

AIFT Practicum

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We both attended the training in Halifax, Nova Scotia, the week of October 18 to 21, 2016 that was facilitated by Jeanie Becker and Corrie Melanson. Corrie agreed to supervise Mark and Ida-Jane in preparation for this AI event.

We planned to do an AI event with staff and residents of Mark's supportive housing program at the John Howard Society of Ottawa. *A Different Street* is a 25-bed program for male youth over 16 years of age who are involved/at risk of involvement in the justice system, and/or are aging out of care with the Children's Aid Society, and/or are homeless or unstably housed. The young men each have their own studio apartment, and an assigned on-site caseworker. The program has three full-time caseworkers who work days, afternoons and evenings. Outside of their caseworkers' hours, the youth have access to on-site support workers. The program is staffed 24 hours-a-day, seven days-a-week. The program takes a Housing First approach to service—albeit at a single (versus scattered) site—in that it is assumed that housing stability is a prerequisite to a youth being able to choose to address other needs. With support, youth decide when they are ready to move forward in different areas of their lives.

We decided to do an Appreciative Inquiry of this program for a number of reasons. The process of evolving from a transitional housing program to a supportive housing program occurred after major renovations were completed in April 2013. In mid-October 2012, and for the renovation period, the program moved to another location—a nine-bed house with limited program and staff space. This smaller footprint allowed for a different kind of relationship to occur between staff and residents than seemed possible in the larger setting. Prior to the start of renovations and a Housing First approach, there was a definite “power over” structure inherent in the relationships between staff and residents. Since April 2013, with a new mandate of supportive housing with a Housing First approach, residents have much more autonomy in their decisions without fear of losing their housing. **Staff have adjusted well to the new structure overall although change has been harder for some.** An AI for those staff may make the ongoing adjustments easier.

There is a notable degree of negativity inherent in a largely correctional population. Youth with justice involvement often have histories of trauma, abuse, distrust, addiction, school failure and conflict with peers. We wanted to shift focus to what has worked for residents and staff at this housing program. What have been their best experiences? How can we do more? We have questioned whether it will be more productive to do a staff-only event the first time. We will discuss this at our first core group meeting and make a decision. The rationale for a staff-only event would be for the protection of residents' confidentiality when staff are sharing their stories of support. We may have legal issues otherwise, and don't want to hinder what staff share. Obviously, having residents share their stories of support could be very powerful as well. Perhaps a separate event would accomplish this.

Definition: Core Group

The core group consists of the Housing Director of the program (Mark), the Clinical Supervisor for the agency (Ida-Jane), the Director of Youth Justice Services for the agency (Christine MacIntosh), and the Coordinator of a similar agency program for young women (Alison Newson). Christine was one of the original counsellors for the program when it opened in 2003. Alison was included for the purpose of observing the process in consideration of how well an AI event might serve her program team in the future. Mark and Ida-Jane will be leading such an event when it takes place.

The first core group meeting occurred on June 26 from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Our agenda included:

- Explain the process and answer questions
- Topic of inquiry
- Location of event
- Date of event
- Food
- Introduce the interview guide
- Core group roles at event
- Discuss sample itinerary

