**Riverbend City: Social Cognition in the Workplace**

Introduction: Welcome to Riverbend City

Expository Text:

Tim Gunderson, a case management supervisor for Riverbend Senior Services, is unhappy with the performance of one of his direct reports, case manager Jamie Stone. Tim has received consistently negative feedback from clients about Jamie. Additionally, Jamie frequently arrives late and she is often late with paperwork. Tim is now working with the human resources office to create a performance improvement plan for Jamie.

Instructional Text:

Understanding the complex nature of social cognition-how people think and feel about one another-can help us better understand our own prejudices and behaviors as well as those of the people we encounter. As you move through this mission, consider how self-concept, self-esteem, and other elements of self are being expressed by the various individuals. You will have an opportunity in your course to discuss your observations.

Characters in this Mission:

•Bruce Greenberg, Riverbend City Resident

•Shirley Greenberg, Riverbend City Resident

•Tim Gunderson, Supervisor, Case Management

•April Nguyen, Case Manager

•Jamie Stone, Case Manager

•Jeff Taylor, Human Resources Director

Scene 1: Rondo Neighborhood, Riverbend Senior Services

Expository Text: Case management supervisor Tim Gunderson meets with RSS Human Resources Director Jeff Taylor to discuss the proposed performance improvement plan for Jamie Stone.

Instructional Prompt: Click on the highlighted characters.

Dialogue 01: Tim expresses his frustration with Jamie.

**TIM**:

Jeff, I've got to tell you, I don't see the point in creating a performance improvement plan for Jamie. I've given her a ridiculous amount of feedback on her performance, and it never changes. Frankly, I feel we have ample grounds to let her go. A performance improvement plan is just a formality that's putting off the inevitable.

**JEFF:**

I'm sorry you feel that way, Tim. I know you're frustrated with Jamie.

**TIM:**

She just doesn't get it, Jeff. We get feedback all the time from clients that she doesn't listen. Last week we received another request from a client for a different case manager. I have talked to her over and over again about this, and nothing changes. And the late paperwork is inexcusable for any employee-not to mention that she's late to work all the time and misses meetings.

**JEFF**:

Tim, I know this is a difficult situation. I appreciate all the work you've put in to trying to help Jamie improve her performance. But I do want to emphasize the importance of creating a strong performance improvement plan for Jamie-and for taking the performance improvement plan seriously.

**TIM:**

I know. We could get sued if we don't give her a chance to improve.

**JEFF**:

Well, yes, the performance improvement plan exists in part because of legal concerns. But it's more than that. We've invested in Jamie as an employee, and from a cost and resource perspective, it doesn't make sense for us to abandon that investment without trying to make things work.

**TIM**:

Well, that's a good point.

JEFF:

Also, perhaps more importantly, we want to be fair. We probably do have grounds to fire her immediately, but why would we want to do that without giving her a genuine opportunity to learn from her mistakes and improve? This is a nonprofit organization. Our mission is to help people, and that extends to our employees.

**TIM:**

That's true. I'm sorry, Jeff. I don't want to be a tyrant, and I do want to help Jamie. I'm just very frustrated.

**JEFF:**

I understand completely, Tim. Really I do. But can we agree to put some effort into creating a solid performance improvement plan that gives Jamie a real chance at success? PIPs don't work if the supervisor sees them as just a formality. If Jamie senses that the PIP is a death sentence, she's never going to improve.

**TIM:**

You're right, Jeff. I'll give it my best shot. But I'd appreciate your guidance on this. I've never created a performance improvement plan before.

**JEFF:**

Absolutely. I'm happy to help.

Dialogue 02: Jeff discusses the characteristics of a strong PIP.

**JEFF:**

One of the most important things about a PIP is that it needs to define specific, attainable goals. Remember that old S.M.A.R.T. goals acronym?

**TIM:**

Yeah, that was hammered into my head in a bunch of my classes. Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-Bound.

