Tuckman's Group Development Model mapped against developmental stages of a homestay provider.

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the stages of development that a homestay family goes through and the psychological significance of each stage. A family who is recruited to be a homestay provider for the first time needs guidance and support from an experienced professional as well as from other families who have been providing this service for a certain length of time. Two 'new' families have been selected and the stages they have developed through have been mapped against Tuckman's group development process as outlined by Samuel Gladding in 'Group Work – A Counselling Specialty'. Variations to the model will be discussed as well in this presentation. The stages will be explored and strategies will be designed to optimise the experience for the families, students and professionals at institutions working with these groups. The increased understanding of the developmental process will benefit all involved.

Introduction

Tuckman first proposed the five developmental stages of group processes in 1977, the stages were forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. These stages are mirrored by the developmental processes that a homestay family undergoes when joining a formal homestay program. A family who is recruited to be a homestay provider for the first time needs guidance and support from an experienced professional as well as from other families who have been providing this service for a certain length of time in order to progress smoothly through these stages. This paper plans to explore the stages and strategies designed to optimise the experience for the families, students and professionals at institutions working with these groups.

Stages

The first developmental stage a family goes through is forming. The stage of forming is characterised by the initial caution that is associated with any new experience. The potential family is excited about the new prospect and all the possibilities and yet they fear that they will not be accepted.

Forming

Forming as a stage begins when the initial idea or concept occurs to the homestay family. The idea at this stage is unrealistic and full of romanticised expectations. The family has an idealised concept of what being a homestay provider will be like. Without a clear understanding of what is involved in the process, the potential host imagines that the process will be easy and beneficial in all ways. The family imagines the ideal student fitting in seamlessly to their lives and enriching the family culturally and socially.

It is important that, at this stage, the homestay co-ordinator clearly outlines the program's expectations in a specific, concrete and practical manner. The homestay family should be led through the program's expectations step by step and clearly informed of what the reality of

having a student is like. The homestay co-ordinator should provide the expectations or requirements of the program in writing and leave this with the family for further reference. The family should be encouraged to ask any questions that they may have no matter how trivial the question may seem.

It is also helpful to point out to the family ways in which existing families interact with the students and how they comply with the program's expectations whilst maintaining the individuality of the family. New La Trobe University Language Centre hosts have found it useful to be given a 'fact sheet' of helpful hints gathered from experienced families over time, in addition to the official requirements of the program. The La Trobe University Language Centre also has a peer support program in operation, in which a new family is given the phone numbers and contact details of two or so existing families in their area who they may call if they are unsure at any stage. It is extremely important that the family is thoroughly prepared and informed at this forming stage of the model.

It is important to remember that, at this initial stage, the homestay co-ordinator is not only preparing the family to operate within the program's requirements, but also screening out those families who do not appear to be suitable for the program. This process establishes a relationship between the homestay co-ordinator and those families who are suitable for the program. The establishment of this rapport or relationship is extremely important. The family needs to be able to trust that they can turn to the co-ordinator with their concerns and questions, and the co-ordinator needs to be familiar with the situations into which they are placing students. The rapport also makes it slightly easier when the homestay co-ordinator has cause to contact a family to discuss concerns raised by a student or agent. The trusting relationship fosters clear and honest communication, which is vital in solving difficult situations.

The important objectives that must be achieved during the forming stage of the process are thus; dealing with the families apprehension; reviewing the goals and objectives; specifying the program requirements; setting limits and rules; and promoting a positive trusting relationship between the family and the co-ordinator.

Storming

The second stage of Tuckman's developmental model is known as storming. This stage begins with the waning of the high levels of enthusiasm from stage one. Normally a family will move through a transition stage from the idealised expectations and high enthusiasm of the forming stage to the more realistic expectations and understanding of the storming stage.

The storming stage can be disconcerting to the family as they find their expectations changing to meet reality and they must adapt to a new person in their lives. The family must establish a 'way of being' within the program that lets them maintain their important family values and individuality, yet also conforms to the program's expectations and the reality of having a stranger in their home. Often the families have a vision or a dream of how their lives will be with a student staying with them, and the reality very rarely agrees with this vision. Letting go of an unrealistic vision and embracing a new more realistic and sustainable vision can be an extremely unsettling and challenging time for the family.

Although unsettling and challenging, this stage of the process is also very productive. The homestay family works through the unrealistic expectations of the forming phase and establishes a routine and a method of working within the program that is most beneficial for them.

