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PROJECT HAHN: An Evaluation of Probationers Experience Since 1983

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Robert arrived in Australia, from Canada in 1984 and commenced work with the Probation and Parole Service in Tasmania. He is currently responsible for the district known as the Huon Valley, in the southern most part of the state. Robert has been actively involved with Project Hahn since 1985 as a major referral agent for the Tasmanian probation population. Occasionally he acts as a contract instructor.

Project Hahn is an adventure based challenge program with a fundamental philosophy of personal development through a wilderness experience. For the Probation and Parole Service in Tasmania the program acts as a 'preventative model' for youth at risk and incorporates a significant management tool to assist our clientele attain positive changes in their attitude to themselves and others over a very short space of time. Over 500 participants have been in attendance on Project Hahn courses since its inception in 1983 and 93 of these have been subject to a supervision order through our service. The program integrates both offenders and non-offenders thereby acknowledging that addressing the needs of youth in general is equally as important as addressing the unlawful behaviour of a young offender. The activities themselves are not the critical component, rather it is their utilisation as a means to provide challenging and meaningful experiences which create a positive environment for personal growth. The ultimate aim is not to develop highly skilled sporting individuals but rather to use the challenge and stress of the activities to bring about deeper psychological changes.

Evaluation over the past seven years has been anecdotal in nature. A general consensus has existed amongst parents of participants, welfare and probation officers, solicitors, politicians and magistrates that the basic philosophy of Project Hahn was sound and therefore should continue in its existence. However, these abstract statements have not been sufficiently thorough to justify in tangible terms the continuation of the program or our involvement in it.

A pilot study by the Probation and Parole Service was commenced in February of this year to address this fundamental lack of evaluation and empirical data.

A statistical survey of our 93 clients was initially conducted isolating features of age, year of attendance, gender, demographics and type of offence (see Appendix I).

A preliminary feature of this analysis showed that 78% or 73 of the 93 probationers had offended through 'risk-taking' types of crimes (ie breaking, entering, fraud and theft - the 300 range of the DANCO system). As 78% of our participants had volunteered for this type of course and had offences of risk-taking, a positive correlation between this offender group and the positivity training gained from their participation could show a significant impact in terms of cost-savings and benefits to the community as a whole. Particularly as this population make up 75% of

all imprisonments in Tasmania for people under the age of 30 years; 68% of who served at least three months in prison and then returned with the highest rate of recidivism at 59.9% upon release. They also represent 54% of all probationers, 41% of all Commutlity Service Order employees and 37% of Parolees. (Data: Corrective Services Division, Department of Community Services, Tasmania 1989). Not only are the costs borne out in the damage to the community, but also in the estimate of \$7,400 per inmate per year (after salaries of \$29,600 which remain static) the Risdon prison calculates in 1990 figures. Most importantly though if the program is successful, its preventative function will be assisting in keeping people out of a prolonged period in the system by redirecting their focus on thrill-seeking illegal activities to more legitimate forms of challenge with positive personal outcomes.

The second phase of the study was a recidivism register with the emphasis on risk-taking offenders. The specific details are a participant profile with indicators of behaviour patterns. Rearrest ratio according to police court appearance records (September 1990). Probation and Parole Statistics, and self-reports in conjunction with the summative interviews show 36 of the 73 risk-taking offenders have not had any further involvement with offences of dishonesty or of a more serious nature since their completion of the Project Halm course.

Table 1

| | RECIDIVISTS | NON-RECIDIVISTS |
|-------|-------------|-----------------|
| 1983 | 3 | 1 |
| 1984 | 6 | 6 |
| 1985 | 2 | 0 |
| 1986 | 12 | 6 |
| 1987 | 7 | 5 |
| 1988 | 5 | 4 |
| 1989 | 2 | 7 |
| 1990 | 0 | 7 |
| TOTAL | 37 | 36 |

Table 2. Post-Recidivism Register Project Hahn

| 1-6 Mths | 6-12 Mths | 12-24 Mths | 24-36 Mths | 36+ Mths |
|----------|-----------|------------|------------|----------|
| 8(21%) | 14(38%) | 12(32%) | 1(2%) | 2(5%) |

NOTES

(a) No participant in this sample has re-offended as per the above guidelines after a five year period.

(b) Re-offending data is based on the date of commission of offence rather than the date of conviction.

DISCUSSION

The critical component of this statistical survey shows the major need for follow-up after the program and that the follow-up should continue for up to two years after the event.

Another significant feature of the analysis is a clear pattern of non-recidivist behaviour beginning to emerge over the past two years. A major reason for this it is suggested is our new procedure of screening probationers into the program with the greatest commitment. In past years the selection process was ad-hoc with the referral generally being on the basis of trying to offer something positive in a negative atmosphere.