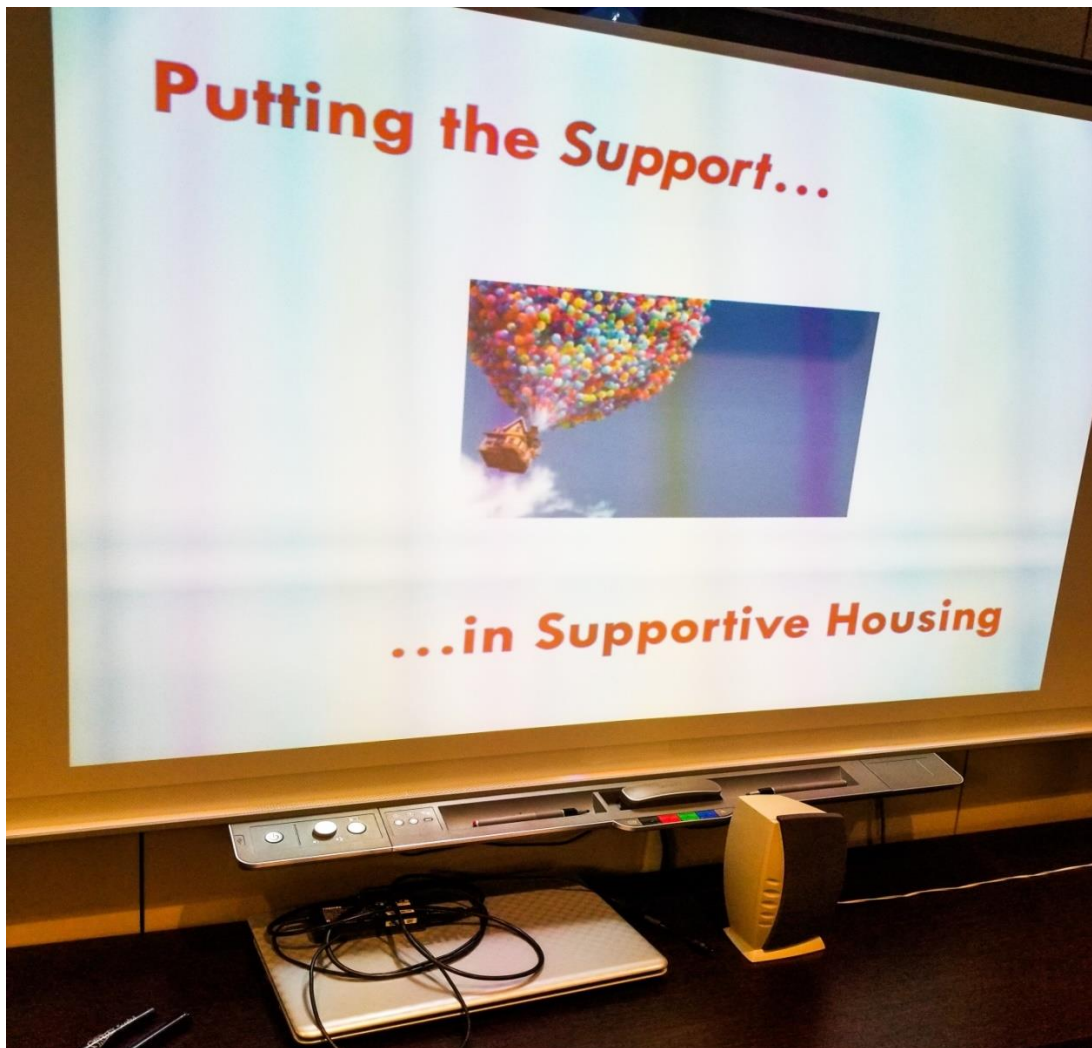
In this case, the client was also one of the facilitators. Since the first day of Appreciative Inquiry Facilitator Training Mark knew that providing this experience to his team could provide significant benefits to their morale and their sense of purpose, as well as enhancing the housing experience for clients.

Mark identified a number of goals for the day to include:

1. Understand a little bit more about the people with whom we work

2. Appreciate and identify the efforts of staff and residents in the work we do
3. Identify what is the best support we provide
4. Identify what it is that we would like to do more of
5. Generate some ideas of how we do that

Corrie agreed these were fine goals, but affirmed we needed a theme for the day. The theme was identified as *Putting the Support in Supportive Housing*. In sharing the interview guide with the core group it was apparent to all that something around *support* would be the focus of inquiry.



Discovery:

The inquiry took place on September 22, 2017, at the agency's Community Employment Resource Centre in west-end Ottawa. It was attended by the core group in the following roles: Mark and Ida-Jane co-facilitated the sessions. Christine attended the full day and supported

various activities including observing one of the paired interviews and providing feedback, and helping the team navigate the Dream and Design phases of the day. Alison was able to attend for the morning only. She led a brief warm-up exercise (Addendum 1), and observed one of the paired interviews and provided feedback to the group. Other participants included the program's three full-time caseworkers, one full-time support worker and two part-time support workers.

