

# External Review 2010

## Stages of Change Research Project

Prepared For:



opportunitiesforemployment

HOPE IN ACTION

Prepared By:

**proactive**  
INFORMATION SERVICES INC.



*“Helping Clients Make a Difference ... Since 1984”*

January 2010

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### Contact Information:

**Proactive Information Services Inc.**

**Mailing Address**

**101 – 478 River Ave.**

**Suite 732**

**Winnipeg, MB R3L 0B3**

**(204) 943-2370**

**[www.proactive.mb.ca](http://www.proactive.mb.ca)**

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## - INTRODUCTION -

### A. Opportunities for Employment Inc.

Established in 1995, Opportunities for Employment Inc. (OFE) is “a faith-based non-profit corporation established to help individuals in need of assistance to obtain full-time, long-term employment.” A non-profit corporation, its roots and mission are derived from the founding partners, the Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba and the Mennonite Economic Development Associates, Winnipeg Chapter. OFE’s mission is to “equip individuals to achieve greater independence by pursuing and maintaining meaningful employment.” While OFE now receives core funding from the Manitoba provincial government, an array of other partners and funders also support its work.<sup>1</sup>

Opportunities for Employment provides a variety of programs and services to people in Winnipeg who are seeking full-time employment, but who may lack skills and/or have lost confidence. Participants move through Intake to Skill Enhancement Programming, Employment Services, and Retention Services. Employment Consultants, a resource centre, and other on-site supports (e.g., food bank, interview clothing) assist clients in their job preparation and job search. An off-site location, House Of Opportunities, is found in the Spence Neighbourhood.

While in 2005, Opportunities for Employment was able to celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and 5,000<sup>th</sup> placement, not all clients were successful in obtaining and maintaining full-time employment. Informal discussions with other organizations working in the same field, but using a variety of approaches, identified a common phenomenon – a high drop-out rate. It was not uncommon to lose anywhere from 25% to 50% of candidates after their first contact. Also, all too frequent was the situation where significant resources had been invested in training and preparation only to have the participants drop-out or fail when they were about to transition to the job-site.

OFE decided to explore approaches that would address these issues and, hence, the **Stages of Change (SOC) Research Project** was developed. While descriptions of the approach and the history of the Project are found in the following section of this document, it is important to note that SOC was funded as a three year research project. One of the conditions was to have an external consultant review the research project and make recommendations (as necessary) to enhance its quality, efficacy, and usefulness. This report represents the external review for Year 3 and the final external review of the project.

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<sup>1</sup> For further information on OFE, its history and its supporters, please see: <http://www.ofe.ca>

## B. Proactive Information Services Inc.

Proactive Information Services Inc., a Winnipeg-based social research company, was contracted to undertake the external review. Proactive was established in 1984 to provide qualitative and quantitative research and evaluation services to clients in the public and non-profit sectors. Clients include government ministries, community organizations and agencies, post-secondary and training institutions, school districts and schools, foundations, and other NGOs across Canada, as well as internationally.

Proactive's professionals have undertaken social research and evaluation projects in a variety of settings, including in Canada, with people in recent immigrant communities, with rural, urban and Northern communities, and with Aboriginal communities. Internationally, Proactive has worked on projects in numerous countries in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, as well as in Argentina, Lithuania, and Mongolia. These experiences, in conjunction with the team's professional skills and knowledge, have highlighted the necessity of working to ensure that research processes and methods are contextually sensitive, as well as culturally, socially, and developmentally appropriate.<sup>2</sup>

Linda E. Lee, one of the partners in Proactive, is the key contact and project director for the external review of the SOC Research Study. She has worked in research and evaluation since the late 1970s, for the provincial government, for Manitoba's largest school district and, since 1989, with Proactive. Linda has developed evaluation frameworks for pilot projects in Canada and across the world, including projects in East Central and Southeastern Europe funded by the Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation, New York) and in Lithuania for a project funded by the Lithuanian government and the World Bank. Data from one of her projects has been used as evidence in the European Court of Human Rights. She is a former national President of the Canadian Evaluation Society. In 2009 she was inducted as a Fellow of the Society. Linda has published and presented nationally and internationally and has conducted training in evaluation and research methods both at home and abroad.

Larry K. Bremner, the other partner in Proactive, is the adjunct reviewer. He provides a second independent perspective on the SOC Research Project and assisted with the external audit of the data analysis. In the 1970s and early 1980s, Larry was a senior analyst and survey coordinator for a provincial government department and then became senior vice-president for Angus Reid Group, prior to founding Proactive in 1984. Like Linda, he has worked in research and evaluation in Canada and across the world, from Macedonia to Mongolia. He was a consultant to Statistics Canada on their educational indicators and has conducted training in research methods and data use in Canada and Europe.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on Proactive, see [www.proactive.mb.ca](http://www.proactive.mb.ca)

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## - STAGES OF CHANGE PROJECT -

### A. The Approach

The Stages of Change Model (SOC) is an approach that has been used extensively in the addictions field, where emotion, cognition and behaviour are all crucial factors; however, the approach had not been used in the employment development field. The approach speaks directly to the issue of motivation. In conjunction with SOC, Motivational Interviewing (MI) was a strategy that held promise. MI is a client-centred communication method intended to move people towards change by exploring and resolving ambivalence as a key to eliciting change. Studies in other fields have demonstrated that SOC and MI are effective in assisting individuals to make desirable life changes.