**JEFF:**

I know that model gets overused sometimes, but I've found it's very useful for helping someone set goals. For starters, "specific" is very important here. We can't just tell Jamie that she needs to improve her communication with clients. We need to define clearly what that means.

**TIM:**

And we need to ask for results that are measurable, right? Like that we need to see a certain percentage of improvement in her client feedback.

**JEFF:**

Exactly. And I think the "attainable" attribute in the S.M.A.R.T model is especially important. We have to give Jamie goals she has the ability to meet. And part of making these goals more attainable is hooking her up with the right resources. This might mean more training, or having her shadow a more experienced case worker.

**TIM:**

Shadowing sounds like a good idea.

**JEFF:**

We should definitely talk to her about that. We also need to make sure the goals are realistic in that we're not asking her to do something that's technically attainable, but not realistic. And we need to make sure this is time-bound by setting a reasonable deadline for completing these goals.

**TIM:**

That's good advice, Jeff. Anything else I should know?

**JEFF:**

Well, another important part of a performance improvement plan is that it needs to be collaborative. Jamie will feel more empowered to make changes if she has extensive input into what these changes should be. And be sure to listen to any concerns she has and take them seriously. Have you talked to her about why she comes to work late?

**TIM:**

Her excuse is that she's a busy single mom. I understand that, but we have early morning meetings to accommodate everyone's case management schedules. It's not fair to the other employees that they're here on time and she isn't.

**JEFF:**

Well, let's talk to her about that. She does need to be at these meetings. But maybe there are some reasonable accommodations we can make.

**Scene 2**: Rondo Neighborhood, Riverbend Senior Services

Expository Text: Later, Tim and Jeff both meet with Jamie to tell her that she's being placed on a performance improvement plan-and to discuss the content of the plan.

Instructional Prompt: Click on the highlighted characters.

**Dialogue 03:** Tim breaks the news to Jamie.

**TIM**:

Hi, Jamie, Thank you for meeting with us.

**JAMIE:**

Oh my God, Tim. I'm freaking out. What's going on?

**TIM**:

Jamie, as you know, we've been having conversations about your performance. You've received consistently negative feedback from clients. You've also been turning in your paperwork late.

**JAMIE:**

Oh my God. Are you firing me?

**TIM:**

No, Jamie. We're putting you on a performance improvement plan.

**JAMIE:**

A performance improvement plan?

**TIM:**

Yes, Jamie. A performance improvement plan is a set of goals that we're going to establish to help get you on the right track towards success.

**JAMIE (tearfully):**

I know what a PIP is. Look, you don't have to go through the motions, OK? This is just something employers do so they don't get in trouble. I really need this job and I don't want to leave, but if you're going to fire me, just-I'd rather just get it over with.

**JEFF:**

Jamie, I assure you we're not just going through the motions. We're here to work with you to come up with a set of attainable goals for improvement. We genuinely want to help you meet these goals so you can be a successful employee here at Riverbend Senior Services.

**JAMIE:**

Thank you, Jeff. But I don't think Tim feels that way.

**TIM:**

That's not true, Jamie. I want to help you.

**JAMIE (continues to be tearful):**

I don't get that feeling from you at all. You're always telling me that I need to listen to my clients, but you never listen to me.

**TIM:**

Jamie, I'm sorry you feel that way. We've been having weekly meetings and I've been trying to communicate my expectations as clearly as I can.

**JAMIE:**

You communicate your expectations, but you never listen to what I have to say. I know that I'm late a lot, and I tell you that I'm doing my best to get here on time after I take my kids to school. But you've got a wife who stays at home with your kids and you totally don't get it.

**TIM (gets a little upset):**

Jamie, my home situation isn't relevant here.

**JAMIE:**

And you never tell me what I need to do to improve. You just keep saying I need to listen better. What does that mean? I'm trying really hard, and I'm totally frustrated because I have no idea what to do.

**JEFF:**

Jamie, please. I know this is upsetting for you. Nobody likes to hear that they're being put on a PIP. Why don't you get yourself a cup of coffee, calm yourself down, and come back in a little while? Then we can talk about coming up with an action plan that includes clear direction to help you improve.

