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We would like to sincerely thank those who contributed to this newsletter through sharing about their experience with Community Conferencing.

UPCOMING WORKSHOP!

Crazy By Design: Adolescent Brain Development Part I and Part II

Part I-Repeat of March 2005:

Date: December 5, 2005

Time: 8:30 am-12:00 pm

Part II- Application of Adolescent Brain Research Information:

Date: December 6, 2005

Time: 8:30 am- 12:00 pm

Location: La Joie de Vive

Registration information:

Debbie Nowakowski at 974-1868 or
ccc.debbie@shawcable.com

Cost: \$25.00 per workshop

Continental breakfast provided.

Calgary Community Conferencing

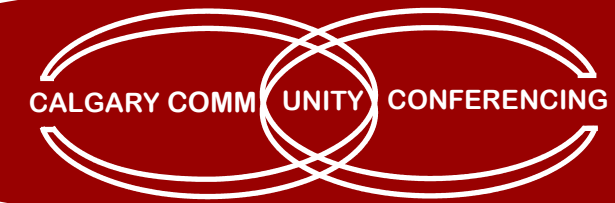
CCC brings together a youth offender and their victim (s), as well as their respective families and supporters, to find solutions beneficial to all. Referrals may come from Youth Court as a pre-sentence measure where the young person has committed a serious offence that has directly impacted others. They may also come from Calgary Board of Education administrators as a way to address serious incidents where the student could be suspended and/or criminally charged. This includes students from elementary, junior and senior high schools. Community Conferencing provides school and system administrators with interventions that promote meaningful learning for students which support the resolution of serious incidents in their schools. In both cases, those impacted have a voice in determining meaningful outcomes.

Beliefs

- ◆ Conflict is an opportunity for learning and change
- ◆ Resolution of conflict belongs primarily to those most affected
- ◆ Young people have the capacity to address and repair the harm they have caused
- ◆ Restorative Practices are opportunities for participants to be active in their own and each other's learning and healing

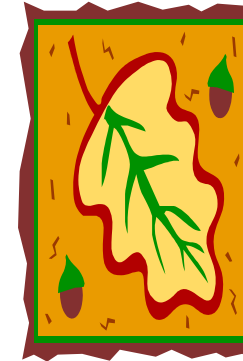
Principles

- ◆ CCC provides opportunities for participation in a safe and respectful process
- ◆ CCC facilitates youth initiated agreements as a commitment to moving forward
- ◆ CCC is committed to the use of constructive, non-stereotyping language
- ◆ CCC requires purposeful preparation of all participants
- ◆ CCC is committed to identifying significant adult support for all youth participants
- ◆ CCC is committed to community involvement



Calgary Board of Education
City of Calgary-Youth Probation
Mennonite Central Committee
John Howard Society
Calgary Family Services

Fall 2005



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CRAZY BY DESIGN

By Wendy White

I recently had the opportunity to attend the "Crazy by Design" workshop hosted by Calgary Community Conferencing as part of their Professional Development Series. The presenters, Gail and Maureen, are both counselors at Calgary Family Services. I found the workshop refreshing. As a social worker by training, I've tended to focus on family dynamics, socio-economic status, gender and social mores as the causes of adolescent trials and tribulations. The "Crazy by Design" workshop shed light on the role brain development plays in adolescent behaviour. The presenters asserted that teen brains are actually designed to be "crazy" (at least crazy by adult standards!).

Gail and Maureen highlighted the importance of the adolescent years for brain development. They maintained that as the teen brain is highly receptive to new information and prone to acquire new skills, the adolescent years therefore provide a once in a lifetime opportunity to hardwire the brain. Exposure to trauma or substance abuse impedes brain development whereas exposure to positive people and activities accelerates brain development. The presenters made several suggestions to adults working with teens:

For one, we can create a safe, low-stress environment for teens. Giving clear, consistent messages in a warm and caring manner helps place the teen in the secure state that is optimum for brain development. Second, incorporating

knowledge of the body-brain link into your practice increases opportunities for growth. This can include everything from educating teens about sleep and nutrition, offering teens a glass of water or a snack in your meetings or conducting walking meetings. Another suggestion was to play an active role in teaching teens to halt impulses, apply emotional breaks and use reason and logic. While they

teen brains are actually designed to be crazy

may not have the capacity to use these skills now, the roadmap you provide can help them navigate in the future. The facilitators also suggested that adults keep comments light and simple. For example, after walking a teen through a decision making process, concluding "that makes sense" serves to both reassure the teen and helps their brain to absorb the new information.