Probation and Parole Officer Bob Pearson in his paper 'On Outdoor Programs for Offenders' for the Australian Institute of Criminology Conference in Melbourne in July 1989 paints the picture well

". . . the temptation to refer purely because someone is having a bad time at home, or has accommodation problems or hassles with the police or girlfriend/boyfriend can be overwhelming but such factors are not sufficient reasons to send someone off into the bush for ten days. The client himself will be the first to recognise such action as escapism and will react on the course accordingly. "

Subsequently many of the participants referred onto Project Halin in the past had a reduced level of commitment to the process of group dynamics and failed to take advantage of the opportunity for personal development.

In an exercise of lateral thinking, we devised a process whereby we could increase the number of potential candidates and screen out unauthentic referrals.

Specifically the process involved a literature search of successful target group characteristics, tempered with knowledge gained from past experience and then devising a short list of specific criteria for potential candidates which included:

- Females (our highest priority) and Males between 15-25 years of age
- First offenders
- Offences involving risk-taking
- Non-institutionalised pasts
- Good state of physical and mental health
- Low achievers

These features were superimposed over each of the 55 Probation Officers monthly caseload statistics to give a read out of potential candidates. This computer search was followed by a marketing exercise selling the value of the program to the Probation and Parole Officers statewide and the positive aspects of their involvement in it. Finally we offered the officers and their clients the opportunity to jointly participate on one-day excursions prior to the actual program. This has become an essential component and hands-on shared experience for case management.

Finally to assist with the achievement of a successful referral a contract is established between the Probation Officer and Client prior to the course including areas of responsibility, co-operation, participation in general camp chores etc. In this way the client has a clearer picture of what is expected and the ways in which they are expected to achieve.

After isolating this target population the next phase of the study was an analysis of Participants Perception of Project Halm with the aim of subjectively assessing behaviour change through one-to-one interviews.

Assistance was sought from the University of Tasmania, through Dr. Carey Denholm (a visiting lecturer on sabbatical from his usual position as Associate Professor in Youth Studies at the University of Victoria, Canada) and he was very helpful in outlining components which could be measured to gauge the impact of the program on the participant.

Also valuable advice was gained from Malcolm Wells, the present Director of Sport, Recreation and Tourism in Tasmania and a founding member of Project Hahn Incorporated; regarding perception studies and the effects of self-clarifying experiences during the period of late adolescence becoming significant to the participant's later development.

The critical element of focus became the issue of behavioural change through Project Hahn's philosophy of personal development through challenge.

A series of findings were noted through three library searches of Criminal Justice References, NCJRS and CINCH for relevant literature on Wilderness Programs and seven features were considered essential for evaluation including aspects of peer relationships, indicators of pre and post-program self-esteem, level of commitment to the program, factors of the containment theory including positive and negative indicators of self-concept and findings of program specifics which apparently create an environment for behavioural change.

These variables were worded into questions pertaining to the probationers experience. Two drafts were tested to simplify the questions and then we set about trying to locate and have the past participants from throughout the state volunteer to be interviewed.

Considering the mobile nature of our clientele, the fact that for most co-operation with a probation order was not a highlight of their life, and that they may not have had involvement with this service or Project Hahn for perhaps seven years the task of interviews became problematical.

To date we have concentrated on the risk-taking offenders and contact them in most cases through family referrals, telephone contact and visiting last known addresses. All those approached offered quite happily to be a part of the evaluation, open about their experiences and quite keen to be given a copy of the findings. This has been an ongoing process for the past four months and to date 27 have been interviewed.

Further assistance has been gained from John Koldolski, the Manager for Research at the Department of Sport, Recreation and Tourism in analysing the data collected. He has also assisted in making the questionnaire more subjective and easier to analyse for the future evaluations (see Appendix II). The interviews have been coded on the basis of keywords and each questionnaire has been divided into 88 variables. The participants responses from the original survey were programmed into frequency

counts and we have crosstabulated the variables to be correlated.

SUMMARY OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

1. Participants who found the course was appropriate for them also have gained a clearer picture of their career direction.

Previous experience with activities is a feature which assists positive behavioural change. (The participant it is suggested will have a higher level of frustration, tolerance and the ability to focus on wider issues.)

Participants who showed a high degree of peer influence were more successful in completing stressful events.

4. Participants with previous activity experiences were more likely to be involved in shared leadership.

5. Participants who found positive peers on the course showed a higher level of completion of stressful events.

SUMMARY

Although the findings are of a preliminary nature only, there are indications that as a 'preventative model' Project Hahn does attain positive changes in participants attitudes creating an environment for personal growth. It is analogous to a medical model of defence mechanisms, where the individuals perception of who they are is strengthened, which reduces their vulnerability from external forces. Reid and Matthews in their paper 'A Wilderness Experience Treatment Program for Antisocial Offenders' cover the topic well:

"It provides an initial breaking of old behaviour patterns and a renewed sense of strength, personal worth, and social skills. The insight gained evolves into emotional control and interpersonal experiences which eventually are translated (generalised) into behavioural control, improving problem solving, and an increased ability to plan one's actions rather than acting primarily upon impulse."

The recidivist study shows that half of the sample have encompassed non-delinquent behaviour after the course. This percentage it is argued will be increasing significantly in future years as the screening process and follow-up procedures are continued by the participant's probation officer and other significant individuals in their community.

Also, as the sample size increases the study can expand into the areas of program components which most effect change, other types of offenders who benefit from this type of programming etc. and authenticating the present preliminary findings.

The most promising feature of this study has been the remarkable recall displayed by the juveniles and young adults to an event that occurred up to seven years earlier, and the enthusiasm they felt for a very short space of time in their lives. We cannot underestimate the impact of this course over time.

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APPENDIX 1

PROBATIONERS WHO HAVE ATTENDED PROJECT HAHN

STATISTICAL SURVEY

1. Demographics of Participants

| | | | | | |
|-------------|----|-------------|----|-----------------|----|
| SOUTH = 56 | | NORTH and | | NORTH WEST = 37 | |
| Hobart | 18 | Launceston | 10 | Burnie | 8 |
| Glenorchy | 8 | George Town | 3 | Devonport | 13 |
| Gagebrook | 4 | Scottsdale | 1 | Ulverstone | 1 |
| Rosny Park | 18 | Queenstown | 1 | | |
| Huon | 7 | | | | |
| New Norfolk | 1 | | | | |
| TOTALS | 56 | | 14 | | 23 |

2. Referrals paid for by Probation Service

(Although participants may have been on Probation at the time of their referral networking has taken place through numerous other agencies.)

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|----|-------------|----|-------------------------|----|
| Total 46 P&Ps (49%) | | | | Other Agencies 47 (51%) | |
| Hobart | 9 | Launceston | 4 | Self | 12 |
| Glenorchy | 5 | George Town | 2 | Summerleas Youth Co-Op, | 1 |
| Gagebrook | 2 | | | EPUY/CYSS (1983-87) | 8 |
| Rosny Park | 12 | Burnie | 0 | Youthcare | 3 |
| Huon | 6 | Devonport | 5 | Hobart Tech | 1 |
| - | | Queenstown | 1 | HYPO | 1 |
| | 34 | | 12 | Ashley Home | 3 |
| | | | | Wybra Home | 1 |
| | | | | Sheffield K.A.R.E. | 1 |
| | | | | | 47 |

Discussion

Probation & Parole first referrals commenced in early 1985 and began to fill the role C.Y.S.S./15.P.U.Y. played during 1983 and 1984 in locating Project Hahn's target group of disadvantaged youth. When C.Y.S.S. became Skillshare in early 1989 referrals dried up completely as did that avenue of networking our clients. A substantial decline in our population's use of Project Hahn has been a consequence since that date (Figure 4) and further efforts for screening probationers has been necessary.

3. Attendance (Prior, during or post Probation)

Active = 61 (65.5%) As 49% were sponsored by Probation & Parole Service our networking superseded the others when our clients were on supervision (Figure 2) referrals.

Prior to Probation = 12 (12.9%)

Post Probation = 21 (22.5%)

26 of the 93 were on multiple Probation Orders. Figures relate to the first period of supervised probation.

PROJECT HAHN PROBATION PARTICIPANTS PROBATION STATEWIDE Population (1988)

MALES 83(89.2%) (87.8%)

FEMALES 10(10.8%) (12.2%)

A concerted effort needs to be made to attract females. More study needed in this area.

Average age = 19.4 years

Compared to median age of 21.1 years for entire Statewide Probation population.

Year of attendance

| | |
|------------------|----|
| 1990 - (to July) | 8 |
| 1989- | 9 |
| 1988 | 16 |
| 1987 | 16 |
| 1986 | 20 |
| 1985 | 3 |
| 1984 | 14 |
| 1983 | 7 |
| | 93 |

Lean years can largely be explained by:

1. The changover in leaders as they have burnt out.
2. The re-establishment of confidence of Probation Officers to motivate their clients.
3. A changing philosophy or/and ability of leaders to deal with our clientele.
4. The physical availability of space on courses.

Offence Codes per participant (DANCO)

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|----|------|
| 115 (Death by dangerous driving) | 1 | .01% |
| 120 (Assaults - non sexual) | 6 | 6% |
| 130 (Sexual assaults) | 4 | 4% |
| 210 (Robbery with violence) | 1 | 1% |
| 310 (Breaking and entering) | 40 | 43% |
| 320 (Fraud) | 5 | 5% |
| 330 (Receiving/Unlawful possession) | 2 | 2% |
| 340 (Theft) | 23 | 28% |
| 410 (Damage to property) | 3 | 3% |
| 520 (Breach of Restraint Order) | 2 | 2% |
| 560 (Trespassing/Nagrancy) | 2 | 2% |
| 710 (Alcohol/Road Safety) | 4 | 4% |

Discussion

The Risk seeking offender is isolated by Donnelly 1981 in Sport, Recreation and Juvenile Crime (Mason etal 1988 A.I.C. Publications) as the participant most likely to benefit from this type of activity seems to have selected themselves into this sample making up 78% of the client group (310, 320, 330, 340).

The number relates to the amount of participants who indicated a propensity to take risks through their acts of offending. Multiple offences are classified according to the most serious disposition category.