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Beyond The Books

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Friends Outside - RC Padilla

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Author Note

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Abstract

Friends Outside is a non-profit organization that focuses on empowering the incarcerated population as well as those on probation. The goal of the organization is to teach this population the proper skills they need to successfully reintegrate back into society through weekly group sessions. Clients who are mandated by probation to attend these meetings are often not showing up or do not participate during group. This is due to the fact that the clients do not understand the value of the program. If clients are not participating in the groups offered to them, then they are not able to learn the proper skills they need in order to thrive in society. Furthermore there is an increase in recidivism, substance use/abuse, and a loss in program funding. The purpose of this project was to increase client attendance and participation during the community groups. Clients worked on engaging activities and team building exercises to help build trust within the group. These activities also reinforced the skills being taught in the curriculum. The results were that the clients showed up on time, attendance increased, and clients opened up during the group. It is recommended that Friends Outside facilitators continue to enforce group rules and team building exercises to further strengthen the groups participation.

Keywords: Team building, incarcerated, participation, re-entry

Agency & Communities Served

Friends Outside is a non-profit organization that aims to help those incarcerated and those on probation. Their mission states, “Friends Outside offers caring, evidence-based services to adults and youth who are incarcerated, reentering the community or at risk, so that they, their families and neighborhoods can be safe and thrive” (Friends Outside, 2019). Their goal is to help this population’s transition back into society go as smooth as possible.

This agency serves Santa Cruz County with two main offices, one is located in Santa Cruz and the second one is located in Watsonville. By ethnicity, Friends Outside clients are 42% Caucasian, 20% Latino, 31.2% Unknown, 4.3% African American, 1% Declined to state, 0.9% Other and 0.2% Pacific Islander. A vast majority of the Caucasian clients visit the Santa Cruz Office and the vast majority of the Latino clients visit the Watsonville Office; this is due to the different demographics of each town.

Friends Outside offers a wide range of services including Pre-release and jail visiting re-entry classes, and post release services. These services use cognitive behavioral therapy workbooks to help clients grasp a better understanding of the root of their problems and give them a chance to gain new cognitive skills so they can better handle risky situations that can lead to recidivism. Clients that are on probation meet once a week for an hour-long one-on-one with the social worker to work on the workbooks and discuss progress. The same dynamic is used for the in jail classes, except these are held as groups for an hour and thirty minutes. Another service offered is offering basic hygienic products to clients that may not have enough to buy these basic necessities. For those clients who may be in need of clothes or may need a professional attire for a job interview, clothing vouchers are offered.

Friends Outside is also able to assist their clients with referrals to other organizations that provide services not offered at our organization like food banks, shelters, etc. Friends Outside also offers services for the families of their clients such as helping with jail visits, offering information about the legal system, and family events. Friends Outside puts on an event for Mother's Day where they visit the women's county jail and hold games and food for the women and their children. For Christmas, staff goes and visits clients and their families to gift toys for the children.

Problem Description

Friends Outside had been experiencing a drop in participation from the clients. Clients were not coming in for their one-on-one meetings, and trying to get a hold of them was a real challenge. There were times where they did not hear or get a hold of them for weeks. This can hurt the clients because if they were not consistent with their sessions they were not able to learn the skills needed to stay out of trouble and grow. Not only does this hurt the clients, low participation can also hurt the organization.

Contributing Factors

Contributing factors for low client participation would be lack of understanding what the value of the program is, lack of participation during one on one sessions, and the removal of some of the incentives once offered.

Clients showed little interest and lack of motivation at the agency. Clients had expressed that they do not want to go to the one on one meetings or any community sessions being held, they also expressed that they feel as if there is no purpose to the program meetings. If clients felt

that there was no purpose to the work that they were doing, then there was no motivation to do it. This led to the lack of participation during the one-on-one meetings and because of the lack of engagement from their part, they felt like the agency was not useful. The reality was that the agency was useful but when the client did not engage or put in effort then the process of change did not happen.

