



SHOP TALK # 49: COUNSELING PLAYS A MAJOR ROLE IN INTENSIVE COLLEGE READINESS PROGRAM FOR ADULT LEARNERS

Counseling has long played a key role in retaining students and helping them learn. But counseling services have seldom been available to most adult education programs. Education Service Center Region 6, located in Huntsville, has been fortunate to have on staff a dedicated counselor since May 2009. Since then, Region 6 Adult Education has seen a 48% increase in attendance among students taking advantage of counseling services. 50% of these students have begun their GED preparation and have declared the goal of entering postsecondary education upon completion of their secondary education.

With a licensed professional counselor on staff and through a partnership with Sam Houston State University, Region 6 has become a service site for the counseling department at Sam Houston State. The university sends interns to adult education's various class locations. Those interns utilize the adult learning centers as home base to accrue the internship hours required for graduation and certification. In the recent past, interns have logged an average of 140 hours of direct contact with adult learners.

Counseling sessions are forty-five minutes in length and enable trained interns to provide a much needed service to the adult education population. Within these sessions, intern counselors help students set realistic goals obtainable within the program year. These structured meetings supply the learner clients with additional opportunities to explore educational possibilities and personal behaviors not previously considered.

Initial counseling sessions are usually group sessions to help learners determine barriers to success and to familiarize individuals with pathways to overcome these barriers. Counseling sessions include evaluation of cognitive and non-cognitive skills, and also help individuals determine the social services needed.

Goal setting is an important aspect of student success. The counseling component enables Region 6 to structure the process to include the following:

- setting and documenting goals in sessions with the counselor;
- setting and documenting academic goals in individual meetings with the transition teacher; and
- regularly revisiting goals throughout the program with both counselor and teacher.

Counselors also assist learners in making connections with multiple social service organizations. Region 6 has strong partnerships with community-based organizations that can help students address health and financial needs, workplace readiness, family and marital issues, transportation, and childcare.

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