**JAMIE (pause and sigh):**

Jeff, Tim, I am so sorry. I shouldn't have reacted like I did. This is totally unprofessional of me.

**JEFF:**

I completely understand, Jamie. You're not the first person to get upset in a situation like this. And we do want to hear about your child care situation and anything else that's affecting your ability to succeed. Why don't you take a break, and come back when you feel more composed?

Dialogue 04: After Jamie returns, Jeff asks Jamie about her communication with clients.

**JEFF:**

Jamie, let's talk about your client feedback. Some of your clients feel that you propose solutions to their problems without listening carefully enough to their needs. What do you think is going on here?

**JAMIE:**

I don't know. I thought things were getting better. I really like older people and I want them to get the services they need. But somehow I'm not conveying that to them, and I don't understand why.

**TIM:**

That sounds like a pretty good assessment of what's going on.

**JAMIE:**

But I don't understand how to fix that. And I really want to.

**JEFF:**

Jamie, what do you do if you have a question about something that's happened with a client? Do you ask Tim?

**JAMIE:**

Sometimes. But usually I talk to the case workers who have more experience than me. It really helps to hear how they would handle situations. Actually, I think it's been more helpful than the formal training I got when I started.

**JEFF:**

It sounds like you're hungry for some mentorship.

**JAMIE:**

Yeah! That's exactly the word for it. But everyone's so busy and I don't want to bother them with too many questions. Like, I love talking to April because she's got lots of experience and she's so nice. But she's got a heavy case load.

**TIM:**

Jamie, how would you feel about shadowing a more experienced case worker?

**JAMIE:**

That would be awesome. I think that would really help me.

**TIM:**

I don't know if April is available. But I can definitely arrange a shadow experience for you.

Dialogue 05: Jamie discusses her issues with tardiness and late paperwork.

**JAMIE:**

I know it's a problem when I come in late. I really try to avoid it. But you've got to understand, it's hard for me to get here on time when I have six-year-old twins to get to school. We live all the way in Eden Grove, and if there's a lot of traffic, I'm late. Plus I have sole custody of Megan and Marisa during the week, so if one of them is sick, I have to make arrangements for my mom to come from half an hour away to watch her.

**TIM:**

Look, I understand you've got a big burden at home, Jamie. But we need you here at work on time. You've been late to the last two team meetings.

**JAMIE:**

Do they have to be so early?

**TIM:**

They have to be early to accommodate everyone's case management schedules.

**JAMIE**:

But that doesn't accommodate my schedule.

**JEFF:**

I think this is one area where we can find a compromise. Tim, would you be willing to help Jamie work out a more flexible schedule?

**TIM:**

Well, maybe. But I'm also concerned about being fair to my other direct reports. Jamie, if I make special considerations for your schedule, other employees may see that as playing favorites. As a supervisor, fairness is extremely important to me. It's not fair if everyone else is expected to be at early morning meetings and you're not.

**JEFF:**

Let's talk about this later, Tim. I think we can work something out. In the meantime, let's talk about paperwork. Jamie, you've been having problems filing your paperwork in a timely manner. What's going on with this?

**JAMIE:**

I don't know. I really do try. But we have so many tasks to complete, and I'm just not great with time management.

**JEFF:**

I certainly can relate to that. Paperwork is a nightmare, and it piles up fast. Do you have a system for organizing your papers?

**JAMIE:**

Not a very good one. I've never had a job like this where I had so many things to organize. I waste a lot of time looking for things.

**JEFF**:

Why don't we ask Keisha to help you out? She's the most organized office manager I've ever known.

**JAMIE**:

That would be great.

**Scene 3: Rondo Neighborhood, Greenberg Home**

Expository Text: April Nguyen, an experienced case worker, enthusiastically agrees to be Jamie's mentor. As part of this mentorship, Jamie will be shadowing April as she visits clients. On the first shadowing visit, April and Jamie meet with client Shirley Greenberg, along with Shirley's son Bruce.