Clients not understanding the programs values had them questioning why they were there in the first place. Clients lost sight of what the agency was trying to help them accomplish with the services they provide. It was important for clients to understand the values of the program so they could understand that the agency is there to help them have an easier transition back into society and they are there to ultimately help them develop a healthier lifestyle that keeps them out of the system.

Another contributing factor to the reduction in clients attendance was the removal of the incentives once offered. There used to be a higher number of clients showing up to the agency when the agency offered clothing vouchers, bus passes, and basic hygiene kits. Due to the lack of funding, many of these services had been removed and were only offered under certain circumstances. The advantage of providing incentives to clients in the program was to promote higher efficiency and production.

Consequences

Having low participation within the organization negatively affects our clients because they were at a higher risk to experiencing recidivism and substance use relapse. Not only did low participation negatively affect the clients but it also affected the organization, the less people served the less funding was acquired.

A consequence of clients not participating in a reentry program after being released was that they had a higher chance of falling back into the system. Many clients that were about to re-enter society were released back into the same area they had committed their crime. This meant that ex-offenders were sent back to the same neighborhoods that were high in crime rate. “The criminal justice system needs more resources to improve reintegration efforts and help ex-offenders find adequate jobs and housing so they’re less likely to re-offend.” (American Military University, 2018) If the clients were not given that extra support to help them with those issues they will turn to old ways that are familiar to them in order to survive, trapping them in a vicious cycle of falling back into the system. Clients may also run into old acquaintances that may have had a negative impact on their lifestyle.

Another consequence of clients skipping out on re-entry programs was the higher risk for substance use relapse. Having family members/friends that were also submerged in a substance use lifestyle made it very difficult for them to change their unhealthy lifestyle. In a study done by Addiction Science & Clinical Practice (2012) found that, “overdose rates peak in the first few weeks after release”. Most of it had to do with social isolation and ex-convicts feeling like they had no one to turn to or rely on when trying to reintegrate into society. During this same study a former inmate states, “Most people relapse in the first six months because it's so stressful because they have no help. There's no financial help” (AS&CP, 2012). This population struggles to find that support group that will help keep them on track, during vulnerable times. Not having this support group/network puts them at a disadvantage because when they are struggling with urges or dealing with peer pressure to name a few, they might not have anyone that can remind them or push them of the goal they are trying to accomplish.

Not only does low participation hurt the clients, it also affects the organization. Having low participation rates greatly affects the funding the organization gets. This in term results in the elimination of incentives being offered, cut office hours, and even the termination of the program.

Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Removal of incentives that were once offered	Clients are not showing up to Friends Outside appointments	Recidivism
Lack of participation		Substance abuse/relapse
Don't understand the value of the program		Loss of program funding

Capstone Project Description and Justification

Capstone Project

This capstone project consisted of a six-week Spanish re-entry group that helped clients get more involved in the program and find support within each other. The first part of the project focused on researching and creating a ten-week curriculum that included cognitive behavioral activities and team building exercises while continuing to integrate the current CBT workbooks used by the agency. These activities helped the clients really think about their behavioral thinking patterns and how they have been affected by them. Some of the activities included journaling, team building exercises and vision boards.. This program was intended to run every Wednesday in the afternoon at 2pm starting February 19th thru March 25th. A pretest and posttest was created for the clients in order to assess how the client felt about the program and how they felt about their progress in the program. The main goal was to increase participation within the organization, have clients gain new skills that helped them stay out of trouble, and create a support system within the group.

Project Purpose

One of the main reasons clients were not participating in the program was because of the lack of knowledge on the groups program and lack of trust. A great majority of the population worked with, came from a low income background, and would seek the organization to benefit from the incentives. Participants who did not have transportation benefitted from attending because they were provided with a free bus pass. Using small groups to provide these services benefitted the clients because it helped them build relationships with one another. As the weeks went on, the goal was to help clients build a safe zone during group meetings where they were

able to talk about sensitive topics. Providing this support group, it was expected to have higher attendance rates and more participation. Higher attendance in the program helped ensure that participants were fully benefiting from what the 6 week program had to offer.