The homestay co-ordinator must be readily available to families at this stage to assist them with their anxiety and to support them in their development as a homestay family. It is

important that the families do not feel isolated at this point. The homestay co-ordinator should endeavour to maintain contact with the family hosting their first student so that any issues can be dealt with early and any concerns can be normalised and worked through.

By matching families in this stage of development with families who are familiar with the program and have already gone through this stage, the homestay co-ordinator can ease tension and anxiety. Sometimes a family will ask another family a question that they are too embarrassed to ask the homestay co-ordinator, and hearing about how another family has dealt with a similar issue can be extremely reassuring.

It is important that feedback is given by the homestay co-ordinator to the homestay family during this stage of development. The family needs to learn what works well for them and the student, and what problem areas may exist. This feedback should be done in a manner that encourages the growth of the family whilst maintaining a harmonious relationship between the family and the student. The homestay co-ordinator will, at this stage, be extremely thankful for the open and trusting relationship that they developed with the family in the forming stage.

The storming stage is important as it allows the homestay family to become realistic in their outlook and to examine what they hope to achieve in the program. It is at this stage that some families may opt out of the program as they realise that it is not going to meet their expectations or needs.

Norming

The next stage of the developmental process is the norming stage. This stage is identified by a sense of belonging to the program and sees the return of the enthusiasm from the forming stage, as families know what to expect and how best to operate within the program.

Families will at this stage have already hosted one or two initial students and will be more realistic in their expectations. They will feel comfortable with their relationship with the homestay co-ordinator and with other families within the organisation. Families who have reached the stage of norming require less interaction with the homestay co-ordinator as they know what to expect and require less support. The family should at this stage feel confident in their abilities to cope with most situations, yet they have the knowledge that support is merely a phone call away when necessary.

Performing

The norming stage blends easily into the performing stage. This stage is the one in which most of the work as a homestay family is done. At this stage, the families are performing in the program effectively and are productive and satisfied. This stage is characterised by an increased sense of freedom within the program.

Homestay families at this stage focus on doing a good job and improving themselves. They have higher levels of confidence and enthusiasm. The contact with the homestay co-ordinator is usually at an all time low during this stage. There is usually more peer contact and support happening at this stage, which adds to the feeling of belonging that the family will have.

To maintain an effective team atmosphere at this stage, the homestay co-ordinator can arrange get-togethers for homestay families. This allows the homestay families to network with one another, share ideas and increase their feeling of being part of a team. It is also useful to families at other stages to meet longer term families who are enjoying being part of the program and who have experience and wisdom that they are willing to share.

Although contact with the homestay family may be lessened, it is still important that the homestay co-ordinator maintain the close and trusting relationship with the family. It is all too easy at this stage for small problems to escalate into larger problems as families believe they know how best to deal with issues without asking for support and advice from the homestay co-ordinator.

Adjourning

The final stage of the developmental process is the adjourning stage. This is the stage at which a homestay family will leave the program. The timing will be different for all families; however it is a stage that all families will eventually undergo for whatever reason. This stage of the developmental process can be as important as the first phases, yet it is often overlooked.

The sense of belonging that being a homestay family engenders is important to the members of the family, and the feelings and thoughts that the family experiences as they make the decision to leave the program can stay with them for a very long time. These feelings influence whether the family will join the program again in the future and will affect the way the family thinks of the program and the institution as a whole. Families will discuss their experiences with many people, and their opinion of the institution will colour what they say and thereby influence their audience. If the adjourning stage of the program is not handled skilfully the family will be left with an overall negative feeling towards the program and the institution.

At this stage, it is important to acknowledge the family for their contributions to the program and to allow them to discuss and reflect on their experiences. It is important that the family feels that although they are leaving the program, that door is not closed to them completely. Follow up phone calls can be extremely useful in validating to the family that their contribution was important and useful and can leave the family with positive feelings towards the program and the institution.

Conclusion

As has been shown in the course of this paper, the developmental process of a homestay family mirrors that proposed by Tuckman in 1977. The families move through the stages of forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. Each stage has its own set of characteristics, and strategies have been suggested to assist each family move successfully through a stage. Ultimately, the most important way to assist a family move smoothly through the developmental stages is to establish a close and trusting relationship that fosters open communication between the family and the homestay co-ordinator. The responsibility for the optimal running of the program lies with the homestay co-ordinator and as such they must be kept informed and up to date at all times. Easing the passage of a family through the stages will ensure that the international student accommodated by the family enjoys an optimal experience within the family.

References

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