ROLE PLAY #1: Engaging a Mandated, Reluctant Client

**Counselor:** So Gary, my name is David and it's nice to see you here. I have had a chance to take a look at your file and read a little bit about the basics of why you’ve been sent to this alcohol and drug clinic but I'd love to hear from you in your own words about some of the details around all that.

**Gary**: You know if you read my file you know what’s there, I don't even know what's in that file and you know, beside that I'm here, I'm fulfilling why I'm supposed to be here and three sessions and fine.

**Counselor:** Well, I can tell you what I read that there was an incident that involved some kind of an altercation in a bar that I think a windshield got broken after this altercation in the bar, something about resisting arrest, and then your probation officer managed to work some kind of a deal around if you come for three sessions looking at some of your alcohol and drug stuff and talking about this you could get out of doing some jail time.

**Gary**: I got to tell you that that's not what was told to me.

**Counselor**: Okay.

**Gary**: They said you come, you show up, you know, and so I'm here.

**Counselor**: Okay, so they told you had to come, they told you had to show up, and I can certainly be helpful with letting them know that you show up so I'd be happy to do that for you, and given that you’re going to come, it would be helpful to maybe do something productive with the time, you know? So for starters I'd love to hear some of your story about, or some of your explanation about, what actually the events were.

**Gary**: Well you know, you say you'd love to hear. Yeah. But, you know, I wouldn't love to talk about it and so you know, I'm here, you’ll sign off for me, and we'll be fine.

**Counselor**: I would be happy to sign off for you and I'd really like to hear about some of the details. And I don't want to get into a power struggle with you about that too so I'm wondering if there is some way I can ask the question.

**Gary**: Except I don't have any power here.

**Counselor**: And that would really be hard to have somebody else kind of pushing you in.

**Gary**: You know, to be honest, you know, you are a guy, you know, I don't have a file on you but I wonder how you would feel if, you know, that you were hanging out with some friends after work having a few beers and some guy, you know, who is at the bar turns around and you know, makes a gay comment in your direction. I mean, you know, I don't know how you’d feel.

**Counselor**: Well, I’d feel a couple things. One, I’d feel it wasn't fair and I’d feel angry and ripped off. So specifically, what happened?

**Gary**: Well you know, I don't have to go into those details but I've got to tell you, having that guy say that the front of my friends out of nowhere, you know, and you know, and I didn't do anything in that bar.

**Counselor**: Yeah, that stinks.

**Gary**: And I don't know where you got the rest of that information anyway because it wasn't what I saw.

**Counselor**: What piece?

**Gary**: Resisting arrest, that’s not, that's not the way I saw it. I mean really, so. And I don't remember anything like that. There's no recollection of any altercation with the cops, which is usually what resisting arrest is about after some kind of incident. Listen, you know, I was outside the bar not inside the bar. I think the cops may have come but you know, they approached me but that's not what I, what I recall.

**Counselor**: Yeah well, and sometimes, I mean especially if drugs and alcohol were involved, it might be difficult to remember.

**Gary:** There weren't any drugs.

**Counselor**: Okay. There weren't any drugs. All right, so there might, for whatever reason, be difficulty in recalling and perhaps part of the reason of being sent here was some kind of assumption of the part of your P.O. that maybe alcohol played some kind of a role in this arrest and I have no idea if that's the case or not. That is something we can take a look like over these three sessions however.

**Gary**: Well you know, people trying to tell me that, you know, like right now, that alcohol is an issue or whatever you want to call it, you know, I got called out, I did what I had to do, and that was it so.

**Counselor**: Well, from my perspective once again I have no idea if alcohol is an issue. That is something we can take a look at together. Additionally however, given that we are to spend three sessions together, there might be some ways that we could use the time productively together to, you know, work on whatever kinds of concerns you might have. Mostly to help you not be in this kind of situation again.

**Gary**: Well the best way for me really is to complete this requirement, you know, I've done a class before, completed it, over, and that will be it. So you know, productive for me means showing up.

**Counselor**: Okay, you show up, I can tell your P.O. that you show up. We've got the three sessions under control. Now we've got to figure out how to spend the time when we're here, you know. I mean a lot of times people want to talk about jobs or families or some kind of personal stuff going on or maybe what got you in jail in the first place. I'm not sure what it is that might be helpful for you.

**Gary**: Well, what would be helpful is we get through this, do my three sessions, and that's it.

**Counselor**: So okay, that's good. We'll do the three sessions. So what are we going to do about the time while we’re here?

