



Abstract Nr: 49
Internet ID: 175

Type of Presentation: Symposium

Weaving the web of belonging: networks supporting networks

Zelda Alpern, [James Ashenfelter](#), Lisa Dobkowski
Counseling Service of Addison County, MIDDLEBURY, United States of America

Learning Goal:

Participants will: recognize that to support clients in social networks, staff must feel supported by a network; identify dialogic practices to cultivate connections across the system of care; express the significance of “now moments” in galvanizing individual and group agency; and envision how to cultivate them in varied professional contexts.

Abstract Text:

Workers are often contacted by family to respond to concerns about someone who is perceived to be in an extreme state. As calls and worry increase we find ourselves in an abyss of uncertainty and prone to make decisions based on worse case scenarios and fear. We fill in the uncertainty with our professional certainty as we look for a way out of this abyss. The more certain and fear-based professionals and families become, the more we distance ourselves from the person who is worried about. Through our study of Open Dialogue at the Counseling Service of Addison County (CSAC), a community mental health center in rural Vermont, we have found that slowing down, hearing all the voices and openness to unanticipated possibilities make all the difference in responding to crisis, and are preconditions for what Daniel Stern has termed “now moments” - reducing risk and increasing personal agency. Being with each other in this way is both made possible by and makes it possible to hear all the voices and thereby increase understanding across the network.

But in times of perceived crisis, what supports us to slow down and listen; to respond with openness rather than to react with fear; to be with ourselves and others in ways that encourage connection rather than distance?

To offer connection to others, we must be connected ourselves. We have been tending to relationships across our system of care: bridging inpatient and outpatient programs, and connecting across departmental, agency, state and national boundaries. We will discuss the varied strategies we have used to cultivate “now moments” among staff, and offer vignettes that illustrate how doing so has enabled us to foster presence, openness and connection with clients, families and other members of the social network, leading us all out of crisis in unforeseen ways.

**ON THE HEALING POWER
OF HUMAN RECONNECTION**