DEVELOPING THE LEADERSHIP OF RECIPIENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THIS SERIES

The Building Movement Project develops tools that help organizations align their social change principles with their social service practices. Our research and experience shows that relatively small shifts in service provision can cause ripple effects; raising up constituent voice, fostering community cohesion and increasing engagement in advocacy efforts. This series highlights "5% shifts" – as we are calling them – that don't rely on organizations completely changing course and reinventing themselves. We lift up shifts that are both simple and achievable, to inspire service providers to adapt what works.

These reports are structured to include both conceptual framing based on research and literature in the sector, as well as case studies of on-the-ground experiments initiated by organizations. They also include discussion materials and other resources to help staff and leaders reflect on the case examples and apply the lessons to their own organizations. We hope that organizations will take what is useful, build on their strengths, and exercise judgment and wisdom in tailoring these examples to make "5% shifts" that fit their specific community and organizational contexts.

We invite organizations to spread these lessons and learning throughout the nonprofit sector, and to reach out to BMP to share experiences or to request additional resources or coaching. Feel free to email BMP Co-Director Sean Thomas-Breitfeld at sthomas-breitfeld@demos.org.

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INTRODUCTION AND FRAMEWORK:

DEVELOPING THE LEADERSHIP OF RECIPIENTS

Leadership is closely tied to notions of confidence, agency and authority in our culture. Too often, structural inequities restrict the opportunities for people to develop those self-perceptions and exercise leadership, particularly for people who find themselves in need of formal supportive services. Even within the nonprofit sector, issues of power imbalances that are embedded throughout society can be replicated within organizations and provider/client relationships. For instance, due to the lack of representation of voices from communities most likely to receive services, the systems and structures that govern public benefits and services often demand compliance to rules that recipients have not had a role in shaping. Additionally, the professionalization of service delivery – which has been the subject of long-standing debate in social work theory[1] – can over-emphasize the power of the "expert" deliverers of services and reduce constituent's voice in advocating for themselves and their communities. In spite of these broader societal barriers and dynamics in the sector, organizations find a wide range of ways to develop clients as leaders, strengthen their self-image, and build their capacity to act on their own behalf.

This report includes two case studies of leadership development efforts by nonprofit organizations. At the Rosa Parks Children and Youth Program in Detroit, a junior counselor program has been very impactful on the leadership skills of young adults. By enlisting teenagers to support younger children attending tutoring, summer camp and art therapy sessions, the program builds a pipeline that keeps youth engaged as they age, and builds their self-esteem and capacity to lead in other parts of their lives as well. The second case study examines the Client Advisory Board (CAB) at Bread for the City – a front line agency serving the poor in Washington, DC. The CAB builds on the organization's tradition of client engagement and voice throughout its programs, and has helped empower clients to have a say as individuals and as a collective. Clients who have been members of the CAB have developed new programmatic areas of the organization and even taken their leadership skills out into their community. In both cases, the participants gain concrete skills that are valued in the workplace, but more importantly, the programs help to shift the relationships between staff and clients towards mutual respect as peers and transform participants' self-image and sense of efficacy in the world.

Current service delivery practices that emphasize client leadership, participation, and empowerment have been greatly influenced by both the disability rights movement and concepts of radical therapy that emerged in the 1960s and 70s. These social movements sought to counter the perception that people with physical and psychiatric disabilities were automatically less capable of leadership, autonomy and personal agency. These movements also contributed to major shifts in formal supportive services, both through the move towards deinstitutionalization in the 1970s but also in other routine interactions between service providers and recipients. For instance, mental health professionals tend to view service participants as possessing uniquely valuable perspectives on how to thrive with their illness, and opportunities for clients to engage with – and in some cases reenter – society are seen as integral to recovery. The emphasis on practices that "reduce professional distance," "give clients voice" and "increase client self-reliance" has contributed to a

shift from viewing people as simply and permanently mentally ill, towards emphasizing the possibility of "recovery from psychiatric disabilities."[2] In addition to these interpersonal shifts between provider and recipient, the mental health consumer movement successfully advocated for Congress to pass laws requiring agencies to establish "consumer advisory boards" to ensure that consumers "lead the design, implementation and evaluation of mental health service systems."[3] Many states allow individuals with mental and physical disabilities to hire and train their own personal care providers and to personally direct their work. Many community mental health centers train and support mental health consumers to become peer employees and provide services alongside professionally-qualified staff.

