Mental Health Mentoring Program Training/ Guidelines

A. Mentor Training Curriculum

1. Orientation (at the time of hire):
   a. How to summon staff (specific to your institution)
   b. Needs and issues specific to the mentee
   c. Confidentiality (sign agreement - form HSF-781A)
   d. Review policy HSP-781 - Mental Health Mentoring Program
   e. Procedure for addressing concerns (specific to your institution)
   f. Communication skills:
      (1.) Speak clearly.
      (2.) Slow down your speech.
      (3.) Use the words you know. Don't use any word if you are not sure of the meaning.
      (4.) Make eye contact when speaking.
      (5.) Use body gestures to show your interest in the conversation.
      (6.) Make sure that your words, body gestures, facial expression, message and tone all match with one another.
      (7.) Avoid trying to communicate when in an emotional state.
      (8.) Listen.

2. Peer mentors shall receive training in areas pertinent to their assigned duties. For example:
   a. Understanding psychotic experiences and coaching the mentee in coping strategies.
   b. Encouraging and instructing the mentee in good hygiene practices.
c. Teaching the mentee how to keep a “check register” for tracking the money in the mentee’s account.

d. Assisting with filling out commissary orders for mentees who have reading and writing problems.

e. Coaching the mentee on his or her job duties.

B. Mentor Guidelines

1. The offender mentor is to be on the unit at scheduled times or as directed by staff. Emergencies should be handled by Health Services/Psychology.

2. Offender mentors do not give advice, but they may help the person generate alternative problem-solving strategies.

3. The offender mentor may help an offender with self-help packets.

4. Offender mentors are NOT allowed to discuss/listen to/or talk about an offender's crime.

5. The offender mentor is to report to the unit officer if the offender makes any statements indicating thoughts of self-harm or harm to others. At this point, the offender mentor should no longer be involved and the situation must be handled by appropriate staff.

C. Mentor Listening Techniques

1. Listen well and let the individual tell the entire story

   a. When he/she stops, ask open-ended questions such as “Tell me more.” “What happened next?” “How did you feel?” “What did you want to say?”

   b. Look at the person with respect and approval. Your voice and eyes should show interest and the wish to hear more.

   c. Resist the temptation to interrupt with a story of your own. It is important to ignore your own feelings and concentrate on the person who is speaking. Your friendly listening creates the atmosphere that enables the individual to empower themselves.
d. Encourage the expression of emotions. Until the individual is able to express anger and hurt, it is difficult for them to make a rational choice or decision.

e. Ask questions that connect the present difficulties with similar problems in the past. Examples:

   (1.) A worker has a problem with a supervisor. The supervisor may have given them a bad evaluation, have been unwilling to make a necessary accommodation, or simply hadn't had the time to address their concerns. The worker feels powerless and unwilling to talk to the supervisor. Or, they discuss the situation defiantly. The offender mentor can help by asking the worker for information such as, “Did this happen before? How did you feel?” “When was the first time you experienced this?”

   (2.) Perhaps the worker has brought past negative experiences with parents, bosses, or teachers to the current situation. The offender mentor might ask, “How is this situation different from the past situation?” Sorting out today's experience from yesterday's experience is helpful.

f. State the truth and bring out the positive reality. For example, many people with learning disabilities feel they are stupid. It’s important to tell the individual how smart they really are and to encourage thinking of examples to prove it. The individual who feels “grateful to have a job” needs to understand their own worth. Perhaps the employer is the one who should feel “grateful” to have the individual with a disability on staff.

2. Obtain “listening” for yourself. Most people find listening to others a deeply satisfying experience. For example, a husband listened to his wife for ten minutes without interruption during a “listening skills” workshop experience. “I never knew how eloquent she was,” he told the participants. Many people with disabilities, able-bodied allies and family members all agree that they learn more from their peers from five minutes of listening than they did in years of meeting with professionals.

3. It is important to find equal time for yourself. Listening can be hard work, particularly if their problems remind you of your own, and this can lead to early burnout. Find someone with whom you can talk about your own difficulties. Express yourself. Think aloud. If they cannot listen well, find someone who can.
4. The goal of offender listening is enabling people to express their experiences and feelings. Individual support that people can give each other, formalized support where two people meet and share time, and support groups all have this same goal. This gets rid of negative emotion and leaves room for positive action. Empowerment is more than a political term; it is the process of taking charge of one’s life. This empowerment happens more easily with support from each other through listening.

D. Unit Scribe Guidelines

1. The unit scribe may help with:
   a. Filling out commissary forms.
   b. Writing kites.
   c. Writing letters.
   d. Reading letters.
   e. Filling out other forms.

2. The unit scribe may NOT:
   a. Do another offender’s legal work.
   b. Do another offender’s school work.
   c. Accept payment of any kind from the offenders he/she assists.