

# M.A.D. Adventures

(Mainstream's Accreditation Dream)

## How we do our work is as important as the work we do

### Let's Talk About It

"The problem with communication...is the *illusion* that it has been accomplished." This quote by George Bernard Shaw says it all. Communication is one thing; effective communication is a whole other story. We spend a good part of our days communicating with others in order to share information, discuss ideas, teach and learn. There are situations when, despite our best efforts, misunderstandings occur. How can we ensure that the message we want to share is the one that the other person receives?

Effective communication is something that is very important to FOCUS. It is a recurring theme through all of the domains and many of the standards. They are not only referring to communication between staff members or between management and programs. FOCUS wants to know that we can effectively communicate with the people we support, their families, our students and volunteers, community members, community agencies, media and funders. How does information get shared? In what formats do we make information available? Who are the agency spokespeople

who can speak with the media? How do we know that the messages we give are being understood?

FOCUS asks that we provide accessible, up-to-date, and relevant information about our agency, our philosophies and our activities. Transparency, accessibility and availability of information is what FOCUS wants to see.

Ensuring that we are effectively communicating means many things. It means updating our program brochures to ensure that the information is current, relevant and easy to understand. It means updating our website to make it more accessible and including information such as our strategic plan and annual reports. It means sharing information, such as our complaint and grievance process, with the people we support and our key stakeholders. It also means thinking about succession planning (the 649 rule) and ensuring that information about our processes, projects and programs is accessible to others.

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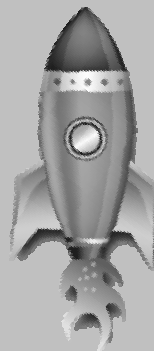
### Mission: Possible

It's been a long time coming but we have finally found a way to visually represent the progress that we have made and continue to make in Accreditation. The A-TEAM went on a field trip and came back with a brightly coloured, positive-looking poster that represents the journey we are taking together.

Several copies of the poster have been purchased and they will be placed in key locations throughout the agency to help keep track of and celebrate all of the successes we make on our journey.

Progress will be measured in terms of standards. In total, there are 158 standards to be met. Every time we meet 10 standards, we will fill in another section on the poster. The December Quarterly Report confirmed that we have already met 69 standards so we're definitely on our way!

So keep your eyes peeled for our Mission: Possible posters and help us celebrate as we make our way to the top!



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## Let's Talk About It

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Accessibility is an important part of effective communication and there are several different ways in which we have to consider it. First of all, accessibility has to do with whether or not the information is actually made available to people. Can a parent find out what the process is if they have a concern with our service? Can a community member access our annual reports?

The second part of accessibility is ensuring that information is presented in an understandable format. That may mean creating pictorial versions for individuals who cannot read, having larger font on the website, creating video or audio versions of some information, and perhaps even making some information available in French.

There are many things to think about when it comes to effective communication. Not all

information needs to be available to everyone or provided in numerous formats. What we need to do is ask ourselves several key questions about the information we do make available. Who is the target audience? What do we want them to understand? In what format would the information be most effective? How can we know that they have understood the information?

By working to answer these questions, we can defy George Bernard Shaw's quote and ensure that our communication both within the agency as well with the greater community is effective and accessible.



## From Talking the Talk to Walking the Walk

The accreditation process has been going on for 11 months now. Our biggest challenge in the beginning was getting our heads around what exactly we were undertaking. Once we understood that, the challenge then became trying to ensure that everyone across the agency stayed informed of what was happening. Newsletters started going out and accreditation became a regular discussion at staff meetings. Céline periodically attended meetings and met regularly with staff to discuss standards and changes that were being made. We were talking the talk.

Eleven months in and we have made many changes across the agency and met many standards. Forms have been created, person-centred planning has become a key part of every program, policies have been written and procedures introduced. There is still more to do but we can now start walking the walk.

Accreditation is no longer about discussion and debate as it is about testing out the results of those discussions and debates. It is about filling out the new forms, trying out new procedures and testing out the changes to see how they feel. Any change takes time to feel comfortable and become part of the routine. However, there may be changes that prove to be less effective than expected. That is where your feedback is essential. If something isn't working, tell us. We also don't mind hearing about changes that are working well!

FOCUS asks that we Plan - Do - Check - Reflect. We've planned and made many changes. We now have to check to see how effective they are and whether they improve the way we deliver service. We can celebrate the changes that work and reflect on those that don't. So let's go from talking the talk to walking the walk.