Similar to the old perceptions of people experiencing mental illness, youth in our society – especially those considered "at risk" – had often been viewed as less able to exercise leadership. In the mid-20th century, youth were stigmatized as a "minority in need of special protection," but those images of risk, turmoil and aggression have been largely replaced by a positive vision of "young people as potentially active participants in democratic processes."[4] The federal government has supported the growth of programs that develop youth leadership through involvement in their communities for the last two decades through a wide variety of programs.

Any organization – whether serving youth, people living in poverty, those with psychiatric disabilities, or any other groups of constituents – can design programmatic shifts that develop the leadership of

participants. Many parts of the nonprofit sector have always emphasized leadership development. For instance, activist and base-building groups focus on educating community members about their rights and creating opportunities to practice exercising leadership and agency in making public demands based on those social rights. But leadership can take other forms besides advocacy, as the two cases profiled in this report demonstrate through their focus on decision-making and skill building. The important thing is for organizations to challenge dynamics of power that erode one's sense of self-worth and agency. When the larger society emphasizes people's powerlessness, it is incumbent on service providers to both resist recreating that powerlessness within organizations, and to actively create a sense of empowerment among clients, constituents and recipients.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

How does your organization incorporate the voices and views of clients in decision-making?

Does your organization develop the leadership of clients? What activities and practices reflect this goal?

2   Ellison and Dunn (2006)

3   National Consumer Supporter Technical Assistance Center

4   Varney (2007)

CASE EXAMPLE 1:

DEVELOPING LEADERS THROUGH PEER COUNSELING

BACKGROUND

Planning leadership programs suitable for the development of middle school youth poses a unique challenge as the youth make the transition from childhood to adolescence. For example, how should programs guide their growing independence and foster a sense of responsibility that comes with it? How would a program encourage a youth's divergent interests and nurture focused skill-building? At the Rosa Parks Children and Youth Program, Sister Nancyann Turner created a junior counselor program that builds on middle school students' budding independence and develops their leadership by helping them serve as role models for younger children in the program.

The Rosa Parks Children and Youth Program is a service of the Capuchin Soup Kitchen and runs its programs in a large room filled with books and art projects on Detroit's east side. Sister Nancyann, a licensed therapist, art educator, and artist, and a small team of staff currently provide support for children and youth ages 6-14 to not only cope with changes in their communities but also to stimulate their creativity and enhance their growth through art therapy sessions, academic tutoring, support groups for both teen boys and girls, a garden club, and summer peace camps.

The junior counselor program began simply enough: out of necessity. Sister Nancyann, as the sole staff at that time, needed more adult volunteers, called counselors, to play and read with young children during the program's open play time. Fridays, however, were the most challenging days to get adult volunteers because of the approaching weekend. Sister Nancyann noticed that some of the older youth were coming to the center on Fridays even though there was no official programming for them. They started to take on adult

counselors' responsibilities to work with younger children. She formally enlisted their help and eventually instituted a junior counselor program for young adolescents ages 12-15. In addition to mentoring children on Fridays, they now lead summer camps, manage the garden club, and even counsel in the intimate art therapy sessions, a responsibility that was formerly only filled by adult counselors.

HOW IT WORKS

The junior counselor program has gone through several iterations; it was adjusted each time as necessary to fit the needs and capacity of the Center, junior

BEFORE:

At an after school program serving elementary and middle school youth, young adolescents were eager to contribute to more than current programs provided and the program's sole staff needed help with programs for younger children.