Instructional Prompt: Click on the highlighted characters.

**Dialogue 06: April begins the meeting.**

**APRIL:**

Mrs. Greenberg, I've brought Jamie Stone here with me. She's another case worker at RSS. Jamie, this is my client, Mrs. Greenberg. And this is her son Bruce.

**SHIRLEY:**

Nice to meet you, Jamie.

**APRIL:**

Bruce, I'm so glad you came to our meeting today. What's on your mind?

**SHIRLEY:**

My son here wants me to move to assisted living.

**BRUCE (sighs):**

My mother and I are having a disagreement. Since my father died, I've been worried sick about her being by herself. There's a wonderful Jewish assisted living facility blocks away from my house.

**JAMIE:**

Do you mean Cedar Place?

**BRUCE:**

Yes. Cedar Place would be perfect for Mom.

**JAMIE:**

Cedar Place is an excellent facility.

**SHIRLEY:**

Sheldon and I lived in this house for almost 60 years. This is my home and I'm not going anywhere.

**BRUCE:**

Mom, you're all alone out here and I know for a fact that you're depressed. Terri and I live on the other side of town, and there's not a tight-knit Jewish community here the way there used to be. Wouldn't you rather be in a nice apartment with lots of Jewish neighbors?

**SHIRLEY:**

I want to be in my own home. I have plenty of Jewish community at the synagogue.

**BRUCE:**

Which you have to drive to. My mother's driving isn't what it used to be. I'm afraid to get in a car with her.

**SHIRLEY:**

You're exaggerating!

**BRUCE:**

And Mom, wouldn't you like someone there if you have an emergency? Mom fell last year and broke her finger, and my fortunately my father was there to take her to the hospital. But what if she falls again? And she has sleep apnea. If she were in assisted living, someone could check up on her to make sure she's not having breathing problems.

**SHIRLEY:**

Oy, Bruce, stop being a nudnik! I take medication for my sleep apnea and it's under control.

Stop talking about me like I'm not in the room, and stop treating me like a child!

**Dialogue 07: Bruce expresses concern about his mother's** driving.

**BRUCE:**

Mom, one of the main reasons I want you in Cedar Place is your driving. I don't think you realize how bad you've become. At Cedar Place they have transportation services. Plus Terri and I are a few blocks away, so we can drive you around.

**SHIRLEY:**

Bruce, stop nudjing me about my driving. I know I don't drive as well as I used to, but I never go very far. I don't want to have to call you and Terri every time I need to run a little errand.

**JAMIE:**

You know, Mrs. Greenberg, I bet you'd be eligible for Metro Transport. That's a van service that helps elderly people run errands and get around the city. That way, you wouldn't have to drive anymore, but you could still live at home.

**BRUCE:**

That's a great idea.

**JAMIE:**

Why don't we get you some more information?

**BRUCE:**

Great!.

**SHIRLEY:**

No! I'm not ready for Metro Transport. I'm perfectly capable of getting into my own car and driving to the hairdresser all by myself.

**APRIL:**

Mrs. Greenberg, I have another suggestion. How would you feel about a driving refresher course? The AARP has an excellent driver safety program designed especially for senior citizens.

**SHIRLEY:**

Oh. I didn't know they had classes like that.

**BRUCE:**

Me neither. That sounds like a good idea.

**SHIRLEY:**

I bet a class like that would help me feel more confident when I drive. I would definitely be interested.

**APRIL:**

Oh good, Mrs. Greenberg! I can help you get enrolled.

Dialogue 08: Jamie suggests that Mrs. Greenberg take a look at the assisted living facility.

**BRUCE:**

It seems like everyone has good things to say about Cedar Place.

**JAMIE**:

It's terrific. The staff is top notch and the apartments are beautiful. And there's all kinds of programming for seniors-educational programming, water aerobicsÃ‰

**BRUCE:**

Mom, you love water aerobics.