Project Justification

Creating an 6 week CBT workshop is the most effective way to help the clients out during the first few weeks after their release. According to the principle “Sufficient Dosage”, “participants need to be exposed to enough of the intervention for it to have an effect.” (Nation, 2003). The workshops were intended to run every Wednesday for 2 hours, this ensured that the clients had time to check in and had a recap on what they have improved on and what they still need help with. The “Appropriately Timed” principle also tied into this project because it focused on implementing the intervention at the correct time. For many of the clients their most vulnerable state was the first few weeks after being released. Planting the seed of change in their minds during the earlier weeks could help foster change within them. Reinforcing positive behavior every week for 2 hours during the course of 6 weeks during the first weeks had much more of an impact than trying to help change a client that had fallen back on their old ways. “Prevention programs should be timed to focus on changeable precursor behaviors prior to the full-blown problem behavior being prevented” (Dryfoos, 1990).

Project Implementation

Starting this capstone project, research on the targeted population was necessary in order to ensure the proper activities were being included. Creating the curriculum was the first step to starting this project and consisted of researching CBT group activities that were planned out for 6 weeks. Apart from the original curriculum provided by Friends Outside, a total of 6 different

activities were put together to enforce team building, and critical thinking on one's own values. The curriculum was finalized during the third week of January 2020. A pre and post-test was created during this time as well to measure the client's knowledge of the material being taught at the beginning and at the end of the program. The test would help analyze what the clients believed the pros and cons of the groups were as well as where they were at in life.

The main curriculum that was used for these group sessions was "Anger Management". The six week program only ran for 4 weeks, it was implemented on February 19th and ran through March 11th due to the global pandemic, COVID-19. As the states enforced shelter in place, Friends Outside was forced to temporarily close its doors. The group meetings were held every Wednesday at 2 pm.

A more detailed implementation plan and timeline can be seen in the Scope of Work in Appendix A. A pretest and posttest can be seen in Appendix B.

Assessment Plan

To measure effectiveness a pretest was given to the clients at the beginning of the program. The plan was to gather information that will reveal the social/coping skills clients needed to develop in order to promote positive thinking patterns. The pretest asked how clients handle . The post-test will be fairly similar to the pre-test to see how the clients would go about the same situation but now answering with their new knowledge of skills they have learned in the program. Attendance will also be recorded to analyze patterns, all outside variables will be taken into consideration including transportation, weather, topics etc.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcome for this project was higher attendance and participation rates. By leaning towards group meetings and removing the one on one meetings, there was room for a more diverse experience that would benefit the growth of all clients. After clients build relationships with one another it was expected that they would be able to rely on one another to help each other through the group and outside of the group. Despite the circumstances, there was hope for the group to thrive. The changes hoped to be seen in the posttest were clients responding that they felt more comfortable sharing, and they had built a support system amongst each other.

Project Results

Due to the global pandemic (COVID-19), California issued a shelter in place order to help stop the spread of the Coronavirus. Due to these circumstances, Friends Outside had closed both of their offices in order to keep their clients and staff safe. Due to this, the project ran for a total of 4 weeks instead of the intended 6. During the first week (Feb. 19th), the group focused on building a foundation of trust and group rules were established. The first session started off by having an open discussion about who everyone was and what they wanted to accomplish. The group was fairly quiet during this first week. The group then had an open discussion about trust and what were things they could do to establish it.

The weeks following there was a change in participation and attendance, some of the clients that usually did not attend started showing up. There were 6 clients that continuously showed up for the group during weeks 2-4. Weeks prior to implementation, there were only 2 to

3 clients showing up or sometimes none at all. Another area of improvement was in the clients punctuality, many clients used to show up half an hour late to the group. By week 3, the clients would show up half an hour to 15 minutes before the group started and would sit and socialize amongst each other. The other half would show up right on time or 5 to 10 minutes after which was a huge improvement from 30 minutes after the group started. Integrating small cognitive behavioral therapy activities and team building exercises to the agenda helped the clients break from the book and work in small groups of 2 or 3. This helped the clients interact more with one another as they learned what their own values were as well as their group mates.

