

Julie's Family Learning Program

Countable Outcomes Goal Setting Process 2004

The Program and Staff

This year **Julie's Family Learning Program** celebrated its 30th year of service in the South Boston community as well as the grand opening of its first permanent home in the George Robert White Fund Building on Dorchester Street. Julie's operates through the South Boston Adult Literacy Initiative (SBALI) with Notre Dame Education Center (NDEC) to offer a collaborative multi-level adult basic education program at our respective locations in South Boston. Julie's however, also offers comprehensive and intensive ABE, family literacy, and a life-skills program to our target population for 20 hours a week.

In order to respond to the needs of our target population that include low-income single head of household mothers, we have developed a holistic approach that is sensitive to the challenges and barriers that face this population. The timing of classes (9:15a.m. - 2:30 p.m.) and an academic calendar that is based on the Boston Public Schools' takes into account the scheduling needs of mothers with school-aged children. A wide range of support services that include: tutoring, counseling, childcare programs, advocacy, transportation vouchers, and crisis intervention help to ensure the learner's successful achievement of their academic, career, and life goals. Our classes have been designed to adapt to the learner's need for individualized attention, small class size, and varied learning styles and challenges. Our goal is to develop a safe and secure learning environment that builds community, family stabilization, personal leadership, and self-esteem.

Currently offered classes:

- 9 ABE Classes (Math I, II, III, Reading I, II, III, Writing I, II, III)
- General Education Development (GED) Classes
- External Diploma Program (EDP) Classes
- Workplace Readiness Classes
- 3 Computer Literacy Classes
- Introduction to Workplace Computer Classes (Microsoft Excel, Power Point)
- 2 Family Literacy Classes
- Life-skills Classes with workshops
- Summer programming and educational field trips

Students may enroll at anytime during the school year or during the summer depending on availability of slots in both ABE and childcare classrooms (unless the child is school-aged and then does not need a childcare slot). Julie's serves approximately 30 students at a time, and serves approximately 50-70 families a year. The year is divided into 2 semesters, but because of the individualized nature of the program, students can enter throughout the year.

Julie's Family Learning Program is governed by a Board of Directors and administered by 2 full-time directors, Sister Louise Kearns, SND, Director of Adult Services, and Sister Jean Sullivan, SND, Director of Childcare Services. Sr. Louise works with a staff of 3 ABE instructors (all 3 are involved in SMARTT reporting), 1 case manager/life-skills coordinator, 1 computer/technology instructor, 4 administrative staff, 1 part-time student advocate, 2 part-time counselors, and 3 program assistants/volunteers. JFLP also has an Advisory Board that consists of student representatives, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, and community members, some of whom have supported our program for decades. They serve to help keep our program's mission clearly in focus.

Process Development

The goal setting process has been an important part of Julie's curriculum since its early stages. Part of our challenge in the goal collecting and reporting process has been to combine our existing methods with the newly developed Department of Education methods to create a workable model for our program. Staff met over several months to develop a system that would incorporate the two processes, and we have come up with a solution for our program that allows us to track both the student's weekly self-stated goals and their long-term program participation goals. Our weekly goal setting process happens every Thursday afternoon during what we call Reflection Period. Students receive the same blank worksheet every week that prompts them to think about setting SMART (Specific / Measurable / Attainable / Realistic / Time-bound) goals for the upcoming week. The back of the worksheet is the "Congratulations to Me" side that students complete for the previous week. It gives them a chance to claim the things that they have accomplished during that week, and it informs the goal setting for the upcoming week. The worksheet includes several possible categories that women have expressed interest in working on that include:

- LIFE SKILLS-health and wellness goals, home management, parenting, relationship, family literacy, and other.
- EDUCATIONAL SKILLS- GED/EDP or workplace competency goals, computer skills, and other.

