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# Turning Point Career Exploration

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“Turning Point Career Exploration”

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**Abstract:**

According to the 2016-2017 Community Action Plan, Monterey County has a youth homicide rate of 23.32 per 100,000 in population compared to the California average of 8.06 per 100,000 (Monterey County Action Plan, 2017). Due to unstable homes, *poverty*, *gang violence* and other traumatic past experiences *at-risk youth* are at a higher exposure to unhealthy life challenges. *Life-skills* lessons can provide an opportunity for this adolescents to become a positive asset to their communities. This capstone focuses on providing the guidance, support, encouragement and readiness for the youth to find employment and become successful. The project “Turning Point Career Exploration” was implemented by Turning Point, a non-profit agency in Monterey County which provides employment, vocational training, and related services for court involved *at risk youth* from ages 16-24. The intern created an 8 week curriculum for the participants to help them be placed in a job site, prepared for interviews and interview clothing was provided for the youth. After completing the project intern felt confident that the agency will be successful in guiding the youth to a positive life. Turning Point should continue with the curriculum, *workshops*, putting themselves out in the community to become a great resource for those adolescents going thru negative life experiences. The agency as well should continue to update the curriculum for the *workshops*, making the people involved in the agency are helping the participants, and sharing their ideas with other agencies to see who else can benefit from their services.

**Keywords:** *at-risk youth, life-skills, gang violence, poverty, workshops*

**I. Agency and Community Served:**

Turning Point in Monterey County is a public agency, which provides employment, vocational training, and related services for court involved at risk youth from ages 16-21. Their mission statement “To provide public benefit through helping people develop skills, motivation, and resources to become productive members of society; healthy in body, mind, and spirit” (Turning Point Handbook, 2016). Turning Point contracts with the Workforce Investment Board through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Monterey County Probation Department, Monterey County Community Foundation, and receives other grants and donations to provide employment development for court-involved youth. By receiving the grants and donations Turning Point continues the programs they currently operate with the youth. These programs help the youth gain skills and avoid future incarceration. The program provides comprehensive services such as: occupational assessment, life skills classes, pre-employment skills training, marketable work habits workshops, vocational training, work experience, unsubsidized employment placements, post-placement activities, and supportive services. By providing these services, Turning Point helps their intended target of at-risk youth. Many of them who wouldn’t qualify for jobs due to their criminal backgrounds however the agency gives them a hand with their job placement. The job placement is a huge success with the Monterey County youth. With the experience they receive in the work they are able to build the confidence to be successful community members. In their website Turning Point states that “this program is to motivate and support the target youth population to gain the skills, self-esteem, and the confidence they need to be accountable, competent, and responsible citizens of their communities” (Turning Point, n.d.). The statement shows that the “at-risk population” needs the continuation of grants and

donations to continue providing the services that will help them be successful community members.

The major programs or services Turning Point offers are: pre-employment, life-skills, transportation, case management, vocational skills and paid-work service. Supportive services included are gang intervention, career planning, drug and alcohol counseling, mental health, and anger management. The high need for these services and the positive outcomes of the youth in the Monterey County, are what keeps Turning Point successfully open. Turning Point with Silver Star help the youth who are dealing with poverty, understand of labor laws, and access education. Addressing poverty in the youth is the programs main priority. They offer the skills to make it stress-free for the teens to obtain an employment. Turning Point does not judge the teens and gives them the hope many people have taken away from them. The City of Salinas has a big problem with youth gang violence and the high percentage of teens living in poverty. Turning Point is a great source of empowerment for the youth and helping the community deal with issues of violence and poverty. With a focus on economic justice, the program helps teens start from the bottom and build themselves up. The program helps the youth make their own money, which provides the teens with the ability to help their families economically, this can mean a lot to this population. Turning Point is a great program were the teenagers do not feel obligated or punished. Instead, they want to better themselves, and the feeling of the community giving those jobs is greatly appreciated by them. In Monterey County Turning Point is run by Ray Banks MPA the Chief Executive Director, Pearl Sanchez the Program Director, Carmen Favila, Monterey County Probation, Silver Star Program and Rancho Cielo. Below is an organizational chart that provides the setup of the program.

