

## In Leading an Organization

# Understanding the Task of Engagement

Gary S. Carter, LCSW; Executive Director, Little Sisters of the Assumption Family Health Service

I am the Executive Director of Little Sisters of the Assumption Family Health Service, a multi-service organization that has been serving the people of East Harlem for more than fifty years. My direct service experience was in child welfare, which is a relatively small part of the services LSA provides. But I have found that my social work skills can be generalized across



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other service areas and functions. I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with a Masters degree from Columbia University School of Social Work. My social work education, training, and experience give me a set of tools and perspectives that I bring to my role as Executive Director.

I use my social work training to provide clinical leadership and direction. A key benefit of my social work background is that my staff knows I've done the work I'm asking them to do. I understand the nuances, the challenges and the risks, and have realistic expectations about success. After 17 years of experience in direct service, supervision and administration, I would say that engagement is the first and most important task. Service delivery is a continuous dance of engagement, disengagement, and reengagement. The more you can help staff to anticipate this dance, the more you help normalize the natural frustrations inherent in this work and manage the challenges that lead to burnout.

I use my social work education to provide professional development. While many things can determine a worker's job satisfaction, good supervision trumps everything else. My first job out of social work school was located in the basement of a synagogue in Coney Island that served Black and Latino families.

My commute to work was long and working conditions were less than ideal, but I had a supervisor I could learn from and that was important

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to me. A good supervisor and the opportunity for professional growth and development can compensate for a long commute or a less than ideal work environment.

I use my social work experience to work for social justice. I do not come to this work with a fantasy that a quick fix will change the problems of poverty in New York City. Poverty is multi-determined and has to be addressed on many levels simultaneously and in partnership. My social work experience has helped me to understand that we are all in relationship with one another. And it's the quality of that relationship that inspires and motivates change, whether the change is helping a parent learn alternative methods of child discipline or helping directors improve their programs' performance and productivity. □

## Undoing Racism Workshops

### Anti-Racism Training for Social Work Practitioners and Educators

Are You Challenged by How to Deal with Race Issues in Your Practice or in the Classroom? Are You Concerned About the Impact of Racism in Our City?

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#### April 26-27, 2010

Monday, April 26, 9 a.m. – 7 p.m.  
Tuesday, April 27, 9 a.m. – 7 p.m.

COFCCA  
254 West 31<sup>st</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10001

#### May 20-22, 2010

Thursday, May 20, 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.  
Friday, May 21, 9 a.m. – 7 p.m.  
Saturday, May 22, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

NASW-NYC Chapter Office  
50 Broadway, Suite 1001  
New York, New York 10004

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Cost is \$350, which includes tuition and light breakfast.

Make check payable to:  
The People's Institute, please write  
Undoing Racism on the check.

Mail to Sandy Bernabei,  
c/o AntiRacist Alliance, Inc.  
351 W. 53rd St. #4E  
New York, NY 10019

For more information, call  
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