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**UNDERSTANDING GANG INVOLVED YOUTH AND
PREVENTING RECIDIVISM; DRAWING ON SPIRITUAL AND
COGNITIVE BEHAVIORIAL PERSPECTIVES**

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Project1

Running Head: Project Proposal; development of a psycho education assessment tool

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Project Off Streets/ Exit Strategies

Project Purpose

I am studying juvenile recidivism specifically the re-arrest rate; because I want to find out if comprehensive psycho-educational groups with cognitive behavior concepts and law related education curricula will reduce the re-arrest rates among adjudicated youth; on parole in (J.R.A.) Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration. This proposal is designed to demonstrate the need for this project. Project Off Streets and Exit Strategies are multi tier behavior clarification groups based on a humanistic model to change the behavior patterns, values, interpretation of events, and life outlook of individuals who are involved in street gangs.

The cognitive concepts of (REBT) Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy and Family Functional Therapy (FFT) combined with Existential themes will address and counteract the influences, nuances, appeal, and allurements of the gang lifestyle. Inappropriate behavior is viewed as a maladaptive attempt to cope with the demands of the environment... Appropriate behaviors are developed by helping the individual to recognize the need for change, and then helping that person to display better behavior choices. Clarification is needed before modification; adolescence is a stage of human development where change is pervasive and perplexing. These two groups will provide and instill cognitive and civic educational strategies, recommendations, and solutions for youth to effectively navigate themselves into compliance and assimilation as productive citizens. These pilot groups will be implemented in three northern counties of region three of (J.R.A) Snohomish, Skagit, and Whatcom counties.

Significance of Project

The adjudicated youth on parole in (J.R.A) Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration resort to cognitive distortions such as self centeredness; which manifest in behaviors according to his or her own views, expectations, needs, rights, immediate feelings, and desires to such an extent that the legitimate views of others are scarcely considered or are disregarded all together. They also blame others; blaming others is misattributing blame for one's harmful actions to outside sources, especially to a person, group, or a momentary aberration (one was drunk, high, in a bad mood, etc.), or misattributing blame for one's victimization or other misfortune to innocent others such as; the police stopped me because I'm African American, Arab, or Spanish. These individuals also engage in minimizing and mislabeling in which an individual depicts antisocial behavior as causing no real harm or as being acceptable or even admirable; such as drug dealers exploiting their community with poison and taggers defacing the community property with graffiti.

Juvenile delinquents find it acceptable to use cognitive distortions and, therefore use them frequently. These at risk youth tend to come from hostile and dysfunctional families in which very little emphasis is placed on structure and discipline. Their environments tend to be high in criticism, physical and emotional abuse, unnecessarily harsh punishments, and lack of positive parental influence. The significance of a comprehensive behavior clarification psycho education group will effectively counter act these irrational beliefs and behaviors; of the adjudicated youth on parole in the Juvenile Administration Rehabilitation system.

Project Design

Therapeutic Component

This project has two components one that is therapeutic and focuses on helping the individual participants make fundamental changes in their ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving; and a educational component that helps participants focus and learn specific coping skills. The core of the therapeutic orientation that will be used in these groups are in the theoretical application and concepts of (R.E.B.T) Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy. The A-B-C-D-E philosophy will be applied to client problems and issues around the central themes of the gang lifestyle. This sequential approach to problem solving will examine the A-B-C theory so participants can see how their irrational beliefs and values are casually linked to their emotional and behavioral issues. Members are taught that no matter how or where they originally acquired their irrational “shoulds,” “ought’s,” and “must,” they have the power now to began to surrender these dysfunctional beliefs. They will be shown ways to apply the A-B-C theory to practical problems they encounter in everyday life.

R.E.B.T. and most cognitive behavior therapy share educational material with clients. Group facilitators educated clients about the nature of their problems and how the group process is likely to proceed. Rather than lecturing to group members facilitators strive to ask participants how particular concepts apply to them. The primary theme with gang involved youth is their adversarial demeanor and non-compliant attitudes towards the governing authorities. This is the logic and rational for this integrated approach for a psycho-education project with a curriculum in law related education and civic virtue.

