Cornell University
ILR School
Employment and Disability Institute

June 2006

Work Incentives Support Center

Promising Practices

Creating Model Partnerships to Promote Employment of People with Disabilities

Reaching Out To The African-American Community in Illinois

Raymond Cebula, Cornell University,
Extension Faculty

Background

Building trust and allowing for the development of a level of comfort has allowed Equip for Equality to successfully reach out to the African-American community in Chicago and rural Illinois. While the Illinois African-American community was seen as the initial target of outreach efforts, it soon became clear that there were differences to be dealt with when reaching out to the Chicago community and to the rural Illinois community.

Cheryl began reaching out to the African-American community in Illinois as a member of Equip for Equality's (EFE) PABSS staff. EFE has seen an increase in the numbers of African-American clients served by the PABSS program as well as by the agency as a whole. The African-American community simply didn't know about EFE. HIV agencies serving the African-American community didn't know of the agency's existence. Cheryle estimates that the number of calls from the African-American community has increased 200 – 300%.

Identification of the Barriers

- Language barriers – use of neighborhood slang and recognition of educational level of community is important. Cultural awareness in terminology is critical to effective communication.
- Accessibility in terms of knowledge of existence of P&A agency – Many in the African-American community were unaware of Equip for Equality's existence and the services that are provided to the greater disability community.
- Outreach by African-American staff person provided ability to travel in neighborhoods where other staff would not be as welcome. Use of African-American staff allowed for a more effective transmission of basic, critical information concerning disability issues facing the community. The knowledge of locations and agencies serving the target community is important. Teamed outreach efforts using other staff are more effective when a African-American staff member serves as an intermediary and attends the sessions.
- In urban areas there tends to be more of a cross-disability community. In rural areas the greatest focus is on developmental disabilities.
- Initial outreach effort may be a simple pamphlet drop at an agency that is not initially welcoming. This is used as an effort to "break through" to this agency in hopes of building a relationship. African-American run agencies have been more receptive to outreach from a African-American staff person. Reception tends to be better when a African-American staff member approaches a African-American agency in an urban area. A mix of staff may be more effective in rural areas of the state.
- Tailor outreach materials to the target community, be that a disability group or a cultural group. Be sure to tailor outreach materials and presentations to the educational/cultural level of the audience.
- Significant trust issues exist when dealing with this community. A African-American staff member can talk to folks in a much more straight-forward way as opposed to a white staff member talking with a African-American client. The information will be processed and understood better when delivered by a member of the client's community.
- Repeat visits and information sessions are necessary to maintain a trusting presence in the community.

Methods used:

- HIV service directory for Illinois provided significant information for outreach efforts.
- Cold calls and letters initially provided limited results.
- Calls to case managers familiar to EFE staff allowed for the information to be presented to greater staff by an "insider".
- Providing information and business cards to businesses in the African-American community, i.e., OSCO, groceries, health clinics, churches, minority job fairs, resulted in lots of responses. Go where the people you are trying to reach are!

The authors would like to acknowledge contributions from the following individual in the production of this brief, Cheryl Martin from Equip for Equality.

This is one of a series of briefs that has been designed to disseminate information pertaining to promising practices within the BPA&O and PABSS network. This publication is neither an endorsement of the practice or statement regarding the mandated work of this network. The thoughts, opinions and practices expressed are those of the authors and do not reflect the viewpoints or official policy positions of either the Social Security Administration or Cornell University.

Contact Information

Cornell University
ILR School
Employment and Disability Institute
201 ILR Extension
Ithaca, New York 14853-3901

t. 607-255-7727
f. 607-255-2763
tty 607-255-2891
ilr_edi@cornell.edu

www.edi.cornell.edu