5% SHIFT:

Staff created opportunities for older youth to support and lead programs with younger children.

IMPACTS:

Junior counselors learn new skills and practice leadership, as well as extend the program's capacity to reach more children.

counselors and staff. In its current practice, staff takes a more structured approach that includes a job description, an application form, an orientation, two check-in sessions, and an appreciation event at the end. This comprehensive system of support requires more staff time to maintain program integrity but helps to set clear expectations and responsibilities that are essential for junior counselors to succeed in their roles.

At Rosa Parks, the junior counselor program primarily operates on a typical school calendar where staff identifies interested youth throughout the year and asks them to apply in the beginning of the next school year. Junior counselors may choose to continue in the summer with a more intensive schedule and increased responsibilities.

In their new role as a junior counselor, youth have to transition from a program participant to an observant and responsive role model. Staff uses the orientation to clarify responsibilities and discuss potential difficult situations when working with young children. Using an interactive method such as role-playing, new junior counselors work together to explore issues such as what it means to keep confidentiality for a child even when that child is a family member or how to respond when a child suddenly starts crying. The orientation is also an opportunity to foster junior counselors' critical thinking skills as they are asked to consider their role as an authority figure versus a nurturing mentor who helps others in expressing their feelings and experiences.

To continue supporting the junior counselors' development, staff holds two in-depth check-in sessions in January and April, in which junior counselors and staff evaluate their experience so far and design solutions moving forward. In June, each

junior counselor completes a self-evaluation and is also evaluated by the staff. At the end of the school year, junior counselors are honored in front of their peers, parents, and younger children at the program-wide graduation. In this way, the ceremony helps to highlight for the younger children what they can aspire to as they continue to participate in the program.

RESPONSE & IMPACTS

The junior counselor program is structured so that youth know what to expect and to have opportunities to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to take on new roles and responsibilities. The orientation supplies them with initial knowledge and periodic check-in sessions provide reminders of the high expectations of their roles.

More than anything, the program provides opportunities to practice leadership. It is learning by doing. Sister Nancyann explains, "The real examples, the real experience of being a leader probably teaches more than all the materials we

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- Setting specific standards helps youth know when they are meeting them.

- Determin who on your staff would have the capacity to provide support to junior counselors.

- In an orientation, explain youth's roles and responsibilities and other existing staff policy on child safety.

put together." Junior counseling is a highly skilled job; a good junior counselor must have a sense of how to talk to children, how to listen, and how to motivate. The junior counselor must also be actively engaging with children the entire time. As an employee-in-training, youth have to learn to self-evaluate, to receive feedback, and to anticipate mishaps and communicate with their supervisors. In art therapy sessions, junior counselors, along with staff or an adult volunteer (called counselors), lead younger children in a reflection and share their observations of the group dynamics in a debrief afterwards. These sessions help junior counselors develop a high level of social skills, tact, professionalism, and confidentiality.

By exercising new skills, young people build confidence in their abilities. "Students are usually thrilled when we ask them to apply. Many of the youth have negative self-esteem so it is extremely affirming that we trust them enough to ask them," explains Sister Nancyann. In all programs and especially in art therapy, junior counselors are treated like grown-ups, professionals, and peers.

Through the mentoring relationship, junior counselors are able to see themselves in a different light. Sister Nancyann explains, "Just like they expect that child that they're working with to treat them with respect and to do their work, so they apply them to their own: how do I work? I have a feeling that it works in both ways: affirm themselves, and learn skills and talents that they didn't even know they have." Additionally, the opportunity to practice these leadership roles expands their idea of potential career paths; many youth have even used their formal experience as junior counselors to apply for college and secure other employment.