Although the clients were unable to take the posttest due to the circumstances, overall, there was huge improvement with the group. All of the clients started to speak up and voice their opinions, they were also not afraid to challenge one another or call out one another. As stated above, attendance and punctuality also improved. Lastly, the clients started to socialize on their own which was what one of the main goals of this project was, building a support network within each other. If the project continued to be implemented, there was hope that the goals would have surpassed and the results would have been much clearer.

Conclusion & Recommendations

After analyzing the project from start to end, it was evident that the implementations made to the group sessions greatly impacted the clients. Clients' participation rose dramatically and they were able to hold each other accountable for their actions. Apart from this, clients attendance and punctuality improved because they felt excited to see what the next group session had in store. Clients were also able to socialize with one another and build relationships that could potentially establish into support systems. It is recommended for Friends Outside

facilitators to continue implementing the new curriculum model, this ensures clients keep working towards their goals without getting bored of the same workbooks. Another recommendation to the agency is that staff work communication skills, this ensures that staff is able to work with one another to assure they are providing the best services to their clients. This could be achieved by engaging in team building exercises during staff meetings. Lastly, setting group rules during the beginning of every group session is vital to avoid side talking, side comments, and lack of respect for one another during group sessions.

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Appendix A

Scope of Work

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
1. Researching cognitive behavioral activities that will help foster coping skills/social skills to help participants re-enter society	List of activities and possible worksheets	(Now-January '20)	RC Padilla
2. Determine the topics to be covered during group	Creating the curriculum	Finalized by 4th week of January	RC Padilla
3. View the progress of clients to see the effectiveness of CBT group to make it as effective as possible	Create pre/post-surveys	Finalized by 1st week of February	RC Padilla
4. Ensure all 6 weeks are planned	Prepare curriculum binder	Finalized by 1st week of January	RC Padilla
5. Talk clients about possible meeting times	Ensure clients availability	2nd week of February	RC Padilla/Katie
6. Figure out what clients need bus passes	Ensure clients have a reliable way of getting to the program every week	First group sessions (Feb 19th)	RC Padilla/Katie
7. Give out pre-test	-This pre-test will show the clients' current coping skills to certain situations* -Set group rules	Feb. 19th, 2020	RC Padilla

8. Continue sessions (5 more weeks)	Ensure clients are learning the proper coping skills to reintegrate into society. Will also ensure clients are building an outside support system	Feb 19th - Mar. 11th 2020 (Wednesday's only)	RC Padilla
9. Give out post-test	Will show what coping skills clients have learned after the 8 week program.	Unable to continue due to COVID-19	RC Padilla
10. Analyze data from pre/post-surveys	Will be compared to pre-test to see how clients' cognitive thinking patterns have changed after the program.	Unable to continue due to COVID-19	RC Padilla

Appendix B
Pre-Test

The Courage to Change: *Social Values*

1. What do you *like* about the class (Skills for Re-entry)?

2. What are your *dislikes* about the class (Skills for Re-entry)?

3. If you have been here more than once, why do you keep coming back to this lifestyle?

4. What would you like to gain from this class (Skills for Re-entry)?

On a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being the least and 5 being the most, please rate & answer the following questions:

5. How much do you participate in class? Why or why not? 1 2 3 4 5

6. Where do you see yourself in 5 years from now? Do you think it's possible to get there? 1 2 3 4 5

7. How useful do you think this class (Skills for Re-entry) is? 1 2 3 4 5

Post Test

The Courage to Change: *Social Values*

1. What did you *like* about this class (Skills for Re-entry)? *Ex. Changes made*

2. What were your *dislikes* about this class (Skills for Re-entry)? *Ex. Changes made*

3. If you have been here more than once, why do you keep coming back to this lifestyle?

4. What did you gain from this class (Skills for Re-entry)?

On a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being the least and 5 being the most, please rate & answer the following questions:

5. How much did you participate in this class? Why or why not? 1 2 3 4 5

6. Where do you see yourself in 5 years from now? Do you think it's possible to get there? 1 2 3 4 5

7. How useful do you think this class (Skills for Re-entry) was? 1 2 3 4 5