## **II. Problem Definition, Issues, and Causes:**

To the country Monterey County is known as an agricultural jewel, the salad bowl of the capital of the world, but in the other hand to the residents they see Monterey County as one of the most violent counties in the state of California. The county with the most youth dealing with poverty, violence, homelessness, low education, culturally sensitive issues and death. The rate of at-risk youth in Monterey County is too high. What is at-risk youth? The National Center for School Engagement indicates the term “at-risk” youth typically implies a future with less than optimal outcomes. Youth is considered at-risk for many reasons in Monterey County, reasons many of the youth are at no fault, they are victims of the circumstances.

Monterey County has one of the highest rates of gang violence, homicide rates and teen gang involvement. The Californian Newspaper states that “Monterey County tops the state for the highest homicide victimization rate for ages 10 to 24, according to an annual study by the Violence Policy Center” (Chelcey Adami, 2015). Gang warfare, street shootings, increase of drugs, binge drinking, make it tough for the youth in the county. The tragic result is many youth are caught up in a dangerous lifestyle and place their life, and health at risk. Even with all this undesirable things happening in Monterey County, it is an expansive geographic and diversely populated region with 56.75% Hispanic/Latino origin. Monterey County is expected to see growth according to statistics, but at the same time we are seeing a decrease in our population of 0-17 year olds, which shows us the great need the youth is going through. According to the 2016 Kids Data child population numbers, Monterey County has one of the lowest youth population compared to other counties. Monterey County has 109,355 teen’s population with an overall 431,344 population, compared to Kern County who has a population of 258,383 of youth and an

overall county population of 839,631. This is just an example of how the youth in Monterey County is slowing decreasing compared to other counties in the state.

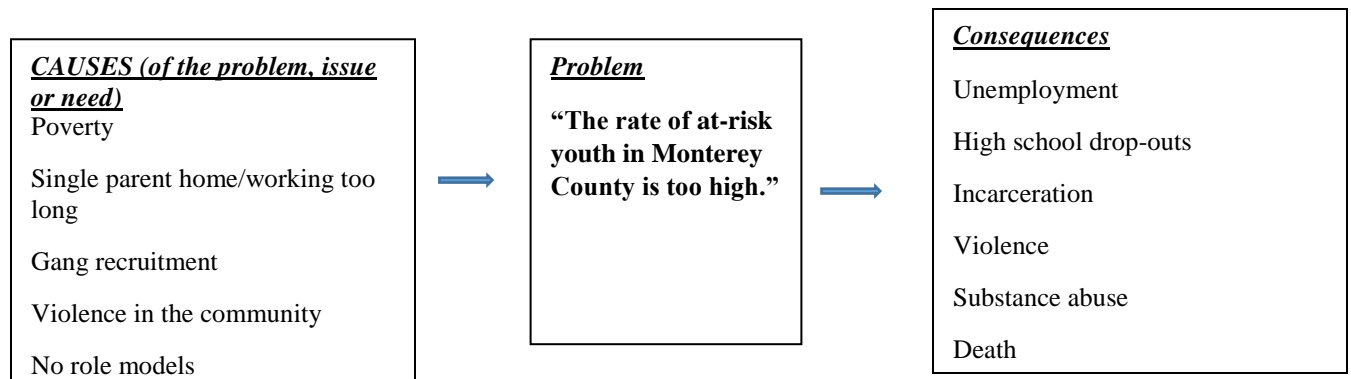
The causes for at-risk youth vary from poverty, single parent home, parents working too long, violence, no role models, and high density community/too many people at home. Lack of education and low education background is one of the primary reasons many teenagers in Monterey County are dealing with poverty. Majority of teens living in poverty come from backgrounds of families with no education at all. The Census of the United States shows that in Monterey County 17.9% of families lived below the poverty line in 2013. (Census, 2010) The Monterey County Health Department states that more than 1 in 5, 9th to 12th graders dropped out from school. Lochner (2004) emphasizes the role of education as a human capital investment that increases future legitimate work opportunities, which discourages participation in crime.