The positive impact is not just only on the junior counselors. Programs benefit when their youth take on more responsibility through the expansion of how many people they can serve. In addition, when youth actively participate and increase their accountability to the program, they develop stronger bonds and feel more compelled to continue their participation. Significantly, it's even transformed the staff themselves. "In the beginning, we would never dream that we would have them help in art. It's asking them to really share in the life of another person at the tables," recalls Sister Nancyann. "I think trusting them with a very sacred relationship in here has come about gradually. But I haven't had any reason to doubt its worth."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

How does your organization keep program participants engaged as they gain skills and confidence, and their need for support decreases?

What forms of leadership do you see emerge naturally/spontaneously among your organization's constituents?

FROM CLIENT ADVISORS TO CLIENTS AS LEADERS

BACKGROUND

Client engagement is nothing new at Bread for the City. A recent internal report outlines more than 30 projects in which clients are active in more ways than just receiving services. To name a few examples: Bread's clients regularly facilitate cooking workshops, lead wellness classes, plant gardens, testify at city commissions, and attend coalition meetings. Some might consider these acts of "giving back" a natural outcome for the thousands of clients who come to this $8-million multi-service agency in Washington DC. CEO George Jones sees it differently, "Our mission is to alleviate the suffering caused by poverty and to rectify the conditions that perpetuate it. Engaging our clients is the pivotal piece that will make meaningful impact on this mission." In the past few years, George has pushed this vision of deliberate client engagement and leadership building within Bread for the City. This case study highlights one example, the Client Advisory Board (CAB), and discusses ongoing challenges and concerns as Bread implements this strategy.

HOW IT WORKS

The Client Advisory Board was originally founded in 2009 as a training ground for clients to join Bread's board of directors and as a space for clients to give feedback to Bread independent of the board. Since then, the CAB has moved beyond its original vision but remains one of the few spaces at Bread that is composed of clients from a diversity of programs with an explicit intention to build client leadership.

Staff recruited clients from different programs to join the CAB, which consisted of about 20 members. As an indication of his commitment to the CAB, George attended all the meetings. When he was on sabbatical leave, another executive would join the meeting in his place. After Joni Podshun was hired as the first staff member of the budding Client Engagement and Advocacy department, she increased the capacity of the CAB and supported its processes through facilitation, agenda preparation, and meeting reminders. Joni recalls the difficulties, "Many people when they first joined the CAB really had developed survival tactics for themselves that were about aggressively promoting their ideas or perspectives. CAB members developed an agreement that the CAB is an open process for any client to learn about the opportunities that they have at Bread and the resources at their disposal. That was a really big deal for people that this wasn't just about their project, but about something bigger." To strengthen group dynamics, the CAB developed ground rules and community agreements that would guide the group in working together.

BEFORE:

Clients who wish to be involved participate in individual program opportunities.

5% SHIFT:

A Client advisory board was formed to bring together clients from different programs.

IMPACTS:

A client-centered structure has helped clients to share and build new skills and to transform their individual voice into a collective force.

CAB's ability to work together immensely strengthened through a six-month-long Participatory Action Research (PAR) project in partnership with researchers and students from George Mason University in nearby Fairfax, Virginia. The research team, composed of 18 CAB members and a few other clients, came together through a recruitment process and decided to explore current and ideal client engagement at Bread. The team discussed research methods and agreed upon an appropriate community research process. They conducted more than 60 interviews with clients, staff, and board members, culminating in a team presentation to more than 200 people at both of Bread's service sites.

The CAB is still in the process of figuring out what exactly their roles should be within Bread. George has some ideas, "I think they should be a space to hold Bread accountable – a real facilitator for community engagement/empowerment." As a result of the research project, the CAB is now split into different committees to begin working on recommended projects. In the meantime, the CAB is leading an effort to organize a large client town hall that will engage clients on Bread's and CAB's current progress and direction.

RESPONSE & IMPACTS

The Client Advisory Board has become a community space for clients to access resources beyond the immediate services that Bread offers. Concretely, CAB members have used their experience and skills gained from serving on the board and participating in the research project to get jobs.

