



## Is The Council for Boys and Young Men an evidence-based program?

**The Council is designed in the evidence-based principles** of Motivational Interviewing and Strengths-Based approaches that target resiliency and protective factors, in addition to stimulating critical thinking and moral reasoning through experiential activities and guided discussions. The Strengths-Based approach - now being adopted by several states' education departments as a developmentally-appropriate approach - is recognized for its effectiveness in engaging school-aged youth. Motivational Interviewing, a core approach of the behavioral health sciences field, is recognized by the corrections field as an evidence-based practice. Cultural responsiveness and trauma-responsive practices further enhance the potency and relevance of these Strengths-Based and Motivational Interviewing applications in the group context.

The Council is designed for male youth ages 9 – 18 years of age regardless of risk factor.

The Council focuses on being responsive to adolescent male development from a holistic perspective which takes into consideration the effects of trauma and violence, and on a boy's culture and environment by establishing a safe group experience that fosters social-emotional development and empathy (being a primary and essential social skill) while holding youth accountable and responsible for their behavior and choices. The program's client-centered and male responsive approach is highly structured and challenges young men's thinking and behavior. Additionally, it stimulates emotion management in a supportive way that establishes healthy and caring relationships with peers and adults and re-connects them to society in a pro-social capacity with the primary goal being a successful community re-entry from correctional settings.

It is also complimentary to other models of intervention that solely target gang prevention, substance abuse, school truancy, and other high risk behaviors.

There are many examples of communities that deploy The Council format within the framework of Evidence-Based Principles. The Council facilitators offer exercises that focus on anti-social attitudes, anti-social peers, anti-social cognition, and substance abuse. The Council is not meant to be a replacement program to cognitive behavioral treatment or other services. In fact, not surprisingly, several communities are pairing The Council with model CBT programs such as Aggression Replacement Training and are reporting high levels of client engagement as well as client AND staff satisfaction. The Council appears to do very well as an option in the menu of core programming.

ONE CIRCLE FOUNDATION [www.OneCircleFoundation.org](http://www.OneCircleFoundation.org)

Tel: 415 419 5119 | Fax: 415 448 5459 | [info@OneCircleFoundation.org](mailto:info@OneCircleFoundation.org) | 734 A St., Ste. 4, San Rafael, CA 94901

Evaluation is currently underway at Portland State University in Oregon<sup>i</sup> to understand the impact of The Council model on boys' and young men's development. Early outcomes include significant increases in school engagement<sup>ii</sup> and young men in gangs thinking more about leaving gangs<sup>iii</sup>.

Meanwhile, the research behind The Council is clinically sound and based on solid approaches endorsed by the behavioral health sciences field. Like its parent Motivational Interviewing and Strengths-Based approaches, The Council does have the versatility to be applied to low risk populations such as schools, camp and after school programs, job training programs, mentoring, and it is now being demonstrated as a valuable program that makes sense in correctional and rehabilitative settings as well.

The Council lends itself to complimentary programming of cognitive behavioral approaches to thinking and moral reasoning, substance abuse education, or other structured programs. This is due to two aspects of this kind of strengths-based, motivational interviewing program: (1) it enhances treatment readiness and client responsivity, and (2) it develops and fosters a positive culture of self directed change. In the behavioral health sciences field, it has been demonstrated that program outcomes are substantially improved when the treatment readiness and client responsivity is enhanced. Clinically, this only makes sense - if the client is not receptive to the program, or if the client has not resolved the ambivalence to change, it would be a struggle for that client to meet program goals.

The great value of The Council is as follows: this structured program (which has achieved uncommon buy-in from clients and staff) gets kids to be self-motivated to change, develop and practice skills that are amenable to group work, and are able to transfer those skills to other parts of their lives, whether it be their classrooms, neighborhoods, job training, cognitive/behavioral program, their substance abuse education, or the basketball court.

In addition, The Council is a culturally responsive program. Cultural Responsivity has been identified as a primary principle of education and youth programming.

A salient aspect of The Council model, format and curricula that include three current Facilitator Activity Guides is its capacity for cultural responsivity with youth members and staff. Youth identity is shaped by and inexplicably tied to race, ethnicity, culture, socio-economic status, geographic region, sexual orientation, religion or belief system, and gender. These central characteristics of identity, when recognized in strengths-based activities and discussions within The Council groups meet fundamental developmental needs that assist adolescents in developing pro-social purpose.

Youth of color make up a disproportionate share of the total youth population in the juvenile justice system as well as in continuation schools and drop out groups. Evidence-based cognitive behavioral programs in youth programs have not yet, to our knowledge, shown evidence of significant positive effects on youth of color specifically. Drop out rates of youth of color are often highest amongst the total youth population. The Council is designed with positive cultural resiliency elements and is therefore likely to add important benefits to the overall program and educational goals for youth of color and all disenfranchised youth.