More specifically, SOC recognizes a gradual, six stage change process:<sup>3</sup>

1. Pre-contemplation – when the participant is not considering change because no perceived need for change,
2. Contemplative – when the participant is thinking about making some changes,
3. Preparation – when the participant is preparing for or becoming determined to make changes,
4. Action – when the participant is actively making changes,
5. Maintenance – when the participant consistently attends to and is working on maintaining the change,
6. Termination – when the participant no longer needs to attend to the task of maintaining change.

Research indicates that people who are asked to accomplish tasks they are not ready for experience frustration and setbacks. People who are deemed 'resistant' to change may indeed represent individuals where the services offered did not meet their needs because of their personal stage of change at the time. Additionally, few people start at one stage and sequentially move through the stages to termination. 'Recycling' is common, where people move back to a previous stage before being able to move on. This is not considered as 'failure,' but rather a likely part of the process of finally moving to sustained maintenance and termination. Therefore, in the employment development setting, SOC allows a focus on individual needs, stages of recovery and time frames, while still accommodating groups of people.

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<sup>3</sup> The Research Design Report, as well as the Interim Reports, Best Practice documents from the SOC Research Study and the Final SOC Report January 2010, all explain the stages and provide more detailed information.

The target population for SOC intervention is unemployed or underemployed individuals who face motivational barriers to work. These individuals may be long term or multi-generational recipients of Employment and Income Assistance (EIA), people returning to work after lengthy absences for reasons such as injury, child rearing, or mental health issues, to name a few. They include Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, youth at risk, single parents, newcomers, and ex-offenders.

## B. Purpose and Background to the Research Study

The project staff included a Program Manager, Researcher, Facilitator, Employment Consultant, and Administrative Assistant.<sup>4</sup> In addition, a broad-based Steering Committee<sup>5</sup> met quarterly to review the process and results of the SOC Research Study in order to provide feedback and advice to the project.

The SOC Research Study was originally designed with a Study group that received the interventions and a Control group that did not. The **Test Question** was:

As compared to a Control group, how does the application of the Stages Of Change model and Motivational Interviewing to employee development impact participant's movement within the SOC model (Pre-contemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action and Maintenance)? Also, will the application of the SOC Model and MI result in decreased OFE program attrition rates, increased employment, and increased longitudinal employment retention rates?

### Original Hypotheses:

1. As compared to the Control group, the percentage of the SOC/MI Study group obtaining employment would be higher.
2. Of all participants obtaining employment, as compared to the Control group, the percentage of the SOC/MI Study group still employed six months post hire would be higher.

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<sup>4</sup> This three year research study is funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (Pan Canadian Innovations Initiative), The Government of Canada Employment Insurance Account, and The Province of Manitoba (Competitiveness, Training and Trade - Research and Innovation).

<sup>5</sup> In addition to OFE staff and SOC practitioners, the Steering Committee included representatives from Manitoba Competitiveness, Training and Trade, Family Services and Housing, Manitoba Justice - Community and Youth Corrections, Service Canada - Employment Insurance, RCMP, Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, Selkirk Mental Health Centre, Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives MB, Rehabilitation and Recovery Services, Restorative Resolutions, Urban Circle Training Centre, as well as an Assistant Professor of Social Work and a consultant.

3. As compared to the Control group, the percentage of the SOC/MI Study group leaving OFE programming will be lower.
4. Participants of the SOC/MI Study group that have been assessed with the University of Rhode Island Change Assessment (URICA) as being in the Pre-Contemplative or Contemplative stage would be assessed as being in the Preparation stage after taking part in one or more of the following: SOC/MI Workshop-1, SOC/MI Workshop-2, Motivational Interview.

Originally it was expected that, during the study period, approximately 800 individuals would be recruited each year, for a total of 1600 to 2400 participants over the three years of the study. These numbers include Study group and Control group participants in various stages of searching for and maintaining employment. Participants were assigned 50% to the Study group and 50% to the Control group. Comparisons between the Study group and the Control group are available in reports on Phase I of the project, as well as in the Final SOC Report January 2010.