The CAB is a training ground for leadership where new projects are nurtured and developed. Through the support of Advocacy staff, one person even received a grant from City funds to lead garden clubs in his neighborhood. Another long-time client and CAB member, Leonard Edwards, is leading the development of a time-banking project that builds on existing strengths and assets in the Bread community. The project would encourage clients to contribute their skills and time to Bread, and in return receive other goods and services from staff and other clients.

Ultimately, leadership building is about providing the opportunity for human dignity and respect. The CAB empowers individuals to have a voice – not only to have one's ideas heard and implemented, but to transform that individual voice into a collective voice. The CAB provides a forum for working together to collaborate with others toward a common goal. It has been a space where people can feel their own power beyond themselves. George comments on the transformation that he has observed, "It is the commitment and dedication they have to CAB. At the end of the day, it's not just about them, but about creating something new for this community in terms of work."

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- Setting specific standards helps youth know when they are meeting them.

- Determin who on your staff would have the capacity to provide support to junior counselors.

- In an orientation, explain youth's roles and responsibilities and other existing staff policy on child safety.

An immediate impact of clients becoming more involved is that the relationship between clients and staff may be forced to change. Clients, who before were just coming in and leaving, are now staying longer to access the resources that CAB and Bread have. They have more ownership of the space, which has not always been embraced by staff. George explains, "I've got people at Bread who have been here for 20 years, who dedicate their lives to serving community folks and the community. There was an assumption that they would be completely flexible around this idea of sharing the power with this group. It doesn't play itself out that way so easily. There's a kind of discomfort that surfaces almost immediately around roles and boundaries." George is addressing these concerns by providing opportunities for staff to learn together and to discuss how these changes will affect them. In the past 6 months, all of Bread's staff has completed the Undoing Racism workshop by New Orleans group People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. George is setting aside time for all staff to come together to discuss what they have learned and how the trainings will be applied to Bread's work. In May, staff again came together to discuss how client engagement and advocacy priorities in Bread's strategic plan will be operationalized within Bread.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

What informal or formal structures are in place to support clients working together?

If clients were more active in advising your organization, what would be some benefits for you or your organization? What shifts around roles and boundaries might you anticipate?

What knowledge, skills, or abilities might you (or your organization) need to develop to support this shift in roles and boundaries?

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Purpose of this Discussion:

Have participants reflect on the case studies and their own experiences, in order to identify opportunities for leadership development.

Hoped-For Outcomes:

- Explore the value of constituent empowerment

- Identify barriers to developing constituent voice and leadership inside the organization

- Brainstorm shifts to practice leadership development

60-MINUTE AGENDA AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Round of Introductions and Personal Reflection 10 min

Start with a round of introductions where people respond to the following statement:

Describe a time when you felt like your opinion and voice was really valued

If time allows, ask for reflections on common themes across people's individual experiences.

Reflect on Understandings of Power 20 min

Ask people to brainstorm definitions of power.

Once a few definitions have been offered, pose any of the following elements of power that might have been missed:

Power is the capacity to influence others

Power is the ability to make things happen

Power is the potential to make someone comply, commit, and/or do something they wouldn't otherwise do

Emphasize that power is a neutral force. It has potential positive and negative impacts depending on how it is used.

Discuss any underlying, structural power forces acting on your clients, whether with positive or negative impacts.

Begin to Explore Strategies for Developing Leadership 25 min

Reflect on the two case studies to consider activities your organization could undertake:

How do we currently honor client's voice and cultivate their sense of leadership and empowerment? What are the benefits or impacts of these efforts?

If we were to do more to empower our constituents, how might we restructure an existing program to achieve that goal?

Note: it may be helpful to break the group into two smaller teams.
Use two sets of flipcharts to visually record report-out's from each group.

Closing and Evaluation 5 min

Ask people to identify one thing they liked and one thing they would change about the conversation.

