



# INNOVATIONS IN MENTAL HEALTH DIVERSION:

## Life Skills Groups for Mental Health and Justice Clients


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# The Agenda

- ▶ History: the why and the how (rationale and partnership with Corrections)
  - ▶ Recovery model
  - ▶ Program design (issues and descriptions)
  - ▶ Evaluation thus far
  - ▶ Strengths and areas that need further investigation
  - ▶ Open discussion: give us your suggestions, comments, concerns and questions
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# Educational Objectives



- ▶ **Inform** participants about the new life skills group
- ▶ **Encourage** innovation and creativity in programming for individuals with mental health and justice challenges
- ▶ **Increase awareness** of the benefits of cross-sectoral collaboration
- ▶ **Explore** the challenges posed by a variety of stakeholders to culture change and innovative programming as well as begin to **problem solve** solutions



# The Rationale

- ▶ Frustration is a motivator for innovation
  - ▶ Exclusion of clients of the Mental Health Court from psychoeducational or peer support experiences
  - ▶ Rethinking recidivism and the court's revolving door
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# Research Provides Inspiration


- ▶ Lack of empirical evidence sparks the need for expanding programming to do more with the same or less
- ▶ Innovation encourages a shift in criminal thinking patterns
- ▶ Recidivism is addressed through enhancement of social skills
  - Changing thinking and behaviour patterns
  - Improving problem solving and decision making
  - Expanding responses to socio-cultural and economic environment
- ▶ Recovery is promoted through group work
- ▶ Research suggests 'Criminal justice involvement [is] not a direct product of mental illnesses but rather [a] product of a set of person-level and socio-environmental risk factors'




# Rationale Continued

- ▶ Expand services for clients of diversion
  - ▶ Expand responses for diversion workers to facilitate success for a wider variety of clients
  - ▶ Provide an opportunity for professional development within Diversion Program
  - ▶ Facilitate a change in attitude in the criminal justice system
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# The Seeds of a Partnership

- ▶ Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services (MCSCS) announces Core Programming at the new Toronto South Detention Centre
  - ▶ These programs are “[M]inistry accredited, evidence based programs intended to produce offender change, reduce recidivism and hold offenders responsible for their behaviour, thus promoting community safety”
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# Partnership is Mutually Beneficial

- ▶ Benefits for Fred Victor

- Pre-developed Life Skills Training Manual (content)
- Training provided at MCSCS training facility

- ▶ Benefits for MCSCS

- Strong mental health background from Fred Victor
- Increased focus on mental health approach (language, case examples)





# Introducing Recovery Paradigm

- ▶ “A deeply personal, unique process of changing one’s attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills, and/or roles. It is a way of living a satisfying, hopeful, and contributing life even with limitations caused by illness.” (William Anthony, 1993)
- ▶ “Living well in the presence or absence of illness.” (Mental Health Commission, 1998, New Zealand)

# Recovery Paradigm versus “Old Think”

Unique identity, whole person	Diagnosis
Hope, realistic optimism, brain plasticity	Broken Brain, Very Poor Diagnosis
Strengths, resilience, capacity	Pathology, deficits, vulnerabilities
Empowerment	Coercion
Self-Management	Helplessness, passivity, adaptive dependence
Community integration, access, accommodation	Social segregation, deviancy amplified, artificial settings
Active growth	Stabilization, maintenance
Asset building	Resource limitations, poverty




# Key Concepts of Recovery

- ▶ Hope
- ▶ Personal Responsibility
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Self-Advocacy
- ▶ Support




# Important Factors that Lead to Recovery?

- ▶ Good relationships
  - ▶ Financial security
  - ▶ Satisfying work
  - ▶ Personal growth
  - ▶ The right living environment
  - ▶ Developing a cultural and/or spiritual perspective
  - ▶ Developing resilience to stress and adversity
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# Other Important Elements of Recovery

- ▶ Being believed in
  - ▶ Being listened to and understood
  - ▶ Getting explanations for problems and experiences
  - ▶ Having the opportunity to temporarily resign from responsibilities when in crisis
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# Recovery and Social Inclusion

- ▶ A key role for services is to support people to regain their place in communities where they live and take part in mainstream activities and opportunities along with everyone else





# Program Design

- ▶ Incorporates recovery thinking and language into MCSCS training material
- ▶ Provides an antidote to the reinforcement of offending attitudes and behaviours experienced during incarceration (*positive* peer influence)
- ▶ Challenges pre-conceived attitudes and explores hope as an agent of change
- ▶ Introduces the concepts of choice and internalization of locus of control
- ▶ Serves as an introduction to life skills topics as well as participation in therapeutic groups
- ▶ Can be a gateway to other programs (WRAP, CBT, Peer Support Groups)
- ▶ Serves as means of 'mobilizing the community for systems change'



# Program Description

- ▶ Eight stand-alone psychoeducational lessons
- ▶ Certificate provided for every session attended
- ▶ Referral from court diversion worker, bail program, other agencies working with mental health and criminal justice clients or by Crown
- ▶ Course selection can be a collaborative approach between worker, client and possibly crown
- ▶ Only criteria is mental health and justice involvement



# Life Skills Series Topics

- ▶ Understanding Feelings
  - ▶ Thoughts to Action
  - ▶ Supportive Relationships
  - ▶ Changing Habits
  - ▶ Goal Setting
  - ▶ Substance Use
  - ▶ Anger Management
  - ▶ Managing Stress
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# Expected Outcomes

- ▶ Facilitates learning, self-reflection and change
- ▶ Enables the contemplation of changing attitudes, thoughts and behaviour patterns associated with criminal justice involvement
- ▶ Encourages the pursuit of alternative approaches to recovery
- ▶ Allows for positive peer learning
- ▶ Changes *clients* into *participants*



# Feedback

- ▶ Very engaging
- ▶ Would like a follow up group that goes into more detail
- ▶ Having an opportunity to open up and engage in conversation
- ▶ It was helpful just being there and reframing my thoughts
- ▶ Learning new ways of coping, thinking
- ▶ I liked the scenarios
- ▶ I liked the visual and auditory style of the presentations that worked for different learning styles
- ▶ The snacks




# Our Observations

- ▶ Participants taking on a sense of responsibility
- ▶ Taking initiative to help set up and clean up room
- ▶ Helping peers to understand the material
- ▶ Discussing the experience with their workers
- ▶ Experiencing pride when Crown acknowledges certificate of completion






# Strengths

- ▶ Screening
  - ▶ Logistics
  - ▶ Structure
  - ▶ Group Dynamics
  - ▶ Outcomes
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# Areas for Further Discussion

- ▶ Screening limitations
  - ▶ Recruitment and the challenges of culture change
  - ▶ Group Dynamics
  - ▶ Follow Up
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# Case Example



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# A Work in Progress

- ▶ Facilitators

- Ongoing development and optimization of the program

- ▶ Clients

- To continue on their journeys of recovery in mental health and to break away from criminal justice involvement

- ▶ System

- Expansion of services to mental health and justice clients
- To further enhance multi-sectoral collaboration
- To continue working toward reducing the stigmatization of this population and facilitate ongoing change in the systems that serve our clients



And now over to you...

► What are your:

- Thoughts?
- Suggestions?
- Concerns?
- Questions?