Another contributing cause is coming from unstable families. Many of the families in Monterey County are composed of grandparents who have responsibility for raising their own grandchildren under the age of 18. Many of the teenagers suffer emotional or behavioral issues from the absence of their parents. Parents either being in jail, drugs, death are some of the reasons why they grow up in unstable families. The teenagers also suffer from inadequate living conditions, bad communities or single parent homes. Unstable families also lead to the teens questioning their own value as a person, leading to depression or getting involved in delinquent activity. Many of the schools in the country have set stereo types of low income teens and portrayed them as failures or future criminals. The majority of teenagers living in unstable homes have no positive role models, so when the school teachers or counselors put them down they set them for failure. The problem is not in the adolescents not wanting to succeed is they do not have the resources to prepare themselves. A big issue in teens is also coming from homes where

income is such a big issue, they end up settling for jobs in agriculture or fast food due to the immediate need of some kind of income.

The biggest consequences of at-risk youth are unemployment, high school drop-outs, incarceration, violence, substance abuse, and death. Monterey County has one of the highest rates of gang violence, homicide rates and teen gang involvement. The shortage in after school programs is opening doors for the teenagers to join gangs and cause all these crimes against each other. Growing up in low income communities or government housing is the perfect setting for gang members to recruit the teenagers into the gang world. A lot of the teens coming from broken homes with pain in their hearts are the ones joining gangs to find a way to deal with the scars poverty has caused them. In America 40% (under 18) gang members equaling to 400,000 teenage gang members (Helping Gang Youth, 2015). Usually all gangs and street violence target or are known to be around low-income communities, opening the door to many teenagers living in poverty. Gangs also opens the doors to crime for many teens, making easy money due to many of them cannot obtain jobs due to their age. The majority of them at times have to help at home either with siblings or making ends meet to help the parent. For many of the adolescences gang members promise them income or a support many of them do not have at home. In Monterey County, the dangers the teenagers are facing at times are out of hands due to the fact there is plenty of wrong hands waiting to get the teens in the criminal system.

**Problem Model:**





### **III. Capstone Project Description:**

#### **Project Title:**

“Turning Point Career Exploration

#### **Project, Purpose and Justification:**

For the capstone project intern implemented a curriculum for Turning Point that would give guidance and readiness for the youth to find employment and become successful. Curriculum was named “Turning Point Career Exploration” which consisted of 8 week workshops that covered different subjects to get the youth aware with their future. The topics of the curriculum consisted of interest and skills inventory, skills and strengths exploration, exploring careers and setting career goals just to name a few. At the completion of the 8 weeks the youth would be placed in a job site and receive a certificate of completion. All youth enrolled in the Turning Point workshops were either required to attend per their probation officers or interested in employment. The reason the curriculum was needed was many of the previous youth participants in the workshops had decided to drop the program due to repetitive activities or outdated assignments. By implementing a curriculum Turning Point would get a higher number of students interested in participating in their workshops and a higher rate of completion of the work placement contracts. The agency was running workshops that were meant to get the youth participants ready for employment through workshops of career goals, interviewing role play, labor laws and job placement readiness. However, the materials being used were outdated or too long for the participants to find interest in doing. At Rancho Cielo many of the students were being expelled from their regular schools, truant students so being in a classroom setting for a long time was difficult for them. The understanding that many of the participants were coming from a classroom setting or lectures before the workshops was needed, due to the fact that was

one of the reasons the workshops were worsening. The implementation of the workshops with the needs of students would make workshops successful, there is times when you have to make adjustments to fit the clients you want to serve.