Civic Education Component

The law related educational curricula are designed by the National Crime Prevention Council in Washington D.C. and the Center for Civic Education. This component of the project will empower youth in the group with pro-social skills that effectively address the issues of juvenile delinquency, truancy, juvenile recidivism specifically re-arrest, and other parole violations. The project will instill an attitude of compliance and concepts of civic virtue. There will be a strong emphasis on individual responsibility and accountability for students to ascertain the knowledge and insight about being a citizen. These tasks will be accomplished through lesson plans that focus on civic life, the politics of gangs, and the role of government. The curricula will be taught through a combination of lectures, relevant case studies, role plays, small group exercises, and visual analysis activities. This methodology allows youth to participate in their own education; the group goal is to expose the group members to the legal, political, and various civic systems that govern our society.

There will be an enduring understanding achieved from this approach; as the group members will understand the origins of concepts in jurisprudence, learn how to draft legislation, learn the process in writing public officials, and learn guide lines for petitions for redress. The use of pre and post survey, and focus group observations documentation; in conjunction with the logic model evaluation is utilized to meet the proposed group outputs. The psycho education assessment process will determine which group youth will be placed in. Multiple perspectives are considered; the final project tool will evaluate both the environments and the individual's behavior within numerous social contexts.

Project Design Continued

Intervention Assessment Tool

Psycho educational interventions tend to be “packaged” the gang assessment tool that is the final product of this project will be instrumental in how professionals work with gang involved youth in the future. To the psycho educator, “One size fits all” is a lie in fashion, and education. Individualized approaches are necessary. All gang members are involved in the gang for their individual attraction, perception, and perceived benefits. They are also involved for their particular criminal interest; therefore some youth enjoy theft, some selling drugs, some enforcing gang rules through violence and intimidation, some for fellowship, and others just have a need to belong. The litanies of interest vary as well as their psychological adeptness. Therefore the gang assessment tool designed for this project will reflect individual scores from a comprehensive designed questionnaire relevant to the profiles of gang involved youth. The structural design of the tool is a demographic questionnaire with liker scale. There is an individual assessment piece and category assessment piece which covers six domains. The category assessments are self admission, association, judicial verification, family history, incarceration history, and community impact. The combined scores from both of these components will move the youth to an oral interview component to examine their responses in depth. The completion of this phase will place the youth on an assessment continuum that reflect their gang activities and psycho education intervention needs. There are four categories on the assessment continuum starting at age eight through twenty one +. The earlier the intervention the better chances there are to counteract the progression.

Assessment Tool Continued

Completion of the oral interview will place the youth in either “Off-Streets” which is primarily the prevention group or “Exit Strategies” the intervention group for the more immersed youth. The duration of the group is once a week for two hours for six weeks. After completion of the group curricula there is an outcome questionnaire piece of the tool youth will complete to measure group effectiveness. The next phase of the tool is a group exit oral interview for re-entry back to their school of origin. The youth will be interviewed by a panel consisting of a school resource officer, the group facilitator, parole officer, and school of origin disciplinarian or vice principal. The completion of this process will determine if the youth can return to their school of origin or if they need continued interventions from the project groups to address the concerns of the panel.

The last phase of the assessment tool is the quality measure follow up piece. The duration of follow up will be in six month intervals up to eighteen months. This component will examine all documented gang activity after completion of the group, inquiries about any new criminal charges or parole violations, and review school progress regarding attitude, compliance, and assimilation into the school system appropriately. This project will definitely plug the gaps in the school system; provide a real referral alternative to the school to address their gang issues instead of expulsion, reduce truancy, establish an accurate data collection system, improve communication between law enforcement, education and the community, and help students redeem themselves from the allurements and myths about the gang lifestyle. The tool is “teen friendly” and can be replicated by individual trained in the nuances of jurisprudence, and youth sub-cultures.

Ethical Considerations of Human Participant Standards

The participants of this project are youth on parole in the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration of region three. The participants are identified by their perspective parole counselor on a voluntary basis. They are not coerced or given any gratuities, rewards, or inducements to participate in the group project. The ethical considerations in this group project include but are not limited to; awareness of Washington State's laws regarding children, knowledge of the rules, regulations, policies and procedures of the school district; and ethical principals specific to counseling children, and awareness of the American Psychological Codes of Ethics. The department of Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration guide lines and Registered Codes of Washington (RCW's) will also cover the participants in the project. The initial group meeting will establish the norms of the group and address the issue of confidentiality. Project facilitators will go over the agencies policies about disclosure, release and consent forms and reassure group members the guidelines will be adhered to at all times. Group facilitators will have members sign contracts agreeing to the confidentiality expectations and impose some form of sanctions on those who break it. Data from the group project will be stored in a secure automated data collection and tracking system of the department of social and health services (DSHS). Members of the group may be subjected to scapegoat, group pressure, breaches of confidence, inappropriate reassurance, and hostile confrontation. Ways of reducing these risks include knowing members limits and respecting their requests, developing an invitational style as opposed to a pushy or dictatorial style. Members will also be encouraged to describe behavior rather than making judgments.