The day began with Mark explaining to his team what to expect from the day. They were advised that this day would be the basis for a report to be submitted in the certification of Mark and Ida-Jane in Appreciative Inquiry, and that neither of the facilitators had done this before; and, they were thanked for playing a central role in our inaugural experience. The event coincided nicely with the fact that a 10-year veteran of the team was moving on to another opportunity within the John Howard Society of Ottawa. We reflected on the fortuitous timing of the AI event as we strived to be better while losing so much empathy, skill, communication and teaching from our long-time colleague. We took the opportunity to go around the room and allow everyone to comment on what they appreciated most about this individual, what they would miss most, and/or a way in which they might have to step in/up to fill a gap in this individual's absence. This was a powerful team-building experience, and set up the day very nicely for success.

We decided to do face-to-face paired interviews, with observers present for two of the three interviews. Pairs were predetermined with a view to mitigating any anticipated resistance, and also to pair each staff with another staff they may not know so well. Observers were encouraged to keep their own notes and to be prepared to help staff move forward if there was resistance or points at which they got stuck. Resistance proved to be minimal in the course of the interviews. One staff was clearly uncomfortable with the level of self-reflection required by the questions (Addendum 2). The observer suggested that the other half of the pair be interviewed first. Because of the capacity of that person to be open and comfortable with the questions, by the time the second staff had to answer them, he was in a much better place to do so. Our strategy of picking the pairs ahead of time paid off in this case. That this was a small team and their manager (Mark) was intimately involved in the process made this possible.

We decided to share stories as a group as the team was smaller. While the stories were powerful our process for gathering/documenting them took more time than we anticipated. We decided to answer each question from the interviews as a group so we could put powerful thoughts and answers directly on a flipchart page. This proved to be a little cumbersome bouncing around the room for each question instead of allowing each paired group to fully describe their interviews. Still, we wanted a good amount of information to work with in the Dream and Destiny phases of our day.

Prior to the event, Mark met individually with a number of the residents in the supportive housing program and conducted a survey with them (Addendum 3). It was explained to the residents that we were doing some training with the staff team about how they support the residents and each other, and that their feedback would be used in the training day. After lunch, Mark presented the results of the survey and added relevant themes identified by residents to the information gathered and recorded on flip chart pages now posted around the room. After adding this information Ida-Jane coordinated a scattergram exercise to identify where the energy in the room was (Addendum 4). Everyone was given 10 dots to place wherever they chose in whatever quantity they chose. The results allowed us to identify four main themes to be developed further. These included:

1. Our dedication to keep trying and to never give up on our clients
2. Clients helping each other, being a resource, support for each other
3. Assertive engagement on the part of staff / Being proactive with respect to client goals
4. Team camaraderie, reliance and dependability



Dream:

We split the team into two groups to do the dream stage. Support Workers were offered first opportunity to develop thoughts on one of the four identified themes. Their unanimous choice was **clients helping each other, being a resource, support for each other.**

Caseworkers were split on their choice before deciding on **assertive engagement on the part of staff / being proactive with respect to client goals.**

Due to the day running longer than anticipated and the fear of dwindling energy, we decided to forego the visual image exercise. As it turned out, the caseworker group presented a provocative proposition—**“Don’t bring a Wookie to a lightsaber fight.”**—that was more visual than literal in nature. It required a great deal of discussion to clarify what they meant in an effort to translate their provocative proposition into something the whole group could understand and work with.

