

## A FRAMEWORK FOR EMPOWERMENT

### What is an Empowered Person?

Think about someone you know and admire. It could be a neighbor, a family member, someone you know from TV or the news. It can even be someone you imagine. What are the positive qualities of that person?

Write down what qualities you believe an empowered person has: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

Some of you have stated that an empowered person is:

- Committed
- Supportive
- Good listener
- Dedicated
- Fearless
- Open-minded
- Confident
- Non-Judgmental
- Motivated
- Understanding
- Organized
- Loving
- Patient
- Loyal
- Empathetic
- Has a plan
- Joyful
- Intelligent (and uses it!)
- Wise
- Hard Worker

Empowerment is a process of personal and group transformation that leads people to take greater control of their lives and their environment. This means that people also create and carry out their goals and aspirations. Empowerment requires being conscious of the social conditions under which people live, and their effects. It is not a one-time event. It is a constant process that happens over time. We can only empower ourselves; we cannot empower anyone else, but we can support other's empowerment.

## **CHIMES FOR EMPOWERMENT**

The following framework has been useful in creating a strategy in empowering oneself. Within this training series, we will come back to this framework in many ways. They're being presented in steps, called chimes. Some of the trainers who will teach the course will work with some of these chimes within the topics they are training in. They're called chimes like church bells, or those you hang in a window or fire escape which ring with the wind or the hours. Although they are presented in a particular order, they don't have to be practiced in that way. Address them in a way that makes sense to you. Have them ring in your thoughts and actions as you move through your day and your work.

### **Empowerment requires a person to:**

1. Have accurate and updated information
2. Value ourselves & celebrate our accomplishments
3. Make decisions
4. Understand the way power and privilege affect us and our work
5. Deal with the way we internalize disempowerment and privilege
6. Set realistic long-term and short term goals
7. Own our emotions
8. Define & Get Support
9. Build on Your leadership
10. Take action

### **1. Have accurate and updated information**

Having accurate and current information is key to anything we take on. As a CFW, having updated information on HIV/AIDS, on your clients, and the community resources available to them is vital. Knowledge also implies knowledge of self. Just as empowerment is an ongoing process, self-awareness is a lifetime task. We invite you to open yourself to learning about yourself as you gather new tools to do your work.

- What information do you have & need to do your work?
-

- 
- What information do you need to know to feel more empowered in your life and in your work?
- 
- 

- What information do your clients need?
- 
- 

## **2. Value ourselves & celebrate our accomplishments**

We live in a society that undervalues people, and emphasizes looking at what's wrong with a person, rather than at their strengths. People don't grow from being put down; they grow and develop from knowing their strengths and looking at their triumphs. Valuing yourself and your clients means expecting and giving complete respect. It means being willing to look at all that you have accomplished, even when it feels like you still have a long way to go. It will be a lot easier to communicate to our clients how important they are, if we are clear about how valuable **we** are.

### ***Some of my accomplishments:***

---

---

## **3. Make decisions**

Life either happens to us or we make life happen. We can take the position that we have the power to make our own decisions. Sometimes we may make decisions about situations that we feel we have little choice. Sometimes someone else can help us see what our options are. In making decisions, it is important to consider the consequences of the decision and to remember that in most situations, there are at

least two options. We can decide which aspects of our lives and work we have control over and make the appropriate decisions.

**An Important Decision I am glad I made:**

---

---

**A Decision I need to make:**

---

---

**4. Understand the way power and privilege affect us and our work**

Many of our institutions (the courts, the schools, the media) systematically disempower people everyday. People of color, women, lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgendered people, poor and working class people, people with AIDS, are among some of the groups of people who have been (and still are) discriminated against and disempowered to have control over their lives. This discrimination takes the form of lack of access to (or inadequate) housing, health care, living wages, education, as well as having to be subjected to humiliations and violence; they are constantly having to confront the many stereotypes about the groups they belong to. People are discriminated against because of their race, their gender, their sexual orientation, their class, or their HIV status, and treated as lesser than those in the dominant group. If we don't examine the system that we are living and working under, then we could end up blaming our selves or our clients for their condition.

***What situations or institutions in your community support your empowerment?***

---

---

***What situations or institutions in the community support your clients' empowerment?***

---

---

***What situations or institutions in your community disempower you (take away your power)?***

---

---

***What situations or institutions in your community disempower your clients?***

---

---

**5. Deal with the way we internalize disempowerment and privilege**

We internalize disempowerment when we act as if we are powerless; when we believe the negative messages our society gives us regarding the groups we belong to, we are internalizing disempowerment. This is also internalized oppression. Internalized oppression affects how we view ourselves and our abilities. It affects how we do our work, how we view our clients and their ability to help themselves and to change behavior.

If we don't think and act as worthy, beautiful, intelligent, valuable, loving individuals, then we are in some way or another living under the influence of internalized oppression.

