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- Inner City Law Center (ICLC) has been serving the poorest and most vulnerable individuals and families in Los Angeles County since 1980.
- ICLC provides direct legal services to thousands of people experiencing homelessness each year.
- ICLC trains and provides technical assistance to dozens of CBO's and government agencies.

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What Services Do We Provide?

- Advocating for public benefits for low income individuals and families that can make the difference between a stable home and homelessness.
- Increasing veterans' access to health care and other benefits that they are entitled to due to their military service.
- Preventing homelessness by representing low-income tenants facing evictions and early intervention in landlord-tenant disputes.
- Compelling slumlords to make repairs to their buildings and recovering compensation for tenants who have suffered from physical, mental and emotional damages from dangerous housing conditions.

- **What this training covers.**
- **Poverty defined.**
- **Better understanding working with people living in poverty.**
- **Working with people who live in poverty with cultural understanding**
- **Interviewing considerations.**
- **Goals of interviewing.**
- **Best practices.**

- **What is poverty?**

- Families living at or below the poverty level are referred to as “poor”.
- But research suggests that on average families need an income of about twice the federal poverty level to meet even their basic needs. These people are often referred to as “low income”.
- The U.S. measures poverty by and outdated standards developed in the 1960s.

Poverty in Los Angeles County.

- 47,000 People Are Homeless in L.A. County. According to 2016 United Way Report.
- More than 18% of the county's population live below the poverty level. The national average is 14.5.
- How poor is poor? One person living on \$12, 082 a year. A family of four surviving on a little over \$24,000.
- Nearly four in 10 people in L.A. County suffer from extreme poverty, those people live on less than \$5,400 a year for a single person or about \$11,000 for a family of four. United Way Report.
- The LA Times reported in 2015 that about 13,000 people a MONTH fall in to homelessness

Two Major Types of Poverty

Generational Poverty

A family living in poverty for two generations or more is considered in generational poverty.

In other words, a child who grows up with parents in poverty and lives as an adult in poverty is living in generational poverty.

Generational Poverty is long-term poverty in which the culture and skills tend to be different than those of middle class.

- **Situational poverty** is generally connected to a major life event such as divorce, death, illness, or other life-altering event that eliminates resources.
- **Situational poverty** is temporary, and individuals in situational poverty probably have more resources to draw on than those in generational poverty

▫ **Working with people who live in poverty with cultural understanding**

- Poverty is generally equated to a lack of financial resources. In reality, there are many other types of resources and even any one kind of resource, even a financial increase, does not eliminate poverty.

▫ What are resources?

- Money
- Emotional: Resilience, or lack of it, when life is tough.
- Mental: Intellectual/cognitive functioning; skills for life
- Relationships/Role Models: Can often be more important than money as they are considered to be the only thing that can be counted on to last.

▫ More Resources

- Cultural knowledge: Understanding the communication and behavioral norms of your own group and the other types of groups. You do what your culture does.
- Spiritual
- Physical: Health and Mobility
- Support Systems: Friends, family, agencies , community who will respond when needed.

▫ Why does it matter?

- If you are culturally aware, your work will be more efficient and effective
- You may be frustrated less often when you understand about differences
- You will develop better client relationships

- What to learn about communication
 - Relationships are very often the number one priority for people living in poverty-so a lot of decisions are based upon relationships. Including the one with the attorney.
 - Because people in poverty often have little else, their “story” is what they have to offer. **Express appreciation for the story and then move on to addressing the legal needs.**

▫ **Clarifying Questions are Important**

- Individuals in generational poverty may use the “casual register” of linguistics and a lot of facial and body language
- Statements may not have the beginning, middle and end to which attorneys are accustomed
- The client may view the time they spend with you telling a story as more important than the actual information they provide.

