

FACILITATOR INSIGHTS

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CINDY LEGGOTT

Cindy is a career development professional with over 20 years experience in the field, who works for the Regina Work Preparation Centre. She has been facilitating the IM&M+ programme for over three years. Her IM&M+ clients have ranged from 17 to 66 years old. They typically experience multiple barriers to employment, such as being an older unemployed person, involvement with the criminal justice system or the child and family services system and re-entering the workforce after an extended absence. As Cindy put it, "So, essentially we take individuals within our clientele that nobody else will take." Cindy's perspective about the benefits of IM&M+ is grounded in feedback provided by these kinds of clients who have completed the program.

Like when we asked them towards the end of program, "was this program beneficial to you?" And you get responses like, "it's given me validation in the fact that I am human," and "I've gone through some experiences and yeah, I might not have liked those experiences, but I am human and I'm stronger because of them," to the point of, you know, we've heard comments like, "this

program rebuilds you. This program, gives you a sense of worth, a sense of direction."

Cindy can also observe the effectiveness of the program in the way that her clients' attitudes and perspectives change over the course of taking IM&M+:

They walk in and you can see it in their body language, they feel so defeated. And so, "I have to be in this program cause there's nowhere else to go," right? This is the last stop. And by the time they're done the 10 weeks, it's like they want to show people what they've achieved. They start having conversations with some of my coworkers because they want to, not because they have to, you know? They start calling over some of my coworkers and be like, "when you have a break, come and see what we did today."

Cindy appreciates the broad focus of the IM&M+ program, which she views as effective for promoting change even when clients do not have a clear sense of their future; she perceives the program as beneficial for "people know that something needs to change. They may not be, be sure what exactly needs to be changing, or they may

not be sure how to get there.” From her perspective, what makes IM&M+ effective and distinct from other programs is its focus on general skills for functioning in life:

At the crux of IM&M+ is its life skills training leading up to, “do you wanna work? Do you wanna work at getting your children back? Do you have the skills to do what you want to do? And if you don't, how are you gonna get there?” So, it is breaking everything down from a career development perspective back down to the core life skills training.

Elaborating on the concept of life skills, Cindy explained,

It's also using those teaching moments and normalizing that there isn't something wrong with you. This is part of life ... I still remember one of the groups in IM&M+ chose to do a workshop or have a workshop on budgeting. And I was doing this workshop on budgeting, and we were going through the information, and I was trying to get across a concept and I said, “well, what I do, budgeting, this is the kind of worksheet that I use at home.” And two of them were absolutely stunned, absolutely stunned that somebody who is working still needs to budget. Right? So it's also bringing that normalcy that, “yeah, I may be working, but this is something everybody has to do.”

Furthermore, Cindy appreciated IM&M+'s emphasis on assisting people to move forward from wherever they may have entered the program, rather than having a universal set of employment-related objectives that all participants need to meet:

It goes back down to giving these folks some sort of move movement to work towards. And I think, I think what I like

about the program is I don't have to say to them, “in six weeks, you need to meet these objectives.” Right? I can say, “as long as you're moving forward, as long as you're doing something that works for you, you are succeeding,” right? So, it's not about, you know, “you have to have a job, you have to have certain interview skills.” It's about “as long as you are doing something that makes sense to you, you are succeeding and, therefore, you are successful.”

Cindy highlighted the importance of the program's flexibility in defining success based on the specific needs of clients rather than assuming that clients need to obtain employment by the time they complete the program with the following example:

We had actually one entire cohort where the cohort came in with the full intention of finding work by the end of program. And halfway through the program, all six of them identified on their own, according to the IM&M+ exercises and all of those things, “I'm not ready for work. There are a whole bunch of things that I need to put in place before I'm ever going to be successful at work”. So, with that whole cohort, each individual had different things that they needed to be put into place. Like someone decided, “you know what? I need to look after my health before I can even look for work. I need to find a doctor that's going to listen to the fact that I don't feel good. This is what I need to do to get there.”

I had someone else in the same cohort, say to me, “if I'm going to work, I have to make sure that my children have childcare, and not only do they have childcare, but do my children know how to unlock the door with a key if I'm at work and they make their way home on the bus? Do my children know how to make a sandwich if I'm not at

home? All of those sorts of things." Another person in the same cohort was like, "I'm in the process of working on my addiction, but I can feel I'm not ready for work yet. There is some other things that I need to do in order to work with this addiction before I can even look for work." So again, for those individuals, some of them it was about I need to get a schedule where I'm getting up at the same time; I need to be able to stay sober.

Cindy concluded her example by clarifying that focusing on pre-employment needs in the short term had a positive long-term impact on these participants' employment:

As it so happens that cohort was about a year ago, and three of them from that are now working. But, but at that time, they knew that there were steps that they needed to put into place before that could happen, which saves you and I, as taxpayers, a lot of money, because we're not forcing these people to something that they have clearly identified they're not ready to succeed at. Right? ... And they were also able to identify, "you know what, I'm going to work part-time first and make sure that I can do it, make sure that I'm going to be successful. And if that works, then I'm gonna look for other things." So, in all the other programs that I've facilitated in career development, it's been about "in six or eight weeks you have to be here, or you are a complete failure," in terms of the outcomes. Well, some of the folks we deal with, they can't deal with those life issues in eight weeks.

