

Authors:

Jacqueline Robinson Brock, MSW, Project Director, VCU Partnership for People with Disabilities &
 Cynthia George, MSSW, Doctoral Candidate, VCU School of Social Work

Introduction

This poster presents evaluative findings from work that occurred in partnership between the Association of University Centers on Disability (AUCD) member at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and the Office of the Executive Secretary (OES) at the Supreme Court of Virginia, directed by the I-CAN! Accessibility Project of Virginia (I-CAN!). Partners worked throughout 2012-2013 to develop a module for VA Clerks of the Court designed to support the process of arranging accommodations in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), to be presented to Clerks by the I-CAN! Project Director during a regularly scheduled OES training event. An evaluation strategy was designed to ensure effectiveness.

Methods

The community/academic -engaged approach to curriculum development worked to ensure evidence-informed content and instructional methodology; as well as a module relevant and feasible for applied use, consisting of: PowerPoint slides with integrated evaluation strategy, a speaker script with legalese approved by all partners; and the *Accommodations and Services Resource Information Guide*. The Clerk-engaged approach employed Audience Response System (ARS) handheld clickers to present information in an engaging way, collect demographic info about those attending the session, and to administer evaluation questions aligned with content. The evaluation plan was designed to assess change in comfort and empowerment, using a pre/post survey design, with questions integrated into the curriculum. OES provided data to VCU academic partners for analysis, who performed independent groups *t* tests to assess average change to preferred responses from pre to post participation.

Key Components of the Program

A five-section module was developed to be approximately 50 minutes long, with sections titled: 1) Understanding disability, 2) Disability, abuse, and the courts, 3) How to ID supports, 4) Communicating support, and 5) the ADA. The program was designed to be grounded in the social model of disability, which asserts that impairments only become disabling when the physical and social environments do not accommodate the diverse needs of people. Partners utilized an empowerment perspective, and sought to equip Clerks of the Court with adaptable skills and tangible resources so they could best ensure equitable access to the courts for the disability community. Finally, the elaboration likelihood model guided instructional methodology to present emotion-evoking messages that contained factual information, delivered by a credible source, thus engaging peripheral cognitive processes toward agreeing with program messages; as well as providing a formal resource and info guide designed to promote further self-directed investigation and central processing.

Example Content:



How would you best describe this person?

Handicapped
 Crippled
 Disabled
 Mobility impaired person

✓ **Person who uses a wheelchair**

Message: Use People First language please.

Which Barbie has a disability? It's a paradox...



Barbie A has a visible physical impairment, however may not feel very disabled when in a wheelchair accessible environment.



Barbie B has an invisible cognitive impairment, however may not feel very disabled when in an environment where attitudes are accommodative.

Message: Clerks of the Court can reduce the impact of a disability by recognizing the diversity of impairments and the importance of physical and social accommodations.

Findings

Our sample came from among the 346 participants in the training program; with responses collected from 284 people, a 78% response rate. This included 115 Deputy Clerks (42.59%), 140 Clerks of the Court (51.85%), and 15 other government officials and advocates (5.56%). 273 (96.47%) knew someone with a disability; 223 (78.52%) knew someone who had been a victim of violence.

Table 1: Improvements in evaluative criteria from pre to post

Evaluation Criteria	Pre Frequency	Pre Percentage	Post Frequency	Post Percentage	Mean Difference Percentage	Statistical Significance
Feels comfortable accommodating people with disabilities	246	88.49	267	97.8	+9.31	p<.05
Feels VERY comfortable accommodating people with disabilities	107	38.49	156	57.14	+18.7	p<.05
Feels comfortable communicating with and about people with disabilities	246	90.44	253	96.57	+6.13	p<.05
Feels VERY comfortable communicating with and about people with disabilities	95	34.93	184	70.23	+35.3	p<.05
Feels a Clerk of the Court can reduce the impact of a person's impairment by ensuring effective accommodations	247	93.92	259	97.74	+3.82	p<.001
Feels that attitudinal accommodations are most important for people with disabilities in accessing courts	82	35.04	198	75.86	+40.8	p<.001

Conclusions

Virginia Clerks of the Court want to provide effective accommodations, recognize the social model of disability, accept their power to provide support, and appreciate the importance of operating in an environment designed to promote accommodations. Further, very simple training and tangible connection to resources can increase Clerks of the Court's sense of comfort in communicating to provide accommodations, along with empowering Clerks to provide accommodations effectively.

Implications

States should work to: 1) ensure regular disability awareness training for incoming Clerks of the Court; 2) continually evaluate these programs for short term changes in comfort and empowerment; 3) investigate if people with disabilities are more satisfied with accommodations when Clerks of the Court have received this training; and 4) identify aspects of the environment that may promote or hinder a Clerk of the Court's actual ability to provide equitable access to the courts for people with disabilities. Instructional and evaluative methodology is designed to transfer for use by other state Courts, and also for adaptation to other agents required to ensure ADA compliant accommodations.

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