Coaching for Behavior Change

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SUMMARY

Equipping SNAP-Ed nutrition educators and managers with coaching skills can help them shift the way they communicate with and motivate people. By adding coaching skills to their existing knowledge and expertise, SNAP-Ed staff can move from focusing on problem-solving to supporting, defining and achieving goals. In this training-focused program, it was expected that trainees would develop basic coaching skills and begin applying them to their SNAP-Ed work.

The Michigan Fitness Foundation developed this pilot project and worked with Leadership That Works to implement the Coaching for Community Transformation training with SNAP-Ed staff.

OBJECTIVE

The Coaching for Behavior Change pilot was evaluated on these guiding questions:

* What impact did the training have on trainees:
  1. Knowledge of 10 key coaching skills?
  2. Confidence to use skills?
  3. Application of skills?

* What impact/benefits resulted?
  1. What impact/did the training have on trainees:
  2. Confidence to use skills?
  3. Application of skills?

* How effective was the training model?
  1. What impact/benefits resulted?
  2. Confidence to use skills?
  3. Application of skills?

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Using a paradigm ofotal learning combined with experiential practice, the program is hands-on, lively and rigorous. A thread of cultural awareness is integrated throughout.

The program components included:

* Training 1: The two-day training focused on reinforcing the coaching skills, practicing the skills, and integrating the skills into group settings.
* Peer Learning Circles: To anchor the skills and to help trainees troubleshoot real-life application, these 60-minute meetings were held six-times—once a month between two to three months after Trainings 1 and 2.
* Mentor Coaches: Each trainee was matched with an experienced, certified coach to support ongoing communication.

Thirty-seven SNAP-Ed nutrition educators and project managers, from seven different organizations throughout Michigan participated. The coaching pilot was adopted by one organization, YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids, for all of their SNAP-Ed staff members.

METHODS

Methods of data collection included online surveys, observation, self-reflections, focus groups and interviews. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative data. Item level analyses was the focus. Qualitative data was analyzed inductively identifying patterns and themes. Findings were translated to address the guiding questions noted above.

RESULTS

Participants consistently reported increased use of the key coaching strategies over the course of the training. Free reports after the First Peer Learning Circle (Dec) to the final evaluation report (Mar) showed that 80% of the participants reported that they increased their use of the key coaching strategies.

Participants identified positive benefits of the training/skills that they learned: 88% agreed/strongly agreed they were more effective in helping SNAP-Ed participants change behavior, suggesting there could be benefits to applying coaching skills to SNAP-Ed programming to enhance behavioral outcomes. Participants consistently reported increased understanding of the skills, confidence to use the skills, and ability to implement the skills.

Overall, participants were positive about other potential benefits of the coaching training/skills they learned in the project. In the final evaluation (N=24), the following percent agreed or strongly agreed they:

- were more effective in helping their SNAP-Ed participants change their behavior (88%)
- found the coaching project beneficial to them personally, i.e., beyond work (69%)
- felt the coaching project had fostered a community of learners in their place of work (66%)
- felt the coaching project had improved the organizational culture/climate at their place of work (76%)
- felt the coaching project had brought about concrete changes in their place of work related to daily practice (64%)
- felt the coaching project had brought about concrete changes in their place of work related to the way staff are trained and/or evaluated (56%)

APPENDIX

Coaching for Behavior Change

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Next steps

Based upon success, this project has moved into Year 2 with the training of a new cohort of participants. The final cohort of participants continues to receive training. Process evaluation results from the year’s pilot led to the following program modifications:

- The application of coaching in a group setting was introduced in February and more intensively throughout the program.
- Peer learning circles were eliminated and the face-to-face training opportunities were increased.
- Use of the face-to-face training in Year 2 included participants from Cohorts 1 and 2.
- An approach-oriented sustainability by a train-the-trainer model is being considered to further engage returning participants.

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