Building on the recommendations of external evaluation report (March 2008), the research project moved into a second phase. In **Phase II**, the focus was to implement the SOC model in a “real world” setting, without monetary incentives, incorporating the model into daily programming. The key changes<sup>7</sup> introduced in Phase II were:

1. **Removal of Compensation Stipends:** It was speculated that the use of stipends might be keeping participation levels high and inflating results. Attendance rates in Phase II could be studied to see if there was indeed a difference. Other agencies that might be interested in using the SOC model may be more likely to do so if the additional cost of stipends were to be removed.
2. **Removal of Random Assignment:** Along with the elimination of stipends, random assignment of individuals into study and Control groups was ended in Phase II. Given the strong results of Phase I, ongoing comparison of study and Control groups was less important than testing the model in a “real world” setting and monitoring the effect of increased numbers on existing programs and staff. Additionally, the ethical issue of not providing proven interventions to particular individuals based on random assignment was addressed.
3. **Introducing a Third Workshop:** The SOC model calls for addressing different issues facing people at each of the stages in the model. Therefore, a preparation workshop was introduced for all participants.

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<sup>7</sup> Exit interviews were also discontinued in Phase II as they produced minimal information.

4. **Shortened URICA:** Another change was the shortening of the URICA (*University of Rhode Island Change Assessment Scale*) from 32 items to 12. Based on the feedback of participants in the focus group, the 12 item instrument was viewed as less stressful. Feedback from staff and participants, along with statistical analysis, suggest that the 12 item instrument is as effective as the longer version.
5. **Ongoing Adjustments:** The internal monitoring of the project (which continued throughout Phase II) gave rise to a number of other adjustments in the final year of the project, particularly in an attempt to improve attrition rates such as; abandoning breakouts at intake so that all participants received consistent messages, ensuring proper assessments were being done by assisting individuals with language barriers so they would not be frustrated by the wrong intervention, and calling participants immediately after they missed an EAS appointment.
6. **Sun-setting Actions:** In the final year of the project a number of actions needed to be taken to allow for the gradual phase out of the research project. As of April 1<sup>st</sup> 2009, all participants (excluding those in the Control group) were considered to be in Phase II. The intake of any new participants ceased at the end of August 2009. Due to the decreasing size of the active research participant population, the need for SOC interventions decreased. For example, by October 2009 no workshops were held and only eight MIs conducted. Consequently, the responsibilities of SOC team staff were adjusted and, by the fall of 2009, the team concentrated more of its resources towards dissemination of information.

The **Test Question** for exploration in **Phase II** was:

As compared to Phase I Study group participants, Phase II participants' retention rates and employment rates would remain consistent using the application of the SOC model and Motivational Interviewing (MI). Based on time restrictions, namely that Phase II ran a shorter duration than Phase I, the six month employment retention rates would be evaluated on the best available data and were expected to remain consistent.

**Hypotheses:** There were four anticipated results that were studied:

1. As compared to the Phase I Study group, the percentage of the Phase II group obtaining employment will be equal or greater.
2. Of all participants obtaining employment, as compared to the Phase I Study group, the percentage of Phase II group still employed six months post-hire will be equal or greater as compared to the Phase I Study group and greater when compared to the Phase I Control group.

3. As compared to the Phase I Study group, the percentage of the Phase II group leaving OFE programming will be equal or lower.
4. A majority of participants in the Phase II group, who have been assessed with the URICA as being in the Pre-Contemplative or Contemplative Stage, would be assessed as being in the Preparation stage after taking part in one or more of the following: Workshop 1 (WS1), Workshop 2 (WS2), Motivational Interviewing (MI).<sup>8</sup> Participants who assessed as being in Preparation will attend Workshop 3 (WS3) and the majority would move further within the Preparation stage, as reflected by a higher URICA total score.

For the duration of the study, it was anticipated that approximately 800 individuals will be recruited into the project each year, representing the same number of participants who were to have been recruited in each year in Phase I. However, the numbers of participants actually exceeded projections; 1409 were at intake, 1230 were accepted, and 992 were engaged with SOC in Phase II.

## C. Process

### 1. Phase I

Participants in the study had access to the regular programming and services offered at OFE. The process began with an Intake session offered on Wednesdays.<sup>9</sup> During the general orientation, all new clients were given a presentation not only about OFE programming and services, but also an introduction to the SOC research study.

Then clients were asked to select one of the small groups based on their initial programming interest. In each small group, the research study was explained in more detail and clients were asked to indicate on a consent form whether or not they wish to participate. If an individual chose not to participate, s/he was directed to an Employment Consultant, while others in the small group completed a form asking a variety of demographic questions as well as the modified version of URICA. Participants received an incentive for completion of the URICA at time of intake.

In Phase I the URICA was a 32 item, self-report assessment that included subscales measuring the stages in the SOC model. The subscale with the highest score indicated the stage of change most reflective of the person's emotional

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<sup>8</sup> Motivational Interviews use open-ended questions, affirmations and reflective statements. Through guided dialogue, individuals are led to solve their own issues.

<sup>9</sup> This report provides a brief description of the process for contextual purpose; more detail is available in Interim Reports, Best Practice documents and the Final SOC Report January 2010 prepared by SOC staff.

state. Subscale scores could also be combined to produce a second-order continuous readiness to change score. If a person's score totalled more than 80, the participant did not require additional interventions, whereas if the score was below 80 then the person, if selected for the Study group, received an intervention.