Design:

We took the caseworkers’ original statement and engaged the whole group through questions and reflections to evoke this meaningful and workable provocative proposition: **“We go to them to get together. Together, we get to success.”**

Strategic intentions for this statement include:

- Create expectation in residents that they will regularly see their caseworkers
- Learn what their goals/desired outcomes are and then be assertive in helping them get there
- Support clients in taking steps to achieve their goal or get closer to their desired outcomes
- Review achievements and successes with clients
- Collaborate on overcoming obstacles
- Chart their efforts using SMART goals and action steps
- Enhance communication within the team about client goals and their plans to achieve them
- Enhance connections among the team between roles (caseworkers, and full- and part-time support workers) to enhance opportunities to support client success

Working together, the support workers come up with, **“As individuals, we can reach our goals. As a family, we can surpass them”.**

Strategic intentions for this statement include:

- Invite residents to identify their strengths, talents, abilities, knowledge, what they do well, what they can share
- Pair newer residents with more experienced ones to support each other's successes, share solutions and resources, plan together to overcome obstacles
- Invite residents to generate a list of things that make a difference to peaceable living, peaceful co-existence with each other and with staff

Commitments, Requests, Offers:

The Housing Director (Mark) committed to doing individual and group follow-up, specifically around exploring the strategic intent to “learn what their goals/desired outcomes are and **then be assertive in helping them get there**”. The second part needs more “meat on the bone” through additional commitments from staff. Caseworkers have been asked, and have agreed, to be open to further exploration.

Caseworkers have committed to providing links to residents' monthly progress reports on our shared drive so support workers understand the goals of each youth and can begin to collaborate better with caseworkers on how to support success.

The Housing Director, along with one or more AI participant staff, will conduct a town hall-style meeting with residents to provide them feedback on the outcomes of our AI day and to begin the process of moving clients in the direction of strategic intentions outlined by the support worker group.

One of the full-time support workers has agreed to review the information gathered for the day, and come up with a preliminary provocative proposition on the two themes not yet developed so that we can communicate in a more powerful way to staff who were not able to attend the event all the themes we felt were priorities. This will help us to get further commitments and ideas from the staff team to push our agenda forward.

Destiny:

In the three weeks since the AI event, this part has been the hardest to identify. As the manager of this program, I, Mark, have seen increased energy and engagement between some key staff and the youth who are on their caseload. I have seen a boost in empathy that I had hoped would be a result of doing the event. My position in the program affords me ongoing opportunities to influence progress towards our provocative propositions. I plan to engage the team when opportunities arise for reflection on the AI day that was, and what we as a team committed to accomplishing. This can be done both individually and collectively when we meet as a team (which isn't often enough). I plan to order banners of our provocative propositions so we have constant visual reminders of our aspirations. I have asked a staff member to assist in

developing provocative propositions for the two areas that we identified as priorities but didn't have time to develop during our day together. At our next town hall-style meeting with clients, I plan to provide feedback to them about our AI event and elicit their thoughts on our provocative propositions that directly affect them.

Inquiry Wishes:

Mark's goals for the inquiry were stated as:

1. Understand a little bit more about the people you work with
2. Appreciate and identify the efforts of staff and residents in the work we do
3. Identify what is the best support we provide
4. Identify what it is that we would like to do more of
5. Come up with some ideas about how we do that

In addition, personal goals included being as prepared as possible to lead the team through a process that would be fun, motivational and inspirational. I wanted to be a competent co-facilitator with my colleague, Ida-Jane, who does training for a living. I wanted to grow my comfort level with leading a training session. I wanted to fit all of the required steps into the day without losing the team in the process, which became challenging towards the end of a hot day leading into a weekend.

Ida-Jane's goals for the inquiry were:

1. Co-create an engaging, thoughtful and energizing experience for members of a program to which I have both professional and personal connections
2. Gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of people's motivations for their work in this context with these clients
3. Provoke new and renewed thinking about my role as Clinical Director in supporting the program to its desired outcomes
4. Embrace this first opportunity to co-facilitate with my colleague, Mark

What did you learn?

Mark

I learned that facilitating for a team that you supervise presents challenges and opportunities that doing AI with another team will not. I felt there was a commitment on the behalf of staff to work hard all day as they knew this day was important to me. I really respected their effort. I learned just how proud I was of my team as we worked through the day and I watched their expression of support for one another. I learned that my need for some semblance of organization helped as we navigated the use of time through the day. I learned that I need to

preserve my own energy level as the day moves on. While fun, the AI process that we did was hard work and very draining to try to squeeze the most good we could out of the day. I learned that adding in additional steps like affirmation of our staff who was leaving the program or providing feedback about client surveys was both necessary to the overall success of the day and contributed to us feeling we didn't have enough time to comfortably complete everything.