In the state of Pennsylvania, there is a program called JumpStart Success a career exploration and work-readiness program. The program has presented JSS successfully for more than 15 years in the Pittsburgh and Western PA area and to organization in other regions and states. (JumpStart Success, 2016) The program makes sure that participants are equipped with the core competencies associated with entry-level positions as well as the tools to navigate their individualized career plans. Even though their curriculum works for all socio-economic levels, it was designed for youth experiencing some of life's biggest challenges. Through the research intern was able to see this program helps youth with the same needs Turning Point anticipated to help in Monterey County. After reviewing JSS power points and brochures in their website, ideas to empower the youth and give them more of an opportunity to be successful in their road to success came to the table on how to make Turning Point workshops great.

After reviewing Turning Point curriculum or the activities that were being presented to the youth in their weekly workshops, the need to enhance the curriculum and bring a more up to date and successful curriculum was evident. The program had a high percentage of youth not completing the workshops, or the hours assigned to their work site and just the level of enthusiasm when showing up to the workshops was unpleasant. Many of them complained of being there, when at the site the students have the opportunity to sign up to go for a hike or on a bike ride or attend the workshops. The need was clear for the extra income, the youth were receiving from completing the work experience program but the interest to want to participate to get that extra help was missing. Mainly since the majority of the participants at Rancho Cielo

Continuation School are living below the poverty level. With the high level of complains intern received from the youth the need to create a curriculum that would benefit them and plant that seed of wanting to be successful came across. By building or creating workshops with ideas or suggestions coming from the participating youth, they would feel more open and eager to participate in the workshops. The youth participants would feel listened and their participation in the construction of the new curriculum made them feel welcomed and understood.

### **Project Implementation:**

The role of the intern during the implementation of the project was to create the new curriculum for the 8 week workshops and also conducting the workshops with the youth. The workshops took place at Rancho Cielo School through Turning Point the work placement program. Workshops were every Tuesday from 1:30pm to 2:40pm, in the conference room of the school. Workshops were conducted with 8-12 participants depending on the referrals by staff and the commitment of the students. Undergraduate conducted all the workshops with days having the TP staff shadowing and giving ideas on how the workshops were going. Turning Point staff also approved the materials that were being presented to the youth and made sure it was adequate for the organization mission with the youth. At the beginning of the 8 week workshops participants went thru an orientation where they signed documents to get them ready when the time of being placed at a work site approached, during the orientation participants as well signed an “agreement contract” where the students were hold accountable of completing the workshops to keep their jobs. In the past no contracts were signed and students would obtain a job and stop attending the workshops to gain the extra skills. During the orientation students also got an overview on what they would be learning when joining the workshops and the consequences of not following the rules of the workshops. For the 8 weeks there were different workshops that

consisted of skills inventory, work place safety, exploring careers, resume, banking, and at the end a wrap up ceremony with a certificate of completion. During the course of the workshops students who meet all the requirements to be employed would be placed in job placements of their choice, where they will be given hours to gain experience in the work place. Students have attended workshops where it explains to them the responsibilities of being an employee and knowing their rights as an employee. At the end students also took a survey to see what they thought of the new way the workshops were being instructed.

The workshops consisted of packets that discussed the topic of the week, they were as simple and possible but with valued information. The packets were printed with materials being provided by Turning Point, as well as the research being done in their computers when needed. Some of the challenges faced during the workshops was the assurance of all participants' completion of the 8 weeks, with this population many end up being incarcerated or kicked out of the programs, so for this students the completion survey at the end was not collected. At the end of the 8 weeks the survey asked on how they thought the workshops meet their goals or needs and if they would participate in a second phase of the workshops if available. With the surveys the agency would know how the first phase of the new curriculum worked, what went well and what needs to be changed. Students also had a small celebration at the end of the 8 weeks, where certificates were passed out to them and food to reward their achievement. The goal was to implement the new curriculum twice before the end of the fall 2017 semester, to be able to obtain results of the success of the workshops. As well, the agency and student wanted to make changes if needed to the first curriculum after the surveys came in from the students. Overall, the hope for a great result was desired since workshops were conducted with many of the changes asked by the youth participants of Turning Point.