Lastly, students are asked if they have made any progress towards their "cloud goals." The cloud goals are how we refer to the DOE goals that each student chose and refined with a staff member at orientation. These sheets are collected, reviewed, and documented by staff before they are returned to students at session breaks. Together staff and students celebrate the goal/goals that students feel they have accomplished or made significant progress towards during that session. Accomplished goals are recorded by the students on different shapes and papers to create an artistic collection that will then hang in our Gathering Room.

The DOE/ACLS goals are called cloud goals because we ask the students to write their life dream/goal (which may or may not be the reason they chose to join JFLP) in a cloud shape that they spend time decorating and then keep in the front of their reflection folder to remind them daily what they are working towards. Staff assists each student in refining their goals by determining which goals are long-term, short-term, and which are logical steps towards larger goals. Staff asks each student to keep their individual dream in mind while prioritizing. The initial contact for this goal setting process is made during the orientation and interview period.

Staff developed a means of processing the information gathered during the orientation and interview process that included an information sharing time every Friday during our established meeting time. All the departments come together to familiarize themselves with each student's individual goals and educational strengths and needs. Each student is discussed and an action plan is developed and revisited throughout the year. This allows us to evaluate how well we are adhering to the DOE/ACLS five required components. The components are as follows:

- 1. Goal setting is to be done with a staff member who is likely to have an ongoing relationship with the student.** All staff members at JFLP are likely to have an ongoing relationship with every student, but goals are collected by and directed to the staff member in charge of their educational development as well as the Adult Services Director.
- 2. Goals must be determined by the student and negotiated with a staff person.** Students are encouraged to name their own goals for their personal and educational development. All goals are taken seriously and included in the long-term plan. Staff

- negotiates the goals with each student to determine which goals are to be focused on for this academic year, as well as prioritizing, analyzing, and refining each goal to fit the parameters of the program.
3. **Student goals must be communicated to the instructor.** JFLP staff goes over each student's goals several times throughout the year during designated times at Friday staff meetings. Every week a few students are covered, and staff members develop specific action plans to meet the student's needs. Action plans are revisited and revised as situations change.
 4. **Student goals must inform instruction and be incorporated into a program's curriculum development process.** Student demand for more targeted instruction in the core education areas of math, reading, and writing resulted in our development of nine ABE classes to accommodate the needs of student learners. Students are evaluated with diagnostic testing that includes the TABE, a writing sample, and a specifically designed math assessment.
 5. **Student goals must be revisited on a regular basis.** Staff and students regularly revisit goals. Weekly goal setting and claiming with the students familiarizes them quickly with the process and allows them freedom to choose, change, and celebrate their goals and accomplishments. These weekly sessions are facilitated by our Adult Services Director.

Orientation

New students' initial contact with the program is done as a home visit with one of the Directors and our case manager. Background information is gathered during this meeting that lays the groundwork for the orientation process. Students are given an overview of the services available at JFLP and informed of the unique holistic approach that requires a twenty-hour a week commitment. When students arrive at the program, they are welcomed and introduced to the group, but spend their first two days completing the diagnostic testing and orientation process. Our staff is each responsible for a different aspect of the orientation process. Students are handed a copy of our comprehensive handbook, and they will go over each section with a staff member. During this time students will meet individually with a staff member who will discuss the goals and dreams they have, complete a commitment form, the Release of Information form, and take the various entrance tests. A trained staff member facilitates each part of the orientation, and questions are encouraged so that the student has a full understanding of the need and purpose for each component.

Our orientation process also includes instruments designed to make the student more aware of their own styles and strengths like the Seven Smarts, Learning Styles, and the Meyers-Briggs Typology Test. The results of all the assessment testing are analyzed and recorded by the staff member who then meets to discuss the results individually. Feed-back usually happens about a week after orientation and testing are complete. Results of the assessment testing are recorded by the SMARTT data entry person and then posted to a shared drive for staff to access when needed. Hard copies are kept with student information in their individual file.