Ida-Jane

I learned that my typical habits of preparing for and delivering training will not serve me well in AI events! I was very appreciative for the experience of co-facilitating with someone whose strengths counter my challenges. Mark's organizational and planning skills took me through a preparation process that began sooner, provided sufficient time to accomplish all pre-event tasks, and allowed me to arrive at the event rested, calm and confident about how the day would unfold. This was a much more enjoyable experience of preparing for an event than I typically create for myself.

Personal Best Experience:

Mark

Watching the team work so cooperatively and hearing from our observers how blown away they were at the team cohesion they witnessed.

Ida-Jane

I was unexpectedly affected by the provocative proposition put forth by the support workers ("As individuals, we can reach our goals. As a family, we can surpass them"), and the one we arrived at from the caseworkers' starting statement ("We go to them to get together. Together, we get to success"). These spoke so powerfully to the role they saw they had in youths' lives, and the responsibilities they were prepared to take on in support of young men creating healthier, safer, more hopeful futures for themselves.

And, it was an affirming experience that Mark and I worked so well together as a team at this new activity.

Surprises

Mark

I was surprised a bit at the strength of the positive energy that was created by the group. While I had faith in the group generally, the process we used really allowed the strengths to be highlighted.

Ida-Jane

The day offered a wonderful experience of the power of Appreciative Inquiry. I am grateful to have been a part of creating this for my colleagues, and moved by what they in turn created for me to experience. I was somewhat surprised by how I, as a facilitator, was impacted.

Next Time

Mark

For the next A.I. facilitation I will look forward to being a facilitator only as opposed to facilitator and manager. I will look forward to facilitating with Ida-Jane again as our styles seemed to mesh well. Next time I will be mindful to not allow too much extra activity that may compromise finishing in the time allotted. If possible I think spreading the event over 2 days would make for a more productive Design and Destiny phase. If we were doing it in 1 day again then we would have to be more efficient at the Discovery reporting and recording steps as that took too much of the day in this case.

Ida-Jane

I will bring tools provided during our AI facilitation training to the day's activities. Specifically, I expect incorporating the "Summary Sheet" following the personal interviews would bring saliency and efficiency to the task of documenting the outcomes of participants' time with their colleagues.

Permission is granted to share our story and session materials with others.

Addendum 1: Warm-Up Exercises

#1 You have a fox, a chicken and a sack of grain. You must cross a river with only one of them at a time. However, if you leave the fox with the chicken, he will eat it; and, if you leave the chicken with the grain, he will eat that. How can you get all three across safely?

Answer: Take the chicken over first. Go back and bring the grain next, but instead of leaving the chicken with the grain, come back with the chicken. Leave the chicken behind when you take the fox across the river. Leave it on the other side with the grain. Finally, go back over and get the chicken and bring it over.

#2 The person who makes it, sells it.
The person who buys it, never uses it.
The person who uses it, doesn't know it.

What is it?

Answer: A coffin

Addendum 2: Interview Guide

Staff:

1. Describe a time when you felt you were providing the best support or guidance to a youth. What were the circumstances? What was special about this time?
2. What are examples of exceptionalism that you see in yours or others' work in the program? What makes them special?
3. Describe when you have seen residents at their best with each other.

Values:

1. Without being humble, describe yourself as a caseworker/support worker.
2. What are the qualities that others appreciate in you?
3. Why did you get into the helping field?

Core Value:

1. What do you see as the core value of the program team? Without this, the program would be totally different.

Two Wishes:

1. If you had two wishes for the work being done in this program, what would they be?

Addendum 3: Questions for Residents

Resident:

1. Describe a time that you felt the most supported here. What was happening and what support did you receive?
2. What have you seen in staff or residents supporting each other that makes you think, "This is how it should be here". Be specific, if possible.
3. Describe how you have supported other residents.
4. Describe one way that staff can provide more support here.
5. Have staff ever done something to support you that surprised you? What was it?