Cindy reflected on the impact that facilitating IM&M+ had on herself as a career development professional

I think it's made me a better person all the way around. It's certainly made me a better

facilitator. Because first of all, I'm doing what I'm passionate about. Like I said earlier, I'm back to giving people skills that make them feel human and I'm not pushing them through a program. But also, every cohort I learned something from each person in that cohort that I didn't know before.

SPECIFIC COMPONENTS OF THE IM&M+ PROGRAM

According to Cindy, one important aspect of IM&M+ is the way that it allows her to frame the program as a partnership between the facilitator and the participants, where both are learning from each other rather than requiring the facilitator to take the stance of an expert:

When I start every group, I talk about that I am not the teacher. We are going to learn from each other. "There's different things that you do that I don't know about. And there's different things that I do, and we are going to learn from each other." And IM&M+ gives me the permission to do that. IM&M+ gives me the permission to set it up as we are all on an equal playing field. "I am not the expert. I just happen to have information that you can choose to use or not use. It's completely up to you."

Another important component of the program, according to Cindy, is the online Community of Practice that IM&M+ provides, which allows facilitators to obtain support and share ideas and successes:

I think one of the biggest excitements that I've had in the program is CCDF had all of the facilitators put information and pictures on our Community of Practice, and I started incorporating the Community of Practice

and posting on the Community of Practice into the actual curriculum of IM&M+.

Cindy also highlighted the importance of the community projects, particularly the way that the IM&M+ program encourages these projects to be tailored to each specific cohort of participants: "I think the community projects for each group, the beauty of them is they have been meaningful specific to that group." Cindy provided several specific examples of these projects, highlighting the diversity of the projects that different cohorts of IM&M+ participants had implemented:

The first group I ever did was right when COVID hit. And so that group decided to do a education campaign about COVID, how to keep people safe. I gave them a list of our partners that Regina Work Prep Centre works with, and they phoned around and they got donations of masks, hand sanitizer, water bottles, and they put them in bags and stood on our street corner and handed them out to whoever wanted them. And somebody had, kind of, a tip sheet about how to keep yourself safe, and they had put them in bags, and they distributed 300 of these bags based on what they felt was important. And they chose at, when they were finished, handing them out on the street, some of them took them back to the shelters they live in. One of them took them to their child's daycare. Again, they came up with that idea, I didn't.

Another group was adamant that the community fridges around Regina needed to be stocked with water. So they went to all the community fridges. We had given them a little bit of a budget, but they had also gotten donations. They went to all the community fridges and made sure all the community fridges had water in them.

Another group decided to make posters specific for people that were going through addiction. And they, what they did was they made a poster of their different stories of addiction, and then they created kind of like tear off sheets of different services that could help those folks. They took those posters and those tear off sheets to services that they had used, as they're going through their own recovery and put them up. And so that's what they chose to do.

The last group was very pet orientated. So they developed a flyer, put the flyer on Facebook, and they collected donations for one of the shelters, animal shelters here in town for food and those kinds of things.

Finally, Cindy highlighted benefit of the IM&M+ program in allowing facilitators to be flexible and to adapt to the needs of the specific cohort of participants:

I really enjoy that. I've always been the kind of facilitator that would rather take a framework and make it suit the people that I'm working with versus "this is what you have to teach in the eight weeks and that you can't deviate from that," because everybody has different needs. No matter how you cut it, there's gonna be some people that can sit down, there'd be some people that have to sit on the floor. That's okay, you know? And I've always been that kind of facilitator. So to have a program where it's like, "you know, this isn't working so we're just going to turn it the other way and see what happens," is pretty awesome.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THOSE WANTING TO DELIVER IM&M+

Cindy acknowledges that the training and the facilitator manuals allow a wide range of

career development professionals to deliver this program from very experienced facilitators to those new to facilitation. She recommends that those new to facilitation focus on the content day by day rather than focussing on the program as a whole.

We trained somebody who works underneath me and she went through the training and there's this 200 page manual and I said, "just get through day one and then just look at whatever your next day is. Like, don't look at the whole thing and decide how this is all gonna tie together, just go day by day." It's written in such a way that, you know, you should be able to go day by day even if you have no facilitation experience.

In addition, Cindy suggested that it would be important for facilitators to have dedicated time to complete the training, facilitate the groups, and participate in the Community of Practice:

I would tell new trainers, don't do this on your off the side of your desk, which is what I did the first cohort. And between facilitating and doing my other responsibilities and this, it was like, "oh my God, here's one more thing."

She also suggested that facilitator self-care and the kinds of situations the clients may be bringing with them into the IM&M+ group should be emphasized more during the initial training:

The only other thing that I would make sure facilitators know is make sure you take care of yourself. Because you are in this particular program, you are in the midst of wherever a person is at. So if a person is dealing with food insecurities, if a person is dealing with an abusive situation, if a person is dealing with whatever, you are

going to be right in the middle of that, and those are, those can be pretty heavy sometimes. ... I don't think you need to change anything, but you need to be aware of the kind of things that people might be going through.