Following completion of the URICA, potential clients met with an Employment Consultant, taking their completed URICA with them, and were randomly assigned to either the Study group or the Control group. Those in the Study group with a score of less than 80 were referred to the first three hour workshop, which occurred the following day. Following the workshop, participants again completed the URICA. If their score was still below 80, they were referred to the second workshop. This workshop was originally scheduled for the subsequent week, but the timing was changed so that participants returned the following day for Workshop 2. Again, participants completed the URICA. Generally, eight to 12 people participated in Workshop 1, whereas numbers were smaller in Workshop 2; typically four to six participants.

If a person's score remained below 80, s/he was referred to a one-on-one Motivational Interview (MI) prior to commencing regular programming. However, at the discretion of the Employment Consultant or workshop facilitator, a participant could be referred to an MI at any time or the participant may self refer.

Individuals participated in regular programming, while the SOC Employment Consultant provided ongoing job search support to participants. Compensation was given when a participant completed an assessment at the time s/he finds employment. ('Employment' is defined as obtaining a job, while 'six month employment' is having the same job for a continuous period of six months or several jobs in a six month period or changing jobs where the break between jobs is no more than 14 days.) SOC staff delivered the stipend and had the participant complete the URICA at the same time. A summary of assessment points, groups, and compensation (stipend) is found in The Stages of Change Interim Report July 1, 2008 – January 31, 2009.

In the fifteen months of Phase I (March 27, 2007 through August 27, 2008) 1401 individuals completed the URICA at intake and 1249 individuals were accepted into programming. In total, 895 individuals participated in programming and in the research study, 432 in the Study group and 463 in the Control group.

## 2. Phase II

In Phase II prospective participants attended an OFE information/intake session during which time they were informed of the study and asked to sign a consent form. They also completed the SOC assessment and other intake forms. As they completed the URICA, staff reviewed the assessment and recorded the individual's current Stage of Change. Individuals met with an Employment

Consultant (EC) and completed the regular OFE intake process. Participants who scored below the URICA cut-off were scheduled to attend WRO-1, while those above the cut-off were scheduled for WRO-3.

Individuals who attended WRO-1 completed the URICA again after the workshop. If they were below the cut-off they were scheduled to attend WRO-2 and, if not, they proceeded to Workshop 3 (WRO-3) and regularly scheduled OFE programming. It should be noted that the SOC facilitators could refer a participant to attend the next highest level of SOC activity at any time if they observed a lack of motivation (e.g., tardiness, non-attendance, refusal to participate in class).

WRO-3 was the preparation workshop that all participants attended once they had exceeded the URICA cut-off. WRO-3, the “gateway” to programming, was offered twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Participants who recycled with the URICA or who had not advanced after attending WRO-2 or who had been observed as unmotivated were scheduled for a one-on-one MI with the SOC Facilitator. If they still were assessed below the URICA cut-off after the interview, they were scheduled for another MI. If they were above the cut-off they advanced to regular scheduled OFE programming. Additional MI sessions were available to participants on a self-referral basis or by referral from an EC for up to six months after the person obtained a job.

After achieving the URICA cut-off participants attended regular OFE programming and moved to job search. Once they began their job searching, the EC connected them periodically for regular OFE assistance. In addition, the SOC Facilitator met weekly with participants (five to ten minutes) to check for possible indicators of re-cycling. If the possibility of re-cycling was noted, the individual was scheduled to attend the highest level of SOC intervention that s/he had yet to attend.

Once a participant reported to their EC that s/he had secured employment, s/he was asked once again to complete the URICA. The EC’s stayed in contact with the participant for six months after employment, as per normal OFE procedures. At the six month point, the EC again administered the URICA (over the phone or in-person). The EC had one month to contact the participant and administer the URICA before the planned assessment was abandoned.

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## D. Monitoring, Quality Control and Confidentiality

### 1. Monitoring

SOC staff obtained feedback from the participants on their experiences in the process. Following each workshop, participants completed an evaluation form. As well, focus groups were held regularly with participants to elicit feedback. Participants indicated that the new URICA was easy to complete, provided them with an opportunity for self-reflection, and that they completed it honestly. However, they did not understand the purpose of the demographic questions. Consequently, the demographics were collected after Work Readiness Orientations, rather than at intake. However, participants continued to ask about the purpose of demographics. Therefore, in the final months more explanation of the use of the demographics and the meaning of “confidential” was given to participants.

Participants were not all aware that they could self-refer for an MI, so more was done to advertise the availability of this support to participants. In addition, reminders of the SOC were posted in the building. Inaccurate perceptions about WRO-3 attendance holding up program participation were addressed. Follow-up calls were made to people who missed workshops to clarify the purpose and MI's were used to help improve attendance.

Throughout both Phase I and Phase II, monitoring included ongoing attention to the data. All data were analyzed and results reviewed on a monthly basis. Observations from staff were also discussed at internal meetings in conjunction with review of ongoing results. Each monthly report included a section discussing “lessons learned.”

