This figure went well beyond my 50% criteria for success. In prior sessions, before the new material was introduced, students would come, listen, and leave immediately as soon as I was finished. After the interactive intervention, I noticed that students stayed after the session, talking to one another or to me.

Reflection

At first I was reluctant to add a piece where the student had to speak because I was convinced that students would not want to share their goals with strangers. Not only were they eager to share, they began to ask more questions that pertained to their own situations. This has been a great learning tool for me because I now know that students are willing to talk about their goals. Both my agency and I were quite encouraged with the results of the final telephone interviews. Because of the success of this project, I have added this goal-setting portion permanently to the information session. Even if these people choose not to become a part of our program, I feel that they can apply realistic goal setting to many situations in their lives. For me, that is a long-range goal that I feel is being fulfilled every time I deliver this presentation.

Increasing the Return of Monthly Progress Reports

Debbie Thompson

Background

Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council (GPLC) is a non-profit adult education agency providing literacy services throughout Allegheny County. These services include basic literacy, ABE, GED preparation, ESL, family literacy, workplace literacy, life skills instruction, computer literacy, and citizenship instruction. Support staff is located in a central office, and area coordinators are located in eight neighborhood (area)

Debbie Thompson is Program Manager with the Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council.

offices established to provide services at the local level. The primary responsibility of the area coordinators is to provide support and assistance to the volunteers and adult learners within their communities. One problem encountered by GPLC was the difficulty in receiving necessary feedback from the volunteers and adult learners. Each month volunteer tutors are asked to return Monthly Progress Reports which document any progress, concerns, and/or needs of the tutoring pair. Because these reports were not being returned to the area coordinators consistently, it was difficult to collect such information as student hours, achievement of goals, etc. When coordinators receive the information, they are able to schedule post-testing and prescribe new or additional materials and texts. Failure to receive the information hinders GPLC's ability to help the students and to report accurately information to the state. Before the project was conducted through the Pennsylvania Action Research Network (PAARN), the average rate of return of Monthly Progress Reports for the entire agency was 51%. Several remedies had been implemented; none were successful.

Plan

After meeting with the area coordinators, I decided to make changes in the reporting system and to pilot the changes in three of the eight areas. The first two changes were made to the form itself. The blank spaces at the bottom of the page, where tutors were asked to write anything they felt was significant to the tutoring session, were replaced with specific questions: "What did you teach in relation to your student's goals?" "What success have you had?" A student response section was added to the back of the form: "Are the textbooks you are using helpful?" "What have you learned this month?" This area was previously blank. In a change from past practice tutors and students were asked to work together to complete this form, sign it, and return it to the area coordinator by the 5th of the next month. The third change was in terms of who returned the report. The responsibility now became a joint effort rather than being just the tutor's. The timeline established was for three months, January through March, 1996, to include reports from December through February. The three areas selected represented one area receiving the lowest rate of return (MV Office), one receiving an average rate of return (EE Office), and one that received the highest rate of return (NW Office). One office was located in the suburbs; two were closer to the city.

Action and Data Collection

Tutors and students in all three areas targeted for this research received a letter describing the changes and were given three copies of the new report form. The area coordinators in these area offices were asked to keep a record of the Monthly Progress Reports received each month and submit a monthly update to me. The goal at this time was to increase the average rate of return by 25%. I used three data collection techniques: a log for recording who had and had not returned the Monthly Progress Reports; a journal to record ideas, concerns, and anything unexpected; and a document analysis that included information written on the revised report form and other correspondence used during the action research project.

Results

The MV Office showed the most dramatic increase during the three-month period with an increase of 57%. The other two areas also saw an increase: 11% at the EE Office and 8% in the NW Office. These increases gave an average return rate of 25%, the desired increase, for the three areas.

Reflection

It is difficult to say whether the increase occurred primarily due to the new report forms and revised procedures for returning it or if other factors may have had an influence. Area coordinators reported an influx of new tutors at the same time that this project was piloted, and many of these new tutors consistently returned reports. Perhaps the rate of increase would have happened without a change in format and procedures, or perhaps the combination of the intervention and the newly trained volunteers worked together to cause the increase. At the conclusion of the project GPLC decided to adopt the new Monthly Progress Report form on an agency-wide basis. All tutors and students received a supply of the new report forms and letters advising them of the change; the new procedure was put into effect in spring, 1996. This project prompted further revisions of the Monthly Report Form several years later. A focus group of staff and volunteers met to review this form and provide feedback for further revisions. Their ideas have been used. Tutors are now asked what

teaching techniques they use, and students are asked if they had difficulty getting to their sessions and steps they have taken toward achieving their goals. The name on the form was also changed to reflect the way the report forms are completed and returned to the area coordinator (tutor and student together). It is now called the Pair Monthly Progress Report. This PAARN project resulted in on-going success at GPLC. We continue to grapple with the problem of getting our volunteers and students to give us feedback on what's happening during their tutoring sessions, but we also continue to use this process for making improvements in our communication with our volunteers and students and creating a system that works for us and for them.