Documentation

Because we revisit each student's goals throughout the year it has made the documentation process much easier to accomplish. Student's goals that require documentation are highlighted by the SMARTT data entry person and separately recorded upon entry in the SMARTT System. A Micro Soft Excel Spreadsheet is then generated to be brought into discussion during Friday staff meetings. Each teacher who has witnessed the completion of a student goal shares that information during that time, and the responsibilities for collecting outstanding documentation

needs are then divided among staff. The SMARTT data entry person, who also collects and files that information, provides the information about what kind of documentation is required. Students are also informed of the documentation required for reported accomplished goals, and they have been very willing to comply.

Most follow-up documentation is done by personal interviews. The majority of students who accomplish their educational goals join our workplace or college readiness classes, enter post-secondary education, join the work force or otherwise move on from the program but continue contact through our active alumni meetings on Tuesday evenings or through continued career counseling. This continued contact makes the follow-up process simpler to document. Those students to which this does not apply receive phone calls and letters if necessary.

Goals Inform Curriculum

In order to make instruction reflect student self-stated goals and needs, the staff at JFLP meets monthly to discuss the issue. Curriculum is revised and developed to accommodate changing and expanding needs. Student input is critical for this process, and it comes in the forms of goal sheets, reflections, interviews, and evaluations. Staff discusses the needs, updates action plans, and develops curriculum to suit the purpose.

A few examples: The introduction of the three levels of ABE math, reading, and writing into the weekly schedule is a direct result of student feedback. Expressing their desire to be “refreshed” or strengthened in these core areas, students are placed according to the results of their diagnostic testing. Furthermore, lessons for each of these classes were designed to speak to individuals’ needs for targeted instruction, as stated by the students themselves. Lessons designed to teach students decimals, for example, include instruction for practical application such as balancing checkbooks, figuring discounts, practicing basic multiplication and division, and strategies for helping school-aged children with homework.

Educational trips to the South Boston Branch Library were organized to assist students wishing to get and use a library card, as well as familiarize students with the resources they have available to the public and conquer some fears about the library in general. Last year we made three trips to the library, and they each yielded results for the students. Instruction included scavenger hunts, presentations, and family literacy events at the library designed to inform students that they could accomplish several of their goals by utilizing the resources at the library. Some of these goals include: spending more quality time with their children, increased family literacy in the form of reading more books together, or checking out the free passes to the MFA, Children’s Museum, MOS, or the Aquarium. Also, students have reported that they can save money by borrowing free tapes and DVD’s from the library instead of costly video stores. Lastly, students also discovered that the library has after-school and summer programming for targeted age groups.

A six-week cooking class was developed at JFLP to meet the needs of young mothers who expressed the desire to learn to cook, prepare home made meals instead of relying on take-out or prepackaged meals, maintain a food budget, and learn more about nutrition to improve the health of their families. The class met on Wednesday afternoons and provided students the opportunity to learn how to prepare simple meals that they could then try at home for their families. Several students reported that they were trying new vegetables, eating at home more often, preparing dishes for family holiday celebrations for the first time, and are feeling empowered by the knowledge they gained in that course.

Conclusion

Working to meld our goal setting processes has been an extremely positive experience for staff at JFLP. This self-analysis led to the improvement of some of our most established systems by offering invaluable insight to the depth and breadth of our students' changing and expanding needs and goals. Students have responded well to our efforts by having improved and more consistent attendance, a deeper commitment to the program as a whole rather than to just their personal reasons for coming, and more active ownership of their goals and challenges. The specifically developed curriculum that speaks directly to our student's concerns added an unmistakably personal touch to the program. Students' find their voices as they witness the program respond to them as individuals with needs and opinions that are crucially important to the continued success of our mission.

Keeping the focus on serving the needs of our target population by improving the functions of our program has resulted in more satisfied and self-aware students and staff members. Knowing that this process must continue to evolve gives us the freedom to implement different solutions and evaluate their effectiveness for our students and program.

This model was documented by Molly Root who is a teacher in the External Diploma Program and the ABE Program at Julie's Family Learning Program. You can contact Molly at mroot@jflp.org.