Finally, the Steering Committee played a monitoring as well as an advisory function. Key components of the project and ongoing results were reported to the Steering Committee and discussed at their meetings throughout the length of the project.

### 2. Quality Control and Confidentiality

The SOC staff explained the study at intake and were available as the participants completed the initial URICA to answer any questions that arise. A staff member scored the URICA immediately allowing for completion of any missed questions or rectification of any double answers. A second scorer audited the scoring process at point of assessment and again, at the point of data entry, to ensure the scores were accurate. Data were also subjected to cleaning protocols after initial entry.

As previously mentioned, demographic information was collected after intake. Participants were assured that the demographic information was for research purposes only and files were kept in a locked cabinet with restricted access. File folders included the intake forms, all URICAs and review sheets, case notes on interventions, and documentation of employment.

The URICA was also analyzed to ensure that items assessing each stage were internally consistent. The Cronbach Alpha values on the short URICA, which range from .674 to .708, can be considered in the appropriate range.

Finally, relating to ensuring confidentiality, the external evaluator signed a confidentiality agreement in order to obtain access to actual data files used in the project. Files could only be accessed using a password provided by the SOC Researcher. The external evaluator audited data files as part of the second year external evaluation.

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## - THE EXTERNAL REVIEW -

### A. Our Understanding of the External Review

In the initial funding proposal, the role of an external evaluator was included in order to assess the research study in terms of its quality, efficacy, and usefulness and make recommendations for its enhancement (as required). In **Phase I**, the external evaluation was asked to answer five related questions:

1. What are the strengths of the research study (design, implementation, analysis)?
2. What, if any, are the gaps or problems with the research study (design, implementation, analysis)?
3. Are there features of the project that need to be considered in the research study that are not currently taken into account?
4. What are the ethical issues and how have these been addressed?
5. What are the recommendations, if any, for enhancing the quality, efficacy, and usefulness of the research study?

In **Phase 2 for year two of the project**, the external evaluator was asked to address the following four areas:

1. Review and assess the revised framework (design) for Phase 2, including the accompanying four main changes,
2. Audit of the data files and analysis as they pertain to analysis on Phase I study and Control group data,
3. Identify other possible demographics for inclusion in the study,
4. Identify any other issues that require consideration.

In **Phase 2 for the third and final year** of the project, the external evaluator has focused on the following areas:

1. What are the strengths of the research study (design, implementation, analysis)?
2. What, if any, are the gaps or problems with the research study (design, implementation, analysis)?
3. What is the overall quality, efficacy and usefulness of the of the research study?

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## B. Process for the External Review

The external review process for **year one** was conducted in a short time period, beginning February 1, 2008 with completion of the report scheduled for March 19, 2008. The evaluation of the research study or the external review process included the following components:

1. site visits to Opportunities for Employment by both external reviewers,
2. in-person meetings with the SOC Program Manager, Researcher and other SOC and OFE staff, as required,
3. observation of the intake session,
4. review of documents and materials describing the research study,
5. analysis of research instruments, analytical techniques and results to date,
6. clarification of any questions and issues with SOC Program Manager and Researcher, as required,
7. preparation of a draft report,
8. preparation of the final report incorporating any revisions (as appropriate) as suggested by SOC Project staff.

The documents consulted for the external review in year one included: Stages of Change: Project Proposal, Research Design Report: Evaluation Framework, team meeting notes, Best Practices: Version 1, Interim Reports (February 2007 to July 2007 and August 2007 to January 2008), SOC Steering Committee Minutes, SOC Project December 2008 Activity Report, and Analysis Reports.

The **second year's external review** process was also conducted in a short time period, beginning the end of January 2009 with completion of the report by March 31, 2009.

The external review process included the following components:

1. Site visit and meeting with SOC staff to discuss the Year 2 (2009) external review and learn about the changes that have been made in Phase II,
2. Review of documents and materials describing the research study,
3. Assess the framework/design for Phase II,
4. Audit selected data files,
5. Assess analytical techniques and results to date,
6. Seek clarification of any questions and issues with SOC Program Manager and Researcher, as needed,

7. Prepare a draft report, including questions for clarification, as needed,
8. Prepare of the final report incorporating any revisions (as appropriate) as suggested by SOC and OFE staff.

The key documents consulted for the external review of year two were the SOC “Proposed Evaluation Framework Phase II (February 2, 2009)” and the SOC “Interim Report (July 1, 2008 – January 31, 2009).” As well, data files, accompanying code book and syntax used for analysis of study versus Control group results were accessed and analyzed.

For the **third and final year**, the external review included:

1. email and telephone contact with the SOC Program Manager and Researcher,
2. review of documents and materials describing the research study,
3. analysis of the process and results to date including the review of draft versions of the Final SOC Report January 2010,
4. clarification of any questions and issues with SOC Program Manager and Researcher, particularly as they pertained to the Final SOC Report January 2010,
5. preparation of a draft external review report,
6. preparation of the final external review report incorporating any revisions (as appropriate) as suggested by SOC Project staff.