**Gary**: That’s not for me to figure out.

**Counselor**: So you would prefer if I would do what during this hour?

**Gary**: You can do whatever you want to to be honest. Ask questions?

**Counselor**: I mean I suppose we could just sit here.

**Gary**: You know, all I know is, you know, a guy called me out. I was sitting there in front of my friends, you know, we were hanging out after work and yeah, I mean you know, I popped his windshield. You know what he did? I don't know how you’d feel.

**Counselor**: It would be lousy all the way around. First off, for some probation officer to be telling me what I had to do with my life and then secondly, I'd be concerned about whether or not it was gonna happen again. Whether I was going to wind up in jail again.

**Gary**: Well you don't think I can manage this?

**Counselor**: I have no idea. But it sounds like it might be some concern for you about whether not you can manage it.

**Gary**: Well you know I don't know, I don't know, and actually it doesn't matter. I mean I just, you know, I was there with my friends, you know, a guy makes a dumb-ass statement, and that was it.

**Counselor**: So for some people it's somebody says something wrong and they just go ballistic, other people then get, they plan something out, you know, they get kind of underhanded about it and I don't know, what's your way of getting back at people that do you wrong or say the wrong thing?

**Gary**: I mean I don't get back at them, you know, I just….

**Counselor**: Except for taking out a windshield. Yeah that was, you know, nobody else would have not done the same thing. And so that's what happened. I don't know if I’d do it again. Do you have the time?

**Counselor**: Yeah, you really want to get out of here. This is tough, tough having to be in a position of going someplace you don't want to go to because somebody else tells you got to go or you go to jail. That stinks. Giving other people control of your life like that. So the options are we can sit here in silence for the rest of the hour, or we could start to work on some strategies to keep you out of jail, or there might be other things going on in your life that you want to talk about. Jobs, I don't know if you've got work that you do or if you got a family situation that's good or you know, all these other parts of your life. I'd really like to find out about.

**Gary:** They didn't say I was going to have to talk about my brother. I mean, you said, they didn't say I had to talk about that. They didn't even say I had to talk.

**Counselor:** Yeah, and I'm not saying that you have to talk either. It's more of an invitation. And there is something about your brother, what’s on your mind?

**Gary:** That's between me and my family. It's hard even to think about. Yeah, I mean I went after work, had a few drinks, and I told you what happened.

**Counselor**: That was the thing in the bar and the windshield?

**Gary**: Yeah.

**Counselor**: Then there is a thing with your brother. So I can really help you with the probation officer. Keep him off your back as long as you do the three sessions and maybe there's some stuff here about your brother or other things that you want to talk about.

**Gary**: Well you know, I don't know how much time we have left but, you know, right now I'm one for three. I'm here for the first time.

**Counselor**: Well again as long as you stick it through the hour, this is the first time.

**Gary**: I mean, you know, what's in this for you?

**Counselor**: Well it's my job and I'd like to get to know who you are behind the shades, you know, I'd like to get to know who this guy is. As much as you want to tell me about. I don't want to push your comfort levels with that. I’d like to find out who you are. And I’d like to find out if maybe there’re some ways that we can help avoid this kind of trouble in the future.

**Gary**: You ever had a family member be at war?

**Counselor**: That's tough. He's there now?

**Gary:** Yeah. I don't know where he is.

**Counselor**: Not knowing is almost worse than anything else. Can you tell me about him?

**Gary**: We don't, you know, we don’t know where he is.

**Counselor**: Can you tell me about him as a person?

**Gary:** Not much to say.

**Counselor**: So it's interesting. Your brother's gone. He's at war and you don't know where he is. There’s probably all the anxiety about that and then there’s this incident that happens in this bar where people are calling you names. Is there any connection between any of this?

**Gary**: You know what he said in the last letter he sent? What people were saying about him in Iraq?

**Counselor:** No I don't but you're going to tell me.

**Gary**: All I know is I just wish that I could be shoulder to shoulder with him. Protect him. Shoulder to shoulder. Keep him out of harm’s way.

**Counselor**: Must be quite a guy.

**Gary**: Who Richie? Once when I was in sixth grade people were jumping on me, he just took, he just stepped right in.

**Counselor**: That's a very good thing for a brother to do. It would be great to be able to take care of him now and keep him out of….