### **Unexpected Circumstances:**

To make sure the implementation of the workshops develop into success there was a lot of work to be made with Turning Point. With the capstone project there were many questions unanswered to make it a success, addressing the problem and offering what was needed. Some of the questions unanswered at the beginning of the project were:

- How will participants or agency measure the success rate?
- What other services can we offer to make the new curriculum successful?
- How can we make the youth participants welcomed to the program?
- What was being done that made it less successful?
- What possible problems do I need to be aware of?
- What criteria would need to be in place for capstone to work?

To make sure all this steps or questions were answered and the implementation of the project was a success, the agency had to make the youth feel welcomed. By youth feeling listened, and well served the goal of the capstone project should have been completed. As well as ensuring the goals that were set by the youth during the workshops are accomplished or close to accomplished. Working with at-risk youth can have its difficulties, so a backup plan in advance was needed and the usage of the right words in case of an issues were needed. Also, the need of input of the youth, strategies to be successful workshops where they felt they were becoming those positive community members. Another option for the project was to be positive if any issues arise, to always come back with a solution, due to when working with this population patience is very short for many of them. Overall with all the solutions or ideas the project

became a success and Turning Point plus the youth achieved a positive view of the work world and their future careers.

#### **IV. Project Results:**

Through the creation of “Turning Point Career Exploration”, the agency objective was to get a higher completion rate of the worksite placement and the participation numbers to be higher. Turning Point as well wanted to get more participants to become a part of their agency to continue to get the grant to offer services to the Rancho Cielo site. The agency wanted the participants to want to complete the 100-200 hours they are given when they are placed in a business to complete their worksite job placement. The agency as well wanted to give the participants a better understanding of what to expect when they get a job, to learn about sexual harassment, banking, and skills needed to be good employees to name just a few of the topics reviewed in the workshops. The mission of the program is to help the youth reintegrate to society and being able to assist their families financially, as this is one of the biggest challenges they face.

The workshops were conducted every Tuesday for 8 weeks, for an hour. Agency had students sign in to keep track of the 8 hours required to complete the workshops and being placed in a site for employment. Student would do what she called “whip-arounds” and would go around the classroom to get ideas or any comments the students would have regarding the lesson being worked on that week. The going around the classroom, gave students an opportunity to go around and share their opinions on the certain topic we were talking about that week. It also opened that door for intern to build that connection with them and share examples or knowledge of the topic being worked on that week. Having a high attendance number in workshops it showed the improvement as the participants felt welcomed and were building confidence to

better themselves. At the beginning participants were given a post-test to see where they are in terms of understanding in the workplace skills and at the end intern created a survey on what they took away from the workshops. Overall the surveys were good and an excellent source to make changes in future workshops. Below is an image of the survey that was given to participants at the end of 8 weeks, to help the agency and mentor understand what went well and what could be improved in future workshops.

**TP** TURNING POINT OF CENTRAL CALIFORNIA  
LIFE SKILLS/EMPLOYMENT WORKSHOPS

1. Overall, how would you rate Life Skills/Employment Workshops?

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

2. How useful would you rate the material?

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

3. How engaging was the speaker at the workshops?

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

4. What was the single most valuable thing you learned at the workshops?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. How could future workshops be improved?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

