

Human Misery Industry

Type of Activity: Exploring what it means to be an ally when working for the crown

Length: 1hr-2hrs

Purpose/Objectives: This tool is specifically designed for working with social workers/community workers who are resourced by the crown to examine the question 'who benefits and what changes as a result of the work you are doing?' It challenges social/community workers about whether they are being an ally or whether they are simply acting as a 'hat'. A 'hat' is a person who sees themselves as primarily accountable to the crown/their employer whereas an ally sees themselves as primarily accountable to the people they are working with.

Group: Groups of 10-20 participants. This tool is particularly designed for social/community workers who are resourced by the crown in Aotearoa New Zealand. With amendments it may be transferable to other cultures.

Facilitator knowledge and skills needed: Knowledge of the social work industry and clear analysis of the difference between being an ally and being a hat.

Resources needed: Either a whiteboard or large pieces of newsprint. Plenty of whiteboard pens or markers.

Instructions:

Draw a circle in the middle of the whiteboard/paper. Draw three people inside it and label these as the 'mad, the bad and the sad'. This is a shorthand description of the stereotypical judgements made about the people social/community workers work alongside. It challenges participants to acknowledge these judgements and brings the people they work with and their experiences into the room.

Outside the circle in the top right hand corner draw a crown. This represents the government. Below the crown draw a few hats. The hats represent agents of the crown. The hats get resources from the crown. Ask the group what the hats get from the crown and list these alongside the hats (e.g. funding, training, jobs, offices, etc).

Facilitate group reflection and dialogue about the picture. This can be done in a big group, or the group could break into pairs for initial conversation and then work as a full group. Questions to ask the group could include: what do the mad, bad and sad get? Who from? What might the mad, bad and sad say about this picture? How do they see the hats? Are there times when the resources don't make it into the circle? Who has power in this picture? Who are the hats accountable to? Etc.

After reflecting on the picture, ask how hats could become allies so that the mad, bad and sad are benefiting from the crown resources. What would it take to become allies? What are the

differences between being an ally and being a hat.

Variation: This exercise can be done as a role play. If doing it as a role play, begin by giving the different characters their roles and explaining the roles that others will be playing. Give everyone time to prepare before playing the role play.

Facilitation tips: This exercise is designed to support the group to make the distinction that hats are accountable to the crown whereas allies are accountable to the 'mad, bad and sad', so it is useful to highlight accountability.

This exercise could be followed by a session exploring the challenges and opportunities in becoming an ally and an exercise where participants get to practice what it looks like to be an ally rather than a hat.

Acknowledgements: This exercise builds on Veronica Black's (from the Hauraki Mental Health Team) work on the charity model versus ally model

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