**Gary**: And I'm gonna tell you something. Is this confidential?

**Counselor:** For you know, there are limits and we can talk about that but for the most part, yeah.

**Gary:** I know things about him that nobody else knows.

**Counselor**: And given that, you know, we've only got a few seconds more today because of, this is an abbreviated session. I'm hoping that those are the kinds of stuff that you can maybe tell me about next time around.

**Gary**: Well I didn't mean to say this much, I just want to be here.

**Counselor**: Well I appreciate how much you’ve actually shared already and as far as you want to take that next time around is good with me. But for these three sessions, as long as you come, I'll tell your P.O. that we're good. So thanks.

**FEEDBACK AND DEBRIEFING SESSION**

**David**: So thanks you all. Gary, you're a tough character and I'd love some feedback about how you all saw things go. Do you want to start?

**Jane**: Sure, you know, we really, you know, this was a challenging client. And we really saw you work really hard as, at trying to really refocus him and ensure that the focus was on him and his presenting concern and where you could go with it. I’m wondering how you made decisions in the moment as well as to which questions to respond to because we saw you respond to some and those tend to refocus back on him.

**David** : Well you're right, and there's some anxiety with that, you know, because I didn't want to get into a power struggle with Gary around not answering some of his direct questions but I also wanted to keep the focus on him and certainly sometimes clients will use questions of you, the counselor, in a way that shifts the attention away from them, kind of a defensive ploy, and so there were couple of things I chose to answer to try to avoid the power struggle but then not answering others as a way of, or just kind of not paying attention to them as a way of maintaining the focus where it belongs, which was on this very slippery character.

**Anne:** Well it sounded like you used a lot of silence too in that you just would just wait for a while.

**David**: Yeah, absolutely. And again, with that there's always kind of a question about how much silence is enough. Gary, I would imagine, was feeling pretty anxious as a new client even though there was this kind of hostile resistant demeanor, but behind that’s a lot of anxiety about what am I doing here, what am I supposed to do. So if it’s too much silence, my sense is that the anxiety would go through the ceiling and so somehow try to gauge just that right amount of silence. But as you said I was sometimes productive because he usually came up with something.

**Gary:** You know, we’ve, we in counseling sometimes use the term reluctance or resistance or defensive, I mean things that almost add to the us and them kind of quality to things. And what I was aware of was that I had a lot anxiety about, and fear about, what it meant to be in this situation again. So I was experiencing as somehow wanting to protect myself in a way that I needed to.

**Anne**: Well now I wonder if that was happening for you too as you have mentioned there is some anxiety. If I was sitting there I would have been really anxious and so I’m wondering how you managed.

**David**: Yeah, it can be scary. And on the one hand, acknowledging that there is some forces, some power, that drove Gary in here, not wanting to manipulate those and wanting us to be on an equal kind of footing, and yet the fact is he’s got to be here for three sessions and so how can we use the time productively. But the more I can uncouple from simply being one more person who’s gonna push Gary around, the more I can help deal with my own anxiety around it as well.

**Jane:** Now that was something that we certainly observed. You remained very calm throughout, you maintained a consistent tone of voice, and you were consistently trying to negotiate with them. How can we use this space in a way that works for you so that you don’t end up back in jail?

**Anne:** Yeah that was a great example of okay, you know, we’ll sign off on the papers. Now what are we going to do in this space with a lovely way, get that sort of get the power thing out of the way and then bring it to a choice of what he wanted to do.

**Gary**: David kept using words, you know, that I'd like to hear more and how can this be productive even with not wanting to be there. And I think actually his staying with that, repeating that a number of times, I got surprised myself when the story of my brother emerged, which I didn't think was going to happen.

**David:** And you have a sense that in that story there's a lot of material there and that over these next couple of sessions and maybe there would be more that there's a real sense of honor and nobility about Gary and this camaraderie, this alliance he feels with his brother that really could be built upon in this relationship between us.

**Anne**: And I just, you know, question about that, the sort of renegotiating the contract, if you will, or negotiating the contract but also there's a sense of needing to deal with the drinking and I’m wondering what you’re thinking about that?

**David:** Yeah absolutely, I mean it's a primary reason why Gary has come here is because there’s been an assessment that somebody thinks alcohol or drugs, Gary suggests maybe alcohol primarily, is a reason for coming, and while I might not want to lead with that as a counselor because that could really scare him off quickly or put up the defenses, that that has to be part of the future conversation that has to be dealt with on some level. But I don't have to be that one, kind of making an edict about it being a problem, that can be a mutual assessment process.

**Anne**: Perhaps when you talking about the brother.

**David**: Right. Thanks you all. That was great.