, contact Anne Comstock at acomstoc@du.edu.

Perspective on Practice wants to know what is going on in your County! Do you have a new director?... New program?...A new and innovative community partner?... Please email Linda Metsger at lmetsger@du.edu with your information. Be sure to include a telephone number so we can contact you for follow up information.

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RESOURCES & TOOLS

Increasing Father Involvement in Child Welfare (Article on page 2)

Sonenstein, F., Malm, K., Billing, A. (2002) Study of Father's Involvement in Permanency Planning and Child Welfare Casework. The Urban Institute. Available online at: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/CW-dads02/>

National Family Preservation Network (2001) Position Paper on Fatherhood in the Child Welfare System. National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family -Centered Practice.

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice (2002) Best Practice Next Practice: Father Involvement.

O'Hagan, K., (1997) The problem of engaging men in child protection work. British Journal of Social Work. 27, 25-42.

Motivation: The Key to Change (Article on page 4)

Miller, W.R., Rollnicks, S. (2002) Motivational Interviewing: Preparing people for change. New York: The Guilford Press.

Prochaska, J.O. & Diclemente, C.C. (1984). The transtheoretical approach: crossing traditional boundaries of therapy. Homewood, IL: Dow Jones/Irwin.

Why Solution Focused Interviewing Works (Article on page 4)

DeJong, P., & Berg I.K. (2002). Interviewing for Solutions. California: Brooks/Cole. Solution Focused Interviewing Techniques

More Solution Focused Interviewing Techniques: www.perspectivesonpractice.org/resources