The key documents consulted for the final year three review were monthly Action Reports for January, February, March, April, May, July, August, September, October 2009 as well as the Interim Report for February 1, 2009 to June 30, 2009 and the Final SOC Report prepared in January 2010. The consultant, who received the Final SOC Report in various sections and versions of completion, provided suggestions which were incorporated into the final version of the document. However, it should be noted that the tight timeframe impacted on the ease of reviewing the Final SOC Report January 2010,

In all years, the draft reports of the external review were presented for examination by Opportunities for Employment, not with the intention of influencing the results, but rather for purposes of clarity and comprehensiveness. Revisions, as appropriate, were incorporated into the final documents.

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## C. Summary Discussion from Years 1 and 2

### 1. Framework/Design of the Research Study

The original research study presented a strong design that took advantage of Random Assignment methodology, without relying totally on this method to inform the use of the Stages of Change model. The study also took advantage of qualitative methods, such as focus groups with participants and case notes, to assist in monitoring and improving implementation. Using a validated instrument was also a strong point of the original design. That noted; the revision of the URICA to ensure readability (e.g., language level) was a sensible decision and has been followed by a shortening of the instrument for Phase II.

The collection of demographic information continued to be strength of the design, particularly as the demographics relate to the characteristics typical of OFE participants. Demographics allowed for analysis of results by sub-group which helps to determine if interventions are better suited or more effective with some groups than others. The relationship between the self-reported demographic items and acquisition and retention of employment represented another important aspect of the analysis.

The external review of Year 1 (March 2008) raised some issues relating to the future of the research. The strong results, indicating that the SOC model was a positive intervention, raised the ethical question, “why are you withholding services that are of direct benefit to people’s lives? If results continue to demonstrate the effectiveness of SOC, then consideration should be given to a different study approach in the last phase of the project.”

In addition, the Year 1 external evaluation raised the issue that “pilot or experimental projects with high staff commitment, self-selecting participants, and additional resources (e.g., incentives/stipends) can face challenges when moving to institution-wide implementation. This is a caution; significant positive effects often found in pilot projects are not always replicable in the daily realities of organizations which may not include the dedication and resources allocated to time-bound, externally funded innovations.”

The SOC team determined that it would indeed be appropriate to revise the research design for Phase II, implementing the key changes (as described on pages 5-6) including the extension of SOC interventions to all participants and the removal of the stipend. The design of Phase II built on the learnings of Phase I and continued to address important research elements in the design, such as informed consent and the recognition of risk (albeit low) to participants.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> A table detailing Phase II Evaluation Strategy (linking objectives, activities, evaluation questions, performance indicators, data source/collection method, analysis method, responsibility, timing and outputs) is found in Appendix 8 of the “Proposed Evaluation Framework Phase II.”

Finally, interim reports on the ongoing research were produced as part of the project. These reports were circulated to internal OFE staff for their examination and feedback. The Steering Committee also received the reports and Committee members were invited to discuss the results.

**The research design continued to be solid, as well as responsive and sensitive to the participants. Discussion with SOC staff and review of the existing reports suggested that the research design, while different from Phase I, continued to be diligently and respectfully implemented. The key changes made from Phase I to Phase II were appropriate and appear to have enhanced the later stages of the project, addressing ethical considerations while adding to project learnings.**

## **2. Data Files and Analysis**

The audit of data files and analysis was conducted for the year two external review. This included comparing Study and Control group participants from Phase I and the review of the data analysis (comparing Study and Control group participants from Phase I, as well as comparing initial Phase I results with initial Phase II results). The audit of the analysis included accessing the actual data files, referring to the syntax, and attempting to re-create the analysis.

**Overall, the audit confirmed the analysis of the Phase I Study versus Control groups was accurate and appropriate, with only some minor questions and issues raised. Consideration to including statistical significance and fine-tuning the explanation and presentation of some results was recommended for future reporting.**

## **3. Demographics**

In both Year 1 and Year 2, issues related to the collection and analysis of demographic information were raised. The Year 2 report appreciated the breadth of demographic information collected from participants and requested that statistically significant differences be noted.

While there was some discussion of the results in Year 2 project reporting – and the results for some groups were particularly impressive - the questions were asked: “can anything further be said about the broader lessons learned? Can you speculate why SOC involvement creates increased employment for particular often-disadvantaged populations?”

In summary, there appeared to be much rich data related to the demographics collected by the SOC project. The issue is not that more demographics needed collection, but rather that, as Phase II progressed, more analysis on the various demographic variables should be undertaken and, in any future reporting, the implications of the results for various participating sub-groups should be explored.

#### 4. Other Issues for Consideration

While the external evaluator understood that a number of presentations were upcoming and that work was being done on a manuscript for journal submission, it was suggested that the impact of the project, particularly on some disadvantaged populations, could be the focus of short brochures highlighting compelling findings to funders and/or local agencies/organizations. More attention to visual presentation of results was also suggested.