Annotated Bibliography

Allen, Juanita (1981). Games criminals play: How you can profit by knowing them.

First Edition

This book is a valuable composition of psychological patterns and behaviors that saturate the thinking patterns of youth incarcerated in the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration facilities in Washington State. The author provides definitions and terms used by incarcerated individuals in the prison and gang culture that interfere and impair the daily operational functions of the institution. The author discovered these various psychological tactics are due to the improvised environmental circumstances and poorly educated individuals that have learned how to cope with inadequate psychological and educational skills; to achieve their basic essentials. This book will be beneficial in the research to demonstrate the need for a comprehensive psycho educational project to challenge these thinking patterns and behaviors.

Bleecker, Wendy, Town, Randy (2008). Gangs in schools task force. Report to the Legislature; findings and recommendations.

This is a valuable report because I was personally involved for the past year with various stake holders to complete and submit this report to our state legislature. There were several key findings recommended in this report. We concluded that gang activity is on the rise in Washington State schools and communities. The presence of gang activity in the vicinity of schools poses a risk to staff and student safety and school security. There has been an escalation in intimidation of staff and students by gang members; this is one

of the most significant impacts that gangs have on the educational environment and the perception of school safety. We also found out that an effective anti-gang initiative requires the elements of prevention, intervention, and suppression. We agreed that schools do not have a uniformed approach to addressing gang activity or gang associated students; and administrators, teachers, and other school staff lack current information on gangs, gang indicators, and gang activity. We also agreed that most schools and communities lack the resources to address gang issues.

Corey, Gerald (2008). Theory and practice of group counseling

This text will be very instrumental in the research project as it is a multi-tier approach to group therapy. The contents have an inclusive psycho educational approach to addressing the issues of the topic the research is on; and prior experience to apply the various theoretical concepts and applications at City University with my class mates have demonstrated the efficacy of psycho- education. This text is rich in a variety of group formats that will accommodate the nuances that impact youth experiencing deficiencies in their cognitive and educational repertoire.

Greene, Ross, W. (2001). The explosive child; a new approach for understanding and parenting easily frustrated, chronically inflexible children. Second Edition.

This book is of value to the project because it will connect the gaps in early childhood rebellious children to the current issues impacting youth in their adolescent development stage. The non compliance and adversarial demeanor entrenched in the gang members psychological make up has it's origins in their early child hood experiences.

Steiner, Hans, & Yalom, Irvin, D. (1996). Treating adolescents; a volume in the jossey bass library of current clinical technique.

The value of this book in the research project will contribute a wealth of clinical technique directed and dedicated to frontline therapist. Teenagers with “Conduct Disorder” i.e. gang members, who refuse or fail individual therapy, may do better in teen groups. The author notes, though, that many times the problems they have with authority and bullying make them difficult group members. The prognosis for teenagers with conduct disorder might be presumed to be particularly poor. In some ways it is and other ways it is not. Only about twenty five percent of such teenagers go on to develop adult Antisocial Personality Disorder, which might be the worst long term outcome. This would continue to escalate the numbers of youth that go on into adult prisons and organized crime.

Robertson, Cliff, & Wallace, Harvey (1998). Introduction to criminology

This valuable resource will contribute an extensive perspective into the causation of adolescent criminal behaviors and divulge in the numerous theories of criminology that demonstrate how pervasive the criminal mind is; as well as providing clinical interventions in psycho education to effectively address the concerns. The categorical compilation of approaches; such as the classical approach, the positivist approach, and the sociological approach are just a few examples; in conjunction with psychological and psychiatric approaches that address the issues of crimes against persons, property crimes, special crimes, and concepts in victimology and punishment. The typology of offenders (gangs) will allow service professional to better understand these contributing factors.

Sims, Curtis. L. (2008). If you want to be cool, stay in school.

This book has value to the research project because the content demonstrates the direct correlation of lack of education and the impact it has on effective cognitive functioning. The author is also a colleague; and public speaker, that has provided youth in Snohomish County with valuable information about the detriments of poor psycho educational skills. The need to logically and rationally navigate one's way through society has a direct correlation to illiteracy, with core subjects in education, and poor critical thinking skills; which are paramount in youth that are gang involved. These individuals have no idea where education fit in their life development and prefer to embrace their personal circumstances as justifications for their anti social behavior.

