Implementing and Administering Thinking for a Change

Emerging research around effective and successful implementation of any evidence-based practice illustrates the need for a philosophical shift for leaders and staff, mastery of new, complex skills, and a progressive and sustained effort on the part of agencies to continually monitor and evaluate program fidelity. In other words, it takes a lot of work to get the job done right! Mounting documentation indicates that evidence-based innovations alone do not create the desired impact; rather they must be supported by evidence-based implementation. Without effective implementation evidence-based innovations will produce poor results and may even cause harm.

If you are just embarking on implementing Thinking for a Change or if your agency has been delivering the program for some time, now is a great time to plan for or review your current delivery structure to make sure it is effective. Consider the following:

- Who is leading your implementation efforts? Successful implementation requires active involvement and support from the top down. A leader's involvement demonstrates commitment and the importance of the program to the organization's mission.
- How will you know Thinking for a Change is effective? Agencies must have clearly defined goals and measurable outcomes for the program. Think broadly when determining what you want to measure to include the implementation process, staff performance and short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes for the justice involved individuals who participate in the program. Monitor progress towards those goals and use the data collected to make program adjustments and improvements when necessary.
- How are you selecting your facilitators? Getting the right person for the job is critical. Consider developing a clear selection process which includes an interview of potential facilitator candidates. Ideal skills for group facilitators include: empathy, objectivity, facilitation/teaching techniques, understanding group processes, and the ability to manage groups through non-coercive means. Most importantly, selected staff should never be forced to become a Thinking for a Change facilitator.
- Who will provide ongoing supervision, coaching, and support for the overall program and individual facilitators? Having all staff properly trained to deliver the curriculum is a critical first step but it isn't enough. In order to ensure fidelity and quality assurance, make sure staff receive ongoing supervision through expert coaching and feedback. Be sure to use a quality Thinking for a Change fidelity observation tool and include group observation, or the use of video reviews as part of your on-going quality assurance program.

Successful implementation and long-term sustainability of this evidence-based program requires a continued commitment on the part of agency leadership, facilitators, and the entire organization to work collectively to ensure program fidelity. This is best accomplished through continuous performance monitoring, coaching, training, and outcome measurement to maintain high level program delivery. The time and effort put into implementation and ongoing administration of Thinking for a Change will prove to be worth it as agencies begin to realize the benefits of effective correctional practices resulting in improved agency outcomes, improved lives and healthier communities.

As you facilitate groups using this revised Thinking for a Change curriculum, keep in mind that the goal is to effect change in thinking so that behavior is positively impacted.

Good luck as you embark on this most challenging journey!

Jack Bush, Barry Glick, Juliana Taymans and NIC's Thinking for a Change Initiative Team