On the other hand, it is important to understand that we also carry privileges with us that we may not be aware of. Noticing these privileges can make us more effective in working with others, and also taking responsibility for ourselves. If we have a job, we have privilege over people who don't, or are on welfare; as parents we have

privilege over our children; as men, we have privilege over women. As heterosexual people, we have privilege over lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgendered people. If we are white, we have privilege over people of color. It is important to acknowledge the areas where we have privilege and be aware of any actions or beliefs we carry that contribute to keeping a group of people disempowered and to decide to change that.

## **6. Set realistic long-term and short term goals**

Sometimes it is difficult to think about the future when a person is dealing with day-to-day survival (if you're not sure where the next meal is coming from; or sometimes when someone is living with AIDS or another illness). However, if we are to carry out our dreams and aspirations, or simply, if we want to get our work done in an effective way, it's important to think of our long term goals. Depending on the situation, long-term can be in a week, in a month, or in five years.

To write a goal, you need to:

- Define what you want to accomplish – be specific
- Set a date by which you will accomplish your goal

Some examples of goals may be:

- To get my GED or college degree by the Spring, 2005.
- To become a CMT by the end of the year.
- To assist Ms. Anderson to get an apartment by the end of the month.

Once you write your goal, you need to break it down to bite-size pieces. If in a year, you will have completed this part of your education, and then what do you have to do in six months? In three? What do you have to do next week? Today?

MY GOALS:

1. What do I want to achieve in a year in terms of my life /work? – How will I get there?

---

---

2. What do I want to achieve in a month or in a week with one of my clients? –  
How will I get there?
- 
- 

### **7. Own your emotions**

Most of us receive little or no training in how to deal with fear, disappointment, anger, and grief or any of our feelings. We need to recognize how we feel, and how it affects us, and decide to deal with our feelings in a useful way (talking to someone, writing, sports, prayer, sometimes getting help from a professional, etc.)

### **8. Define & Get Support**

People depend on one another in many ways. When we decide to live our lives and do our work as empowered people, then we need support to carry through.

Keep in mind:

***What kind of support do I need:*** (a shoulder to lean on, a gentle push to do something that seems difficult, information, a phone call connection, someone to cook a meal, watch my kids, etc. )

---

---

***From whom:*** (my co-worker, my partner, my friend, a health provider, a neighbor, a community service organization):

---

---

***How do you help clients get the support they need?***

---

---

**9. Build on Your leadership**

You are already a leader. More people listen to what you have to say than you realize. As a CFW, you exercise some leadership within the community that you work in, and with your clients. If you are parent, then you are also a leader in your family. You probably have other leadership roles too. If you are going to accomplish what you set out to do, then you have to take leadership. Sometimes, we fall into leadership and don't even notice that we are doing it. Recognizing your leadership and deciding what steps you need to take next, will help you develop your leadership. Similarly, it is important to recognize where our clients are taking leadership, and encourage them to build from there. This can help them become more self-sufficient, and take greater charge of their lives.

***How do you take leadership already?***

---

---

***Who is in your circle of influence?***

---

---

***What are your next steps in developing your leadership?***

---

***How can you support your clients' leadership?***

---

---

**10. Take action**

If we don't take action to carry out what we set out to do, then it's just a nice idea and we stay at the wishing stage. It's important to look at what disempowers us and our clients, and look at ways we can take action to move towards empowerment. Some actions might be very simple, can take little time, and can be done by an individual; for example, standing up for a client at HASA. Other actions might take groups of people and may take years, for example getting increased funding for AIDS medicines for people who don't receive Medicaid and who can't afford to buy them.

Individual –

***What actions do I need to take for myself to take greater charge of my life or my work?***

---

---

***What actions do I believe my clients need to take in order to take greater charge of their lives?***

---

---

***How do I help them define what actions they may be able to take on their behalf?***

---

---

Family/community –

***What do I need to do in terms of my community or my family to become more empowered?***

---

---

***What actions might my clients need to take to become more empowered in terms of their families?***

---

---

***How do I help them figure it out?***

---

---

Institutional

Taking action for empowerment at the institutional level usually takes more people and a longer period of time. However, when these changes are accomplished, they usually benefit larger groups of people. These include changing laws or policy; providing greater access to services; or getting organizations to provide services in ways that are helpful and respectful of people.

For example, the organizations who started using Harm Reduction techniques in the 1980's to prevent the spread of HIV / AIDS, had to work hard to change policies to have a harm reduction approach to prevention and treatment be accepted by government HIV/AIDS programs. Today, not only are they receiving financial support, but are also being asked to teach others about this approach.

***What might I do in terms of taking action for institutional change?***

---

***What would be the change?***

---

---

***Who else could support me or get involved?***

---

---

Conclusion

Deciding to go to the next step of your empowerment isn't always easy. Yet the rewards are many. Start by noticing where you are already empowered, how you do your work in ways that helps your clients empower themselves. Then keep walking.