Woolfolk. Anita (2004).Educational psychology, ninth edition

This resource examines the commitment teachers have for their students. They must deal with a wide range of student abilities and challenges: different attitudes, languages, different home lives, and different needs. Teachers also must understand their subjects and their thinking so well that they can spontaneously create new examples and explanations when students are confused. They must make the most abstract concepts, such as integrals, real and understandable for their particular students. The profile of gang involved youth not only bring these concerns to today's class rooms they are brought with enmity, violence, and family traditions of mistrust, anger, non-compliance and an adversarial demeanor. The educational venues have to include psycho educational concepts in the entire curricula with today's youth; in order to challenge and counteract these relentless behaviors of anarchy brought into today's educational venues.

McIntyre, T. (2006) What is psychoed? an overview

<http://www.behavioradvisor.com/PsychoEdModel.html>

Retrieved 1/9/09

This article is valuable to the research project because the psycho educational perspective and its practices while acknowledging the influences of past events on a student's psyche and behavior, do not dwell on them. Actions are dealt with in the present context. The psycho-educator does so in a caring, intensive, and realistic manner. She/He is supported by an environment that consistently enforces clear limits, and helps students to meet those expectations. She/He promotes change by helping the student to want it. The result for the student is better personal and social adjustment, prosocial behavior, self regulation of behavior, and good choice making. It is important to note that psycho educational interventions may not be appropriate for some students. Young children may lack the developmental prerequisites and cognitive ability to analyze situations and engage in self-reflection. Those students with severe cognitive impairments might also lack the mental capacity to benefit from psycho-educational interventions. I completely concur with this insight.

Baker, Brooklin, K. (2008). Department of psychology, Missouri Western State

University. Cognitive distortions among juvenile delinquents and non-

Delinquents. Retrieved: 1/9/09

The value of this article to the research project has a direct correlation to the irrational thinking patterns of gang involved youth. It appears from this study that the delinquent youth use cognitive distortions more, with the exception of the self-centered distortion.

It was found that overall, delinquent youth use more cognitive distortions than non-delinquent youth and non-delinquent youth have a higher self-esteem than delinquents. Juvenile delinquents use cognitive distortions to justify their unacceptable actions. These findings are similar to those found by Barriga and Gibbs in (1996). In order to improve this study, several changes could be made. For more compliance and honesty, the use of unfamiliar youth would be helpful. The youth used in this study were juveniles that the author worked with on a daily basis and were comfortable complaining and speaking freely of their opinion. If they had not known him, they probably would have been quieter and more reserved. Having a room that was quiet and free from distraction would make the testing of the youth much better. The presences of a telephone or non-participating people such as other students or teachers interrupt the subjects and get them off focus. Another improvement could be made when distributing the questionnaire. Instead of giving all questionnaires out at the same time, giving them individually would be better.

Plan for Peer Review

My selection of peers to review my thesis project was based on the three components of the project itself. I selected Karen Langer, Clinical Director of the Counseling Department at City University. Mrs. Langer also provides me with weekly supervision and consultation; as an intern in the clinic. She is extremely astute in theoretical applications and concepts that have been, and still are beneficial to my personal and professional growth as a counselor/therapist.

My second selection was Mr. Nick Clovsky, Program Manager 2, for region three of the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration (J.R.A.). Mr. Clovsky is an ardent and proficient designer of assessment tools and instruments on a local, state, and national level. He has developed data collection methods and outcome measurement tools for numerous youth populations; and is working closely with me in the development of my final project instrument. His knowledge of the population in J.R.A. and insight about the needs of the population, operational protocols of the administration; are crucial in helping me achieve this project. The third selection is Mrs. Cathy Hawes; she is the principal of the Northwest Regional Learning Center (NRLC) in Everett. Her academic achievements and perseverance to educate gang involved youth are paramount. She is currently working on her PhD in education. The three peers I have selected will be instrumental in guiding me to successfully address the clinical concerns, juvenile issues, and education component of my thesis project.

Timeline for the Project

The duration of the project will be six weeks; starting February 1st 2009. The classes will meet once a week for a two hour block, for six weeks. This pilot project will end the second week of March 2009. The final assessment tool will be completed the first of April 2009. The tool is currently being modified for normalcy; as the first three pilot groups provided new data that requires changes. This next pilot group will probably stabilize the instrument tentatively until the initiation of our next phase to use the tool. The tool and its efficacy will be assessed in March so I can utilize the results and developmental process for my final project.

