
EVALUATION FOR LEARNING

News for an Evaluating Community

Spring 2000

EVALUATION TRAININGS

Looking for help evaluating a collaborative initiative, such as Strong Families/Safe Children, Child Protection Community Partners, 0-3 Secondary Prevention Initiatives, or Multi-Purpose Collaborative Bodies? The Michigan Public Health Institute offers affordable training on outcomes, objectives, logic models, process evaluation, outcome evaluation, and linking data collection to strategic planning. West Michigan trainings: **June 28-Okemos, August 3-Kalamazoo, September 13-Ludington**. Cost for one-day training with lunch: \$10. To register, contact Sherry Whalen at 888/347-2400 ext. 7391 (ph), 517/381-0260 (fax), or swhalen@mphi.org.

Looking for help evaluating a direct service program? United Way of America's "Measuring Program Outcomes" addresses measurement and analysis of participant outcomes in a 4-session series of training: **Mondays, 1:30-4:30 p.m., September 11, 18, 25 and October 2**, Greater Kalamazoo United Way Board Room Cost: \$15. To register, contact Elaine Griffin at 616/343-2524 (ph) or 616/344-7250 (fax).

LISBETH SCHORR ADVOCATES EVALUATION FOR LEARNING: PART I

At the annual meeting of the Michigan Association for Evaluation in May 2000, keynote speaker Lisbeth Schorr made the case for flexible, responsive evaluation—precisely the approach promoted in these pages.

Schorr explained that she traveled the country in the 1980s to identify the characteristics of successful programs for children and families. She published her findings in Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage (1988). Five years later Schorr found that half of the 25 programs she described had disappeared and none of the remaining programs had expanded or been replicated. Her second book, Common Purpose: Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods to Rebuild America (1997), examined reasons for that lack of growth.

Evaluation Schorr believes that attitudes toward evaluation have limited the size and vigor of the "knowledge base," that is, the set of strategies and techniques widely accepted as "best practices." Schorr points out that we have the shared determination to rebuild civic society—to have children ready for school, in relationship with mentors, giving back to their communities, and so forth—but no widely shared understanding of how to do it.

The type of evaluation traditionally considered the source of best practice information has severe limitations. Traditional evaluation has credibility because it has promised to use the biomedical model, which features random assignment to control and experimental groups to test for a causal relationship between one factor and one or more outcomes. However, if we limit ourselves to random assignment studies, then we are limited to a single remedy. Interventions that change one thing at a time tend to fail, most likely because they change only one thing at a time. The

ASKING GOOD
QUESTIONS

COLLECTING AND
SHARING USEFUL
INFORMATION

USING THE
INFORMATION FOR:
➤ IMPROVEMENT
➤ ACCOUNTABILITY

CONTINUING
TO REPEAT
THE CYCLE

EVALUATION FOR LEARNING
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THE GREATER KALAMAZOO EVALUATION PROJECT PUBLISHES THIS NEWSLETTER TO FOSTER EVALUATION THROUGHOUT THE KALAMAZOO AREA. Send your ideas and examples to:

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present messy, difficult assessment issues. These complex interventions exceed the capacity of the biomedical model. Schorr maintains that evaluators, service providers, funders, and legislators need to accept a different approach to rigor and credibility. She says we must abandon the notion of certainty about causation. We need to be certain of results, but not of which precise factor caused which precise effect.

NEXT ISSUE: Schorr on different approaches to evaluation

Tips & Tools:

Evaluating activities to improve outcomes: "Evaluation of our 1999 Middle School Summer Recreation Program led to a number of improvements, both in the program and in the evaluation process. The program aims to increase middle school students' social skills and knowledge. To reach that outcome, we evaluated our activities and decided to offer alcohol and drug prevention education during the travel time to and from all activities, rather than offering it only one day. We want the Youth Advisory Board, not staff, to develop and facilitate those educational experiences. Instead of mailing evaluation forms to parents, we will call a random sample to get their feedback."

--Diane Schrock, Executive Director, Portage Community Outreach Center

NOTEWORTHY RESOURCES

The Harvard Family Research Project newsletter, Evaluation Exchange (1999, Vol. 5, No. 2/3) features articles on evaluation of collaboratives and initiatives, including:

- ◆ Simplifying Complex Initiative Evaluation
- ◆ Evaluating Collaboratives: Challenges and Practice
- ◆ Evaluating the National Replication of a Prevention Program for Youth and Their Families: Middle School *Families and Schools Together*
- ◆ Cooperative Extension's Capacity to Support Programs for Children, Youth and Families at Risk: The Organizational Change Survey
- ◆ Community-Based Research: Research for Action

Available on the web at <http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~hfrp/index.html>

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EVALUATION FOR LEARNING IS:

- EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY
- CONTINUALLY ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS, GETTING ANSWERS, AND TAKING ACTION BASED ON THOSE ANSWERS
- INTEGRATED INTO THE DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS OF THE ORGANIZATION
- A DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS
- COLLABORATIVE AND DEPENDENT ON INFORMATION SHARING
- TIME WELL SPENT
- GOING TO ENSURE THE ORGANIZATION'S HEALTH AND VIABILITY IN THE LONG RUN IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

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