SURVEY

## **Project Results**

Turning Point Career Exploration workshops was a success in bringing up the numbers of attendees and the full completion of the 8 weeks workshops. The group numbers remained high every Tuesday for the full 8 weeks. Working with this population there were few absences due to participants refusing to participate, incarceration or school related activities. Intern felt the students who participated took away the basic needs to be successful at their worksite and in any future job they might acquire. Students were engaged in the lessons that were being taught every Tuesday, were completing the assignments that were assigned that given week and the most important were participating in class discussions. As for placing students in worksites that part of the program hasn't been achieved, there were some issues with the grant and the disposition of the funds, so no participants have been placed in a site to work. This was a disappointment, for the reason that many of these students want that extra income and many of them participate to get that job, and many of them feel incompetent to go to the real world to ask for a job due to their criminal record. Intern felt that during the 8 weeks of workshops, the topic that went really well was the "Understanding the Workplace", which consisted of packets focusing in culture, safety hazards and learning of the workplace laws. Participants were intrigued to learn about the potential hazards they may encounter while working, intern provided a worksheet with different scenarios of hazards and students would then identified hazards. This activity showed the intern, how the participants enjoyed working together as a whole class and helped her understand the participants better. In the other hand the intern learned that the week of "Financial Management", didn't go as well as planned, however the concept was presented in the most understanding way. During this week's workshops the participants felt too overwhelm with all the information that banking can bring, as well as being able to understand their paychecks. Many of the participants



in the agency have never had a job so understating the state and federal taxes everyone has to pay was a challenge. During, the internship experience the intern reflected on some of the challenges and accomplishments she felt when working with this population. There was times when she felt overwhelm and asked herself “why such young adolescents feel unmotivated and just want to throw their life away in gang violence, drugs?”. Overall, the participants did a respectful job through the whole 8 weeks and really took away a lot of knowledge that a person in the working world needs. Intern felt that during the 8 weeks of workshops, herself plus participants really connected and worked well together to not only create an environment of learning but mutual respect was created.

#### **V. Personal Reflection:**

After completing the workshops at Turning Point, intern felt accomplished and with a valuable experience under her belt. Intern realized the hands-on experience gained through the internship was amazing and values the skills obtained that wouldn't be acquire in a classroom setting. The undergrad suggested the continuation of “Turning Point Career Exploration” in the agency but as well the continue revision of topics and material that is presented to the participants. The student also felt that the agency should have had a more open relationship of the grants that went into play with the job placement of the students and reasons on why they were not placed. Intern reflected, if agency wanted the numbers of participants to increase, they as well needed to communicate this information with interns, just so that interns don't feel like they are falsely presenting information or giving false hopes to participants. Another shared recommendation for agency is they should integrate at least 2 interns to work on projects together through the semesters, however she as well understands the space limit the agency deals with.

Through the workshops the intern envisioned to target the social issue the participants were exposed to such as violence and drugs. With the workshops the student wanted bring awareness to the participants and decrease the existence of the social problem. Yes, the intern realized the problem still has a lot of space for improvement, and hopes future interns continue the guidance to help the at-risk youth become positive members of their communities. Intern feels the need for more partnerships between different agencies and Turning Point that provide services for this population is needed to help the participants stay on a positive path. Future interns should come with an encouraging mindset and bring confidence, patience and thick skin. Working with at-risk youth is not easy, but it becomes a rewarding feeling being able to help the youth, who are victims of circumstances they are brought to. On the other hand, student felt the agency's mission of "To provide public benefit through helping people develop skills, motivation, and resources to become productive members of society; healthy in body, mind, and spirit" was accomplished throughout her curriculum and hopes future interns will do as she did (Turning Point Handbook, 2016). To conclude, intern is grateful with agency, mentors and CHHS program on giving her the opportunity to advocate and teach young adolescents information that will guide them in a positive way on their journey.

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## **VII. Appendices:**

Turning Point conducted the survey at the end of the 8 weeks of workshops to uncover answers in a non-intimidating manner. The agency wanted to gather meaningful data, learn what motivates the participants, and make decisions unbiased and compared results.