DEVELOPING THE OPENING STATEMENT

An opening statement is used to start the initial group discussion after people have taken their seats.

Thinking Segment (you need to tune into the members' experience entering group):
- What are the members' experiences as they enter the group?
- What are the most critical concerns?

Welcome Segment (you need to welcome the members and affirm their presence):
- **Basic welcome.** You want to start somewhere so a basic welcome starts the ball rolling (e.g., I am glad you came in…)
- **Commonality-focus.** Often you want to get a common issue on the table to start the inter-member identification process (e.g., I have met with all of you and was struck that everyone of you has had significant changes in the last few months…)

Set Up Segment (you need to help the members get focused in the room):
- **Normalized reactions** gets common reactions on the table that members may be experiencing. This is useful to promote a feeling of being understood. It may also create a shared experience that will promote identification (e.g., many people are nervous when they first come to group…)
- **Personalized reactions** gets specific, known member concerns on the table right away. This approach is useful when you know there are specific concerns that the members have that may interfere with successful service (e.g., I know you all have had police messing with you and that often makes people want to clam up when they come to a group……)

Table Setting Segment (you need to get the most critical issues on the table to set a tone):
- **Stating the obvious.** It helps to get obvious and unmistakable concerns on the table. This is useful when there are know potential problems with engagement (e.g., some of you are probably here because you think it will be better than…).
- **Normalizing concerns.** It is useful to get normal concerns on the table quickly. This eases the common anxiety of getting started (e.g., most people are not sure whether or not they want to be in a group like this…)
- **Seeding the commonalities**. It is sometimes useful to put the commonalities on the table so members can begin to explore them early (e.g., I know that all of you are here because the judge insisted that you get treatment…)
- **Identifying threats to success.** If there are probable concerns it helps to get them on the table right away especially if the members are not likely to express then and they might interfere with group development (e.g., Sometimes people think they can just put in their time and go back to doing what they used to do. That will really mess things up…)
- **Identifying elements for success.** If there are threats make sure you follow it up with a discussion of what can happen that is good and how the group can make that happen (e.g., if people are able to share their stories and help each other, you will be able to make important changes that make your life better…)

Throwing the Ball Segment (you need to get the group to respond to what's on the table):
- **General directive** open it up for the group to share their experience entering group and any concerns about service (e.g., what concerns do people have about coming in here today)
- **Focused directive** builds on the material on the table up focus discussion (e.g., share among yourselves and identify who forced you to come in…)