**JAMIE:**

I know a few people on staff there. Why don't I arrange a tour for you?

**BRUCE:**

Sounds great!

**SHIRLEY:**

What? No...no! I don't want a tour and I don't care about water aerobics. I want to stay in my home!

**APRIL:**

Mrs. Greenberg, it's pretty clear to me that assisted living isn't something you want. Why don't we talk about some of the programs we offer that will help make things easier for you in your home? Bruce, I know you're concerned, and I think we have some services for your mother that will help put your mind at ease.

**SHIRLEY**:

Thank you, April.

**Scene 4: Rondo Neighborhood, LaVonne's Cafe**

Expository Text: After meeting with the Greenbergs, April and Jamie have lunch at LaVonne's Cafe and discuss the interaction.

**Instructional Prompt: Click on the highlighted characters.**

**Dialogue 09: April and Jamie debrief.**

APRIL:

So now we've had our first shadowing session, Jamie. What are your thoughts so far?

**JAMIE:**

I learned a lot from watching you interact with the Greenbergs. I could definitely see how much better Mrs. Greenberg reacted to you than me-because you listened better.

**APRIL**:

Well, it takes practice. I've been doing this for a long time. I can see that you really wanted to help Mrs. Greenberg, and that you were using problem solving skills to look for helpful solutions.

**JAMIE:**

Well, I guess I get frustrated sometimes. I know she said she didn't want to move to an assisted living facility. But the more I listened, the more I thought that Cedar Place would be the perfect place for her.

**APRIL:**

You may be right. If she would choose to move to Cedar Place, she might be very happy. But what Mrs. Greenberg wants is to stay in her home. We have to respect her wishes.

**JAMIE:**

I know. I messed up with the driving thing, too. I just know that there's so many accidents involving older drivers. Metro Transport seemed like such a good suggestion-until it came out of my mouth.

**APRIL:**

I know where you're coming from, Jamie. You think of solutions and you get excited. Sometimes it helps just to let the clients talk for awhile before offering possible solutions. Then you have time to listen and to process ideas.

**JAMIE:**

That's really good advice, April! I can't tell you how much I appreciate having the opportunity to shadow you.

**APRIL:**

It's my pleasure, Jamie. I know this is a challenging job, and I'm always happy to help.

**Mission Summary**

Congratulations. You have completed the Social Cognition in the Workplace Mission.

Consider the interactions between the various characters. How might their self-concept, social perception, attributions, attitudes, and even stereotypes or prejudices have affected the choices they were making?

**Summary Document Content**

**HS8413 - Social Cognition in the Workplace Mission**

In this mission, supervisor Tim Gunderson was eager to fire case worker Jamie Stone. Jamie has received consistent feedback from her clients that she does not listen. She has also been frequently late for work and late to turn in paperwork. Human resources director Jeff Taylor told Tim that it's important to write a strong performance improvement plan for Jamie to give her a genuine opportunity to learn from her mistakes and improve her job performance. Jamie was very upset when she learned that she was being placed on a PIP, but when she calmed down, Tim and Jeff helped her come up with an action plan for improvement. Part of her plan was to shadow April Nguyen, a senior case worker. Jamie shadowed April as she visited Shirley Greenberg, an elderly woman whose son wanted her to move to an assisted living facility. At the visit, Jamie's inclination was to side with the son, which upset Mrs. Greenberg. April reacted more appropriately by listening carefully to Mrs. Greenberg and offering suggestions that were in line with Mrs. Greenberg's wishes. By shadowing April, Jamie effectively observed how to communicate better with her clients.

**Learning Outcomes:**

A performance improvement plan is useful tools for helping employees develop an action plan. When designing a set of goals on a PIP, employers need to make sure their goals follow the S.M.A.R.T. model; goals need to be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-bound. As seen in this mission, shadowing can be used to help employees observe effective performance strategies. This mission aligns with the following course competency: Evaluate organizational policies and practices in relationship to culture and environment of the organization.