▫ **Middle Class Problem Solving**

- Retrieving data about the problem from memory and using the data to predict whether the problem will continue.
- Projecting oneself into the future and picturing the results of a planned change.
- Weighing pros and cons of a situation internally, to think about it, prior to simply reacting to the problem.

▫ **It *may* be different in the culture of poverty.**

- People living in poverty many times are living a life of uncertainty and sometimes chaos. Their problems are often immediate. Will they have enough money left for food, the car won't start and they can't get to work. Should I pay for food or the doctor?
- There may be little time and energy for future planning.

▫ **It isn't always as it seems**

- It isn't always a decision that creates the problem, but the lack of making a necessary decision
- It isn't always about the choices made, but the lack of choices to choose from.

▫ Middle Class Assumptions May Not Apply

- That the client is in control of their daily life
- life in poverty is unpredictable, and help is not just a phone call away.
- That the client can take the time to grasp abstract concepts and do future planning.
- Thinking ahead, anticipating what has not happened yet is a complex brain function which requires time, quiet, and concentration. Dealing with daily life may prevent someone in poverty from necessary planning.

▫ **Try Not to Judge**

- Pro Bono clients come to you for help and you give it because you can. It isn't about “deserving” the help.
- Demanding low-income clients be worthy of representation demeans the ethical imperative.
- Why would we expect the most disadvantaged among us to exercise better judgment than the rest of us?

▫ Build Trust Over Time

▫ Take Your Time

- Prior encounters with the legal system may have been disappointing. Be patient if you meet with some distrust.
- Address your client respectfully as Mr., Mrs., or Miss.
- Explain your role as an advocate and as someone who is “on your side.”
- Keep your client informed.

▫ **Be Alert for Roadblocks**

- Does your client have a job? Can s/he get time off for meetings?
- Does your client have children? Can he or she get childcare for meetings?
- Does your client have a phone? Is there somewhere you can leave a message?
- Does your client have a social worker, a mental health provider or a domestic violence advocate or service?

▫ **Listen Carefully, Communicate Clearly**

- Build rapport – maintain eye contact as appropriate and delay note-taking until the client is comfortable
- Gently keep your client focused on legal issues.
- Don't assume lack of education or language skills equals lacks of intelligence

▫ **Listening and Communicating**

- Review written documents verbally.
- Explain why your interview questions are relevant to the case (and that you aren't simply being nosy.)
- Don't assume anything; answer all of your client's questions fully



▫ **Become Culturally Attuned-See the World Through Your Client's Eyes**

- Learn about the problems your client faces daily.

▫ Interviewing Considerations

- Cultural Awareness
- Power Differentials
- Confidentiality

▫ **Goals of Interviewing Generally**

- To hear, understand and acknowledge the client's concerns or problems and their context from the client's point of view.
- Encourage the story so that you can obtain the information you need and guide the client in understanding the interaction of their lives and the legal issues.

▣ Concrete Goals of the Interview

- Establish the appropriate relationship.
- Build rapport.
- Gather the information you need to provide legal service to the client.
- Obtain the client's identification of the problem.
- Obtain the client's identification of the goals.
- Obtain the client's story/description of the facts.
- Identify legally relevant documents.
- To identify evidence.
- To evaluate the client as a witness.
- Protect the client from damaging behavior.

- Best Practices Before You Begin
 - Conduct background research before the interview.
 - Start centered. You will have to hold the center in the interview. Set the tone at the outset.
 - **Let the client tell their story initially.**

▫ Best Practices at the Interview

- Icebreakers-Don't forget to introduce yourself and others.
- Let the client tell their story initially. Start by asking the client to introduce themselves and ask what problem brings them to you today.
- Active Listening.
- Determine the client's level of education, sophistication and comprehension level. Does she have special needs?

▫ **Keep going back to the basics!**

- **Cultural Sensitivity**
- **Listen**
- **Review and Paraphrase**
- **Remember your goal**
- **Learn and remember**
- **THE CLIENT'S GOAL**

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Thank You!