Are Your Adult Literacy Students Ready to Work with the Healthcare Community?

Audrey Riffenburgh & Toni Cordell
4th Biennial Wisconsin Health Literacy Summit
April 12, 2011

Who We Are

• Audrey Riffenburgh, MA
  – Health literacy consultant/trainer/speaker for 17 years
  – 12 years in adult literacy (local, state, national levels)
  – From New Mexico—the only state to have had a state-wide student leadership training program

• Toni Cordell, LLL (Life-Long Learner)
  – Professional speaker on literacy and health literacy
  – Former adult literacy student; current college student
  – Five years on staff at Laubach Literacy Action
  – Adult literacy advocate—skated across the US to draw media attention to the solvable problem of illiteracy
You can’t take this lightly. There is too much to lose!

Like what? Let’s talk...

Why Be Cautious?

• If the collaboration is not successful, your program’s image and reputation suffer.
• If the healthcare org is not ready, you may sink time into a project that has no real effect.
• If learners do not meet expectations, negative stereotypes can be perpetuated.
• Putting learners in situations where they are not prepared to succeed can damage self-esteem and confidence. Remember their past history with authority/power. Don’t throw them to the wolves.
Working Toward Success

- If Fit is Good, Plan, Plan, Prepare, Prepare
- Evaluate Fit Carefully, Don’t Jump In
- Healthcare Organization: Needs & Expectations
- Literacy Program: Capacity

Literacy Programs and Students: What Are Your Capacities?

Questions to Ask Before You Start
Are You Ready? Do You...

- know about health literacy? The stats? What it is? What challenges the healthcare org faces?
- have staff resources to dedicate to the project?
- know what your program does best and can offer?
- have learners with leadership training and experience in your program? In their lives?
- have the staff time and expertise to orient, train, support, prepare and equip learners to succeed?

Whom Should You Select?

- What qualities should you look for?
- What experience, skills, and training are needed to succeed?
- What opportunities for leadership training are available?
- Are expectations appropriate?
- What do learners get out of it?
- What might be at risk if they go public with personal information?
What Are Appropriate Roles?

- Helping evaluate printed health materials? Websites?
- Doing a “walk through” of a facility?
- Speaking about their struggles with the healthcare system?
- Advising on policy?
- Serving on committees?
- When are these roles inappropriate and for whom?

Healthcare Organizations: Needs and Expectations

Questions to Ask Before You Start
What Do Organizations Need/Expect?

• Have they thought through what they need?
• Is it within your program’s mission?
• Do they have realistic expectations about the skills and availability of adult learners?
• Are they ready for your learners’ input?
• Are you and your students skilled enough to charge for your help? Or can you exchange expertise?

Case Study: Is This a Good Match?

**DBP (Dedicated but Poor) Literacy Program**
- 4 Staff
- Budget always thin
- 2 learners speak in public about program but only accompanied by staff
- No learners on staff, committees, or board
- 3 help set up for tutor trainings

**ABC Hospital**
- Know they need to address HL for accreditation
- Want to start with easy-to-read materials/forms
- Zero budget
- 2-person committee for patient education
- Recently began working on language/translation issues
Summary

• Consider carefully what your program and your students have to offer, gain, and lose.

• Identify what you can realistically and skillfully do with your program’s resources.

• Remember to protect your learners’ dignity. Set them up for success. Mastery is not achieved overnight.

QUESTIONS?
## Contact Us

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