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Training

Facilitator Development and Training for Reentry Planning Circles

by Lorenn Walker

It takes more than one person to make a path. —African proverb

"What are you most proud of accomplishing since you have been on probation?" I ask an attractive 43-year-old blonde.

"I got my clinical discharge from drug treatment, reconnected with my kids, am making sober decisions, and have been clean for almost two years."

"Wow! You did all that! That took a lot. How'd you do it all?"

"It was that or I was gonna die and leave my kids without a mom."

"Well, how did you stay clean and sober? You must have tried before. What was it this time that made it work?"

"I had to stay clean to live. I knew I was killing myself and didn't want to die. I want to see my kids graduate."

"Okay, you knew you had to stay clean to live and you want to see your kids graduate. Let me ask you

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Suicide Risk Among Federal Sex Crime Defendants Under Pretrial Supervision

by James Byrne, April Pattavina, and Arthur Lurigio

Suicide is a worldwide public health problem. Each year in the United States, more than 30,000 people commit suicide, and at least two to three times that many attempt suicide. Perry et al. (2010) report that "in 2005, the U.S. overall crude rate of suicide across all ages was 10.7 per 100,000 of the population" (p. 803). In a recent review, Hoffer et al. (2010) observed:

Suicide is considered the eleventh leading cause of death for people in the United States. In 2007, 34,598 people committed suicide (approximately one death every 15.2 minutes). Males were 3.6 times more likely than females to take their own lives. Overall, firearms were the most common method of suicide ($n = 17,352$). Suicide impacts not only close family and friends, but also those in the general area who hear of it. For every person who committed suicide, there were approximately six survivors, a total of 4.6 million people, described as family and friends of the deceased (McIntosh, 2010, as cited in Hoffer et al., 2010, p. 779).

A number of recent news accounts have highlighted an emerging potential problem: One *unintended* consequence

of our recent crackdown on Internet-based sex crimes is that those individuals under investigation for sex crimes, as well as those who are arrested and charged, appear to be at a heightened risk for suicide. In a recent study of known suicides by individuals under various stages of investigation for federal sex crimes, Hoffer et al. (2010), members of the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit, point out that when an individual under investigation for a federal sex crime commits suicide, federal investigators are affected in a number of ways, especially when family members and friends of the alleged offenders blame the investigators for the suicide. We suspect that federal pretrial officers face similar consequences when one of their supervisees commits suicide while under pretrial supervision.

Why Do People Commit Suicide?

Most individuals who commit or attempt suicide suffer from a psychiatric and/or substance use disorder; they may also have experienced a devastating or unexpected loss (material or status), or feelings of hopelessness, isolation, or despair (Byrne et al., 2009). Sex offenders

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this. On a scale of zero to ten, with zero representing your confidence that you will probably relapse and ten showing you'll stay clean for sure, where are you on the scale? Honestly, where would you put your confidence?"

"I guess I'm about a seven. I am pretty sure, but not totally."

"Wow! Great! A seven! What makes you a seven? What gives you that much confidence?"

"I rebuilt bonds with my kids. They're trusting me again. I can't hurt them another time. It would be the last straw."

"Wow, okay, you rebuilt bonds with your kids and they're trusting you again. What could you do now, that would move you up just a half a number, to a 7.5 on the scale? So you'd be a tiny bit more sure that you're going to stay clean? What would it take for you to be just a little more confident?"

"Hummmm, I guess I hav'ta go to meetings twice a day. Like I'm doing now. Gotta keep going no matter what. And I need to stay in touch with my sponsor too. And definitely stay away from my old friends and hangouts."

The woman above was participating in a reentry planