

Customer Service Notes for **WIC**

Empathy – An Ingredient for Outstanding Service

Empathy: the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and experiencing the feelings and thoughts of another person

Webster's dictionary defines "empathy" as noted above. We know that as WIC professionals, empathy is a key factor in the quality of the service you provide to participants. Being able to identify with the issues a participant is facing allows one to offer appropriate counseling and solutions.

Empathy means *listening* for what the participant is feeling at any moment; listening is an important skill. It could be frustration, embarrassment, or fear, or a range in between. If you can recognize and respond to that first, then you can go on and help problem solve and give guidance. Take note of the tone and the body language of the participant when she is communicating with you. Empathy means you start where the participant is at any moment. Displaying your empathy can become the foundation for moving forward with your client.

The worst type of attitude a participant could receive is when the WIC staff member is condescending or demonstrates an uncaring feeling toward the person. Even with participants who may be challenging to work with, be careful that your body language, gestures, or tone does not show your frustration.

Effectively communicating with participants will demonstrate your empathy. Here are some phrases that you can use.

- "I can see that you are upset..."
- "I can imagine that would bother you..."
- "I'm sensing you are frustrated about ..."
- "Let's see how we can improve that."
- "Why don't we work on ..."

In our many training sessions with WIC groups, we have learned that some WIC staff were once participants. If this is the case, use your experience as a participant to show empathy toward the person.

Demonstrating empathy will go a long way toward building and maintaining positive relationships with participants!

Questions for Reflection:

1. What specific techniques can you use to demonstrate your empathy with participants?
2. How can you increasingly use the above phrases in your interactions with participants?