Close the discussion and thank people for their participation.

Note: if there was energy in the previous brainstorming session, you might want to invite people to participate in a follow-up meeting, using the guide and worksheet on the following pages.

FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION GUIDE AND EXERCISE

Purpose of this Discussion:

For those individuals who were particularly engaged or excited by the last meeting, you can use this agenda and worksheet to delve deeper into individual programs or areas of your work to begin to generate more concrete ideas for next steps.

Hoped-For Outcomes:

- Identify opportunities for clients to have more voice and leadership in your organization

- Generate a list of concrete practice shifts that can be proposed to others in the organization

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60-MINUTE AGENDA AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Round of Introductions and Personal Reflection 10 min

Start with a round of introductions where people respond to the following question(s):

> (If any participants were not part of the first meeting, have them first reflect on this statement) Describe a time when you felt like your opinion and voice was really valued
>
> (For those who participated in the first meeting) What most excited you about our last discussion together?

Note: it may be helpful to break the group into two smaller teams.
Use two sets of flipcharts to visually record report-outs from each group.

Identifying Current Leadership Development Practices 5 min

As a group, quickly brainstorm answers to the following question. (If you have the flipcharts from the first meeting, you can have them up as well):

> How do we currently honor client's voice and cultivate their sense of leadership and empowerment?

Eight Levels of Client Voice and Engagement Exercise: 40 min

(10 min) Break the group into small teams of 3-4 participants and ask each team to assess which categories the current practices of a program area identified earlier fall into, according to the "scale" worksheet on page 11.

(10 min) Next, have the small teams report out on how they categorized the current practices and compare/contrast views and opinions.

(20 min) As a large group reflect on the following questions to begin mapping out alternatives:

> How could we change programs to involve a higher level of participation by our constituents? How would this benefit and challenge staff? How would this benefit and challenge clients?
>
> What concerns or risks might there be in changing programs to emphasize client leadership, voice and initiative?
>
> What would be the first step to implement these changes? What would be the next two steps?

Closing and Evaluation 5 min

Ask people to identify one thing they liked, and one thing they would change, about the conversation.

Close the discussion and thank people for their participation.

Note: if there was continued energy during this exercise, you may consider forming a group that will continue to work on this issue in your organization and plan for how to move ahead.

SCALE OF CLIENT VOICE AND ENGAGEMENT

Organizations engage clients in a variety of ways at the same time. The types of engagement on the left side of the scale can be stepping stones to greater client leadership and initiative in the future (represented on the right side of the scale).

Use the chart below to consider the various modes of engagement and how the examples provided apply to your organization. In the last row, write down your own examples of existing work and generate new ideas.

Staff Directed	Client Turnout	Staff Selected	Client Informed	Client Consulted	Staff Initiated Shared Decision-Making	Client Initiated and Directed	Client Initiated Shared Decision-Making
Clients are directed as to where to stand, what to say, what signs to hold, etc.	Clients attend an event or meeting but have no clear role	The most skilled clients are invited to "represent" all clients	Clients are informed of a project's purpose, invited to participate, and can say no	Staff consult with clients about a question or problem and consider feedback in design	Staff identify problem, craft solution, and invite client participation	Clients produce own program or activity, in addition to what org. already offers	Clients identify problem, craft solution, and invite staff support

ADDITIONAL TOOLS AND USES

Consumer Advisory Boards provide their organizations with guidance on questions related to consumers and clients. They have become common in many mental health organizations, but any organization whose activities affect consumers can establish such a body. However, creating and maintaining an advisory board can be a demanding process. Advisory board members need to be recruited and trained. They must understand their purpose as a group and remain motivated to meet their board's goals. To learn more about setting up a client advisory board, check out the booklet on the website of the National Consumer Supporter Technical Assistance Center at

http://www.ncstac.org/content/materials/ConsumerAdvisoryBoard.pdf.

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