

Hand in Hand: Client Stories

Book Two

Documentation of Stories of Success in Be'er Sheva's Social Services

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Jerusalem | July 2019

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Abstract

One major challenge faced by organizations is maintaining a capacity for renewal and alertness to rapidly changing realities and conditions so as to properly serve and promote client interests. In an age fraught with rapid, sometimes unexpected, change, it is both complex and vital for organizations to meet this challenge in order to further their work and provide optimal responses to their target populations.

The Learning from Success Service (LSS) at the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute helps organizations meet these challenges by developing and inculcating novel learning practices. The goal is to help them offer their target populations appropriate, effective and high-quality service. The approach of learning from success aims to create an environment encouraging shared, ongoing learning in organizations.

One method developed at LSS is the retrospective method – which focuses on developing an organization's ability to learn from past successes. This type of learning makes it possible to identify the tacit knowledge accumulated by an organization, replicate the activities and principles of action that led to success, and thereby convert the accumulated knowledge into a learning process that can be implemented in the future.

In 2016, the director of the Division for Personal and Social Services in Be'er Sheva, Etty Cohen, asked the LSS for assistance with the process of identifying and documenting stories of success in the practice of division social workers. The methodological tool used in the documentation was the retrospective method. In 2017, a structured, systematic process began of identifying, investigating and documenting the stories. The first book documenting these stories was published under the title, *Hand in hand: Client stories - Documentation of stories of success in Be'er Sheva's social services*. The work proceeded in 2018 with stories chosen from other departments in the division.

The work process, the products of which appear in this book, consisted of several stages:

- 1. Establishment of a steering committee.** A steering committee was established to lead and support the process. Four departments were chosen from the division and, from these, staff members who shared their stories of success.
- 2. Selection of stories.** The stories were selected according to set criteria. For example, both staff member and client deemed the handling of the case successful; the staff member assessed that the client would agree to be interviewed; the stories represented the diverse population of the division's clientele. Once the criteria were determined, several meetings were held to choose the stories of success.

3. **Instruction of social work students in the documentation of the stories.** Social work students from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev were chosen to document the stories. They selected this project as part of the requirements of their BA studies. They learned the main points of Learning from success – the retrospective method.
4. **The investigation and documentation of the stories** were performed by the students trained to do so. Nine clients, as well as 10 professionals were interviewed: seven social workers, one employment coordinator, one employment companion, and a probation officer. The following are examples of the stories of success documented in the book: *Step by step* – The rehabilitation of an addict; *Woman of Valor* – A change of occupation and personal empowerment; *True dignity* – Rehabilitation from a gambling addiction and a life of crime.
5. **Processing of the stories and the extraction of common principles of action.** Following documentation, the interview materials were formulated into stories. A chapter was written summarizing the principles of action common to all or most of the stories. Examples of these are: a respectful attitude to the clients at all times; a treatment program taking into account the entire family; the fact that success has many partners; systemic work with partners inside, and outside of, the welfare system to facilitate all-encompassing optimal treatment; exploitation of a crisis as a lever for change; a meaningful therapeutic relationship as the basis of success; personally tailored treatment.

The book provides insights into successful practices that led to meaningful change in the lives of the clients and their families. These will serve as the basis for further learning and seminars, and constitute a resource for the mutual learning and professional development of social service staff and officials working with Israel's diverse populations.