#### 5. Recommendations from Year 2 External Review

The following recommendations were made in the Year 2 external review report with the subsequent action taken.

1. Operational definitions should be included in any detailed reporting.
  - ◆ These were included in a glossary in Interim and Final Reports.
2. Some small changes in the data sets and their analysis deserve attention to answer the questions posed in the discussion section of this report.
  - ◆ Additional analysis was undertaken for the Interim and Final Reports.
3. Comparison of attendance rates between Phase I and Phase II participants need to be conducted in future to help answer the question as to whether the removal of the stipend has had any impact on participant attendance. While this is done in monthly analysis reports, inclusion of these data in the Interim and Final Reports will be helpful.
  - ◆ Attendance rates have been compared. Attendance rates for Workshops 1 and 2 were lower in Phase II than in Phase I, perhaps because of the removal of stipends. Attendance at Workshop 3 (added in Phase II) was comparable to Phase I workshop attendance (Final SOC Report).

4. Further analysis of drop-outs should be conducted, including exploration as to whether particular sub-groups (based on self-reported demographics) are more likely to discontinue engagement in programming.
  - ◆ Further analysis was conducted on retention rates by sub-group.
5. It will be important to continue to collect and analyze the range of demographic information currently being collected, particularly as more data from the six months employment period are available. The implications for programming and learnings by sub-group should be explored further.
  - ◆ The collection of demographic information was continued. Analysis was conducted by sub-group as recommended. More discussion of the implications could still be included in some reporting.
6. Multiple avenues for reporting and dissemination need to continue to be explored and different types of publications should be created in order to appeal to multiple audiences.
  - ◆ SOC/OFE staff have taken advantage of diverse and multiple opportunities for dissemination.

## **D. Discussion from Year 3**

### **1. Framework/Design of the Research Study**

As previously noted, the original research study presented a strong design that took advantage of Random Assignment methodology, without relying totally on this method to inform the implementation of the Stages of Change model. The study also took advantage of qualitative methods to assist in monitoring and improving implementation. As previously mentioned, the change in Phase II design was an appropriate and ethical choice which allowed for testing of the SOC model in more of a “real world” environment.

Using a validated instrument (the URICA) was another strength of the original design, while the revision of the URICA to ensure readability was a sensible decision which was followed by a shortening of the instrument for Phase II. The collection of demographic information helped to inform how various sub-groups were responding to the SOC model of intervention.

As previously discussed, the design also appropriately included an exit or “sun-setting” strategy. The strategy ensured that participants would be treated in a respectful manner. No new participants were accepted in the final two quarters of the project. By the end of the research, participants who had not yet obtained employment, but who sought to do so, continued to receive assistance through regular OFE programming.

The use of a broad-based Steering Committee throughout the project also represents a strength of the design. As has been noted in past external review reports, the Steering Committee was used as a sounding board and expert group, interested in, but for the most part, not directly invested in the success of the project.

**As noted in the previous external reviews, the research design continued to be solid, as well as responsive and sensitive to the participants. The Phase II research design, while different from Phase I, continued to be diligently and respectfully implemented. As noted in Year 2, the key changes made from Phase I to Phase II were appropriate and appear to have enhanced the latter stages of the project.**

## 2. Implementation

In the final year of implementation, ongoing adjustments were made based on the recommendations from the external evaluation and continuous feedback from participants. Some of the adjustments included ongoing attention to language comprehension through individual assistance to participants with low or emerging English literacy levels (Monthly Activity Report, April 2009). Greater attention was also paid to explaining the purpose of workshops at intake (Monthly Activity Report, March 2009).

As noted in the February to June 2009 Interim Report, the SOC Project Manager was trained to use the Motivational Interviewing Treatment Integrity Coding System (MITI) to assess the quality of Motivational Interviewing from audiotapes and transcripts of individual counselling sessions. According to the Interim Report, “use of the MITI has resulted in higher internal consistency between facilitators helping to ensure participants receive quality assistance.”

The sun-setting strategy, which has previously been explained, represented the final phase of project implementation.

Implementation of the project continued to be responsive and flexible, yet true to the Phase II design and project objectives. Continued attention has been paid to quality control, as evidenced by the use of the MITI. A well planned sun-setting strategy ensured the delivery of quality service to participants joining the project in its latter stages and allowed for optimal data collection.

### 3. Analysis and Results

As previously discussed in the summary of the Year 2 external review results, data analysis was confirmed as appropriate with some minor recommendations. Analysis in the final year has included information on statistical significance, as recommended.

Demographics allowed for analysis of results by sub-group which has yielded some interesting and powerful results. In the Final SOC Report January 2010 the discussion of demographics includes an explanation of what is considered very strong, strong, moderate, and some evidence of significance. This is helpful to reader in understanding for which sub-groups the SOC/MI intervention had the most powerful effects. Comparison of Phase I Study and Control participants is helpful here as well.