The workshop ended with a reminder to never give up on teens. No matter how crazy they may make you feel, chances are they are feeling doubly confused. Teens need patient, committed adults to help them navigate during this crucial time for brain development.

Please see back page of newsletter for information about the next Crazy By Design workshop

STUDENT LEARNS VALUABLE LESSON

The following article features the reflections of a high school student who participated in a Community Conference. She was involved in a serious conflict which included physical and verbal threats as well as ongoing harassment. The situation escalated to the point where the student did not feel safe leaving her home and her mother would not allow her to go to school because she feared for her daughters safety.

When I first heard about Community Conferencing I wondered whether it was really going to help or make things worse. I was concerned about the other girl and questioned whether or not she would show up and be willing to participate. I decided to participate in the conference because I wanted to see if things could be worked out. My

"It has also made me realize that because we worked out our problems it doesn't mean we go back to the way things were."

experience with Community Conferencing was well worth it. The other girl did show up and was willing to work things out. Not only did the conference create a safe place for me and the other girl to sort through stuff, we also worked out past problems. Even though we don't hang out every day, we are still close friends.

Community Conferencing had many benefits for

me. I discovered I could talk through my problems without making things worse. I also realized working out our problems doesn't mean we go back to the way things were. I didn't realize the importance before hand, but it was helpful to have adult supports involved.

Since the conference, things have really improved. I am back at school now and I would tell other students to try conferencing because it really works.

Calgary Community Conferencing welcomes members of the justice system, school system and community to observe a conference. Please contact Becky Slack at 974-1867 or ccc.becky@shawcable.com for more information.

DID YOU KNOW?

- ◆ Calgary Community Conferencing (CCC) worked with approximately 200 young people in schools and court from September 2004 to August 2005
- ◆ Conferencing tailors its process to meet the individual needs of the families referred
- ◆ CCC works closely with School Resource Officers as part of our crime prevention initiative
- ◆ CCC responds within 24 hours of receiving a referral from school administrators
- ◆ Consultations are available regarding potential referrals
- ◆ CCC did two victim initiated conferences last year and will continue to work diligently in this area in the coming year (see article next page)
- ◆ CCC increased its services at the elementary level by 50% last year

REFLECTIONS FROM A COURT REFERRED YOUTH

Some adults believe the youth justice system is too easy on young people. They believe youth are not afraid to break the law because they will get off easy. I also know many youth don't ever expect to get caught, so they never consider what type of punishment they might get. Once they begin to steal they become addicted to the enormous rush of adrenaline that runs through them every time they steal.

As a person who has committed illegal acts of breaking and entering I know what happens when a young person gets caught. Nights in jail, months of house arrest, numerous court appearances causing you to miss exams and social events, enforced counseling, facing your victims in a community conference and fines are what you will face when arrested....more than anything though, the degradation, loss of respect and trust of your teachers, family and peers is extremely difficult to endure. This was punishment I never considered at the time of the act.

I apologize to my victims, my parents, my friends and my teachers for the breach of trust and only ask that you forgive me and allow me to continue to pursue my goals in life and earn your respect once again.

VICTIM INITIATED REFERRALS PILOT PROJECT

By Darrel Heidebrecht

The experience of being victimized often leads to feelings of fear, confusion, anger, and resentment. It is our experience at Calgary Community Conferencing that many victims benefit from an opportunity to meet in person with the youth responsible for their victimization.

In an effort to create greater accessibility for victims to our service, we are exploring the idea of "victim initiated community conferencing". Through a grant received from the Alberta Solicitor General's department, Calgary Community Conferencing will be experimenting with a variety of ways in which victims will be able to initiate contact with our program to register their interest in meeting with the youth responsible for harmful behaviour. This expression of interest will then become the impetus for seeking a referral of the youth to our program.

While there are many logistical matters to be worked out in this initiative, it is our long-standing belief that victims deserve the opportunity to initiate the process of community conferencing. Our hope is that the awareness level that Community Conferencing exists will be heightened for the benefit of interested victims. Look for more information on this pilot project in the coming months.

