

Turtle Creek Dialogue

8/24/04

There were approximately 30 people (about half consumers and half providers) who attended the Consumer-Provider Dialogue in Homestead at the Turtle Creek Valley COG Building. The group was divided in half. Paul Freund and Evelyn Stafford co-facilitated two 45 minute sessions with two separate groups of about 15 persons. The focus of the discussion in both sessions was: Communication, boundaries and recovery.

The discussion comments are categorized into three areas:

1. The helping or therapeutic relationship
2. Consumer comments and concerns about communication and boundaries
3. Provider comments and concerns about communication and boundaries

Many participants in both groups shared their perspectives about the **helping or therapeutic relationship**. Comments from participants included:

- Everyone is looking for a connection to others
- Some people connect better than others
- Trust and respect are basic
- A good consumer-provider relationship is not automatic
- Open lines of communication are needed
- Honest expression of uncomfortable feelings is needed on both sides
- Unexpressed assumptions are part of the problem
- Someone has to be in charge, but not above others

Consumers and Providers each had their unique perspectives on the communication and boundary issues that occur between them. **Consumer comments regarding communication and boundaries** included:

- I want to feel on an equal basis with my therapist
- Consumers hesitate to tell therapist that they are not getting along
- Consumers should be able to move around until a personal connection is made
- A consumer should say “This isn’t working –help me figure out what to do next”, when things are not working out
- Consumer should ask therapist how relationship could be more helpful
- Sometimes a change is needed when a person moves into a new phase of recovery
- Consumers need someone to talk to who knows about mental illness

Therapist / Provider comments about communication and boundaries included:

- Recovery changes boundaries for professionals
- Therapist should indicate that its OK to separate
- Therapist should express uncertainty about what to do if there is an impasse
- Therapist needs direct feedback from consumers
- Some therapists put own expectations on consumers’ recovery
- Therapist doesn’t want to burden consumer with his/her personal problems
- Therapist wonders, “How much should I share as a professional”?

Themes common to both consumers and providers

More self-disclosure of uncomfortable feelings and thoughts would improve communication. Providers and consumers believe that the quality of the helping relationship suffers when either party does not openly express concerns that emerge. Consumers want to be able to express the need to separate and move on from a particular relationship without feelings of rejection being a part of that. The expectation should be that the relationship is time limited, and either party may need to move on.

In a related theme providers are concerned about how much of their personal lives that they should share with consumers. Honest, personal disclosure may “burden” a consumer who is in the relationship to be unburdened of their problems. Recovery is changing traditional boundaries. It is not clear presently where the new boundaries are – or will be.