Addendum 4: Scattergram

The image shows two pieces of paper with handwritten notes. The left paper is titled 'Core Value(s)' and lists several values. The right paper continues the list of values. The notes are written in blue and green ink, with some words in pink. There are several small, colorful smiley face stickers used as bullet points or decorations.

Core Value(s)

our ability to understand the needs of our clients and how to best meet them

- acceptance
- we stay positive
- trauma informed care
- guide to positive change
- uber supportive
- we never give up on clients
- clients are not defined by their past
- opportunity to do better, be better
- mastery, not dependency

• being in the moment with the client

• rolling w whatever it is

• seizing opportunities to inform, support, challenge

- dedication to keep trying
- accessibility, approachability
- creating space to voice opinions, using and hear others
- attending special events in guys' lives

→ how ^{caring} connected the team is to each other

→ confidence } of their leader —
calmness } that fosters that in the team

→ capacity for hope

→ trust, camaraderie among team

- # Staff Experiences
- chances
 - calmness
 - active listening
 - absence of judgment
 - their responses
 - to residents
 - making time
 - opportunities for residents to have fun, do interesting things
 - ability to rely on support team
 - residents' engagement in activities (e.g. D'n'D)
 - residents' respect for property ownership for what they have (taking care)
 - their concern for each other (sharing solutions)
 - peer support
 - ability to regulate the guys when they are in crisis
 - we are ridiculously supportive
 - rapport building
 - building trust
 - most meaningful responses
 - community feeling in the building
 - meaningful responses to clients' needs as they identify them
 - patience, tolerance
 - making the most of the ways and time we have to connect around clients
 - creating choice, supporting autonomy
 - valuing time w/ clients

- # Wishes
- to bring in tradespeople to plant seeds re: future, careers, opportunities
 - positive approach to doing something
 - that guys would experience some relief when things aren't going well (from bureaucracy)
 - ability to see the impacts of the work
 - help the guys to help each other (mentoring, modelling, being a resource)
 - that guys will have a plan/plans for tomorrow/future
 - that we better communicate re: clients and their days, goals, struggles and respond to their struggles, concerns, successes
 - more affordable housing options for what comes after AIDS
 - programming to support guys in being a good employee
 - infinite \$ and staff to fund something for everyone
 - a partnership to an exclusive employer

Resident Experiences

- follow through
- food (food bank)
- advice for certain things
 - bus tickets
- drive to school when I'm late; ^{drives to meetings} transportation
- + when the building is friendly
- + when the guys are not mad at each other
- + supporting each other w goals re: school, drug use
- + intervening when guys are in trouble
- + sticking up for another (e.g. fighting)
- 👤👤👤 talk more, push more → help w cleaning
- +→ toaster, blankets from staff
- +👤 staff taking guys for groceries👤
- 👤 sharing food, belongings
 - lending a helping hand
- +→ including residents (e.g. town hall meetings👤👤👤)
- +👤 thankful for help to solve problem, incl. involving others from life
- +→ support, help, accompaniment, ^{time} taken
- +→ practical help (e.g. laundry)
- residents supporting each other in times of need
- listening to each other
 - company for each other

Values

professional
easygoing
understanding
adaptable
empathic 🧡💚💙

calm under pressure 🧡

firm-but-fair 🧡

balanced approach

Caring

fun 🧡💚💙

genuine

Sincere

openness to beginning again 🧡

reliable

value attached to maintenance →
what clients can learn

desire for guys to have a good life
(HOPE not dope)

aspirational

honest

"there"

goals

focussed

practical re: what
needs to be done

teamwork 🧡🧡💙

helping others, being a role model

role model 🧡

positive, energetic, inspiring

humanitarianism

relatable

coach
advocate
approachable
openness
nonjudgmental
chances:

everyone deserves

an opportunity
for success

strengths based

remembering

people's humanness

good listener 🧡

discrete

again 🧡