It should be noted that Phase I data collection ended April 2009. Analysis confirmed the effectiveness of the SOC/MI model: retention, employment and employment retention rates were higher for the Study group than the Control group. Study group participants also remained at higher stage of URICA stage placement even when assessed after the point of six months of continuous employment.

Regarding the four hypotheses for Phase II, the following results were noted.

**Hypothesis 1: As compared to the Phase I Study group, the percentage of Phase II group obtaining employment would be equal or greater.**

- ◆ There was no significant difference between the employment rate of the original Study group and the Phase II participants by the end of the project. It is interesting to note that this result was not evident early in 2009, likely because of the economic downturn when it appeared that employment rates for Phase II were not holding up to the Phase I Study group (for example, see Monthly Activity Report, May 2009).

- ◆ Number of Phase II individuals who found employment was 514; higher than the Study group (222) and Control group (199) numbers combined (421). The number should be higher as all participants in Phase II received the intervention. However, various reports do note that the increased numbers may have presented a capacity challenge for OFE.

**Hypothesis 2: Of all participants obtaining employment, as compared to the Phase I Study group, the percentage of Phase II employed at six months post hire would be equal or greater.**

- ◆ The discussion in the final Interim Report informs the reader that the numbers used to calculate these rates were only for participants whose employment dates OFE was able to confirm with employers. This strengthens the credibility of the numbers over using simply self-reported participant employment information.
- ◆ The employment rate for the Phase II group held up to that of the Phase I Study group and was significantly higher than the Phase I Control group.

**Hypothesis 3: As compared to the Phase I Study group, the percentage of Phase II group leaving OFE programming would be equal or lower.**

- ◆ The Final SOC Report January 2010 notes that because of a change to a new data base an unprecedented number of releases were processed in order to reduce the amount of data transferred to the new data base. This limitation was appropriately noted in the discussion.
- ◆ The Phase II group did have a significantly higher release rate (which may be explained by the above) than did the Phase I Study group. However, the release rate was still significantly below that of the Phase I Control group.

**Hypothesis 4: A majority of participants of the Phase II group that have been assessed with the URICA as being in the Pre-Contemplative or Contemplative stage, would be assessed as being in the Preparation stage after taking part in one of more of the following: Workshop 1, Workshop 2, and Motivational Interviewing. Those participants who are assessed as being in Preparation will attend WS3 and a majority will move further within the Preparation stage as reflected by a higher URICA total score.**

- ◆ Phase II participants demonstrated positive movement within the stages.
- ◆ Negative movement was lower for all Phase II interventions as compared to Phase I with the exceptions of Workshop 1 and the second MI where there were small differences in negative movement.

**The results of both Phases of the research study demonstrate the positive effects of the SOC/MI intervention. The demographic analysis points to strong positive impacts on certain demographic sub-groups whose members have not been traditionally successful. Analysis of the six month employment rate was strengthened by using actual employer reports rather than simply participant self-report.**

#### **4. Reporting and Dissemination**

The monthly Activity Reports were informative documents which likely helped to support attention to ongoing data collection and analysis. The reflection found in “lessons learned” attests to thoughtful ongoing monitoring. The monthly Activity Reports also document a variety of presentation and dissemination activities which OFE SOC staff had undertaken since the last external review.

Feedback on drafts of the Final SOC Report January 2010 resulted in changes to the document including the:

- ◆ Revision of certain paragraphs in the Final Report that reflected the initial proposal rather than the reality of the project,
- ◆ Revision of certain paragraphs and the addition of others to clarify meaning,
- ◆ Movement of certain descriptive sub-sections to ensure logical flow for the reader,
- ◆ Addition of graphs to illustrate differences (key findings) between Phase I Study group, Phase I Control group, and Stage II participants,
- ◆ Movement of certain tables into the Appendices and re-ordering of the Appendices,
- ◆ Inclusion of a Conclusions section that discusses the primary lessons learned, the groups that benefited the most and the implications for agencies wishing to replicate the use of SOC/MI.

## E. In Conclusion

Overall, it can be concluded that the SOC research project has been thoughtfully - and rigorously - designed and implemented. Data have been appropriately collected and analyzed. The results presented are credible, consistently showing the impact of the SOC/MI intervention. Attention has been paid to using diverse opportunities for dissemination.

The project has been flexible when required. The change of design for Phase II addressed ethical concerns and demonstrated the effectiveness of the approach in a “real world” environment without the use of stipends of the potential Hawthorne effect of a special “study” group.

Attention was paid to the issues and recommendations raised in the 2008 and 2009 External Reviews, as well as to the lessons learned from ongoing internal monitoring. Adjustments to program activities were made as a result, thus addressing service gaps or issues as they arose.

As an innovative project with a strong research base, SOC provides valuable information to those working in the employment development field. As well, SOC represents a model for funders showing the value of investing in pilot projects with a strong research component that can produce credible evidence of project success.