The Council is the counterpart to Girls Circle, a female-responsive program for girls. Nationally recognized as a promising approach by the OJJDP, the Girls Circle program has recently been renewed as a program of the Sonoma County Probation Department after completing a successful three year program in the county through California's Title II gender-responsive programming.<sup>iv</sup>

The Council and Girls Circle share a central tenet of theoretical orientation – a youth's relationships with others is the central organizing and influencing feature in his/her overall development. Therefore, all program elements are designed to recognize, build upon, and restore youth to healthy relationships, a KEY principle of Strengths-Based models and an essential element for readiness to change. Relational practices and strategies build youth capacity to form social bonds which enable youth to engage in cognitive and moral processes and develop pro-social skills.<sup>v</sup>

Research has shown that youth in high risk target populations show a greater prevalence of trauma which can interfere with youth's ability to think and learn.<sup>vi</sup> For example, studies show that a substantial percentage of youth in the juvenile system institutions are the victims of child maltreatment.<sup>vii</sup> And youth in secured facilities are considered to experience additional stress in these settings as well.<sup>viii</sup> Traumatic stress results in altered neurobiological processes and altered structural development in the human brain, including overdevelopment of the limbic and nonverbal systems, and underdevelopment of the higher order cognitive structures such as the neo-cortex that focuses on words and abstract thought.<sup>ix</sup> Hence, by incorporating a trauma-responsive component in its programming, educational and training institutions and youth development programs are better equipped to achieve program objectives when integrating a The Council group approach to development.

The Council is a trauma-responsive model. The curricula is not intended to replace mental health treatment of trauma survivors, but rather to provide science-based strategies to reduce stress in traumatized or chronically stressed youth, i.e. predictability, caring and supportive social relationships, experiential learning methods and shared decision making.<sup>x</sup> These strategies promote regulation of neurobiological processes that increase the potential for stressed youth to engage in broader cognitive and moral reasoning and social-emotional processes.<sup>xi</sup>

Finally, participants of The Council programs report high satisfaction with the program. When youth want to attend programs and are engaged, learning objectives are more easily achieved.

In conclusion, The Council offers a model that is designed in the evidence based principles of Strengths-Based and Motivational Interviewing approaches, and additionally brings cultural responsiveness and science-based trauma responsive strategies to promote male adolescent development that enhance and compliment other core correctional programming goals of the delinquency prevention as well as a key primary prevention strategy.

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<sup>i</sup> For further information, contact Eric Mankowski, PhD, Associate Professor of Applied Social and Community Psychology, at: [mankowskie@pdx.edu](mailto:mankowskie@pdx.edu) or Mary Gray at: [mgray@pdx.edu](mailto:mgray@pdx.edu) or see our website: <http://www.boyscouncil.com/research.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> See Phase 1 Poster Results from Gray, M., Braun, M., Mankowski, E., et al, Portland State University, on our website: [www.boyscouncil.com/research.htm](http://www.boyscouncil.com/research.htm)

<sup>iii</sup> Early data in upcoming report on Study of Boys Council Program in Ohio Department of Youth Services, 2009-2010. To be posted on website upon completion of report, anticipated: Dec, 2010: [www.boyscouncil.com](http://www.boyscouncil.com)

<sup>iv</sup> Sonoma County Probation Department: Juvenile Probation; [http://www.sonoma-county.org/probation/juvenile\\_services/special\\_services.htm](http://www.sonoma-county.org/probation/juvenile_services/special_services.htm)

<sup>v</sup> 1999. Siegel, D. The Developing Mind: Toward a Neurobiology of Interpersonal Experience. New York, NY: Guilford Press

<sup>vi</sup> Ford, J., Chapman, J., Hawke, J. and Albert, P., June 2007, Trauma Among Youth in the Juvenile Justice System: Critical Issues and New Directions: National Council for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice

<sup>vii</sup> Short, J., and Sharp, C., 2005. Disproportionate Minority Contact in the Juvenile Justice System, Child Welfare League of America: Washington DC

<sup>viii</sup> Ford, J., et al, June 2007 (as cited above)

<sup>ix</sup> Perry, B. Violence and Childhood, How Persisting Fear Can Alter the Developing Child's Brain. [www.childtrauma.org/ctamaterials/Vio\\_chid.asp](http://www.childtrauma.org/ctamaterials/Vio_chid.asp): Child Trauma Academy

<sup>x</sup> Vance, J. E., 2001. Neurobiological Mechanisms of Psychosocial Resiliency. In Richman, J.M., and Fruser, M.W., (Eds.) The Context of Youth Violence: Resilience, Risk, and Protection (electronic resource) (pp. 43-20). Westport, CT: Praeger

<sup>xi</sup> Perry, B.D., 1997, Incubated in Terror: Neurodevelopmental Factors in the Cycle of Violence. In Children, Youth and Violence: The Search for Solutions (J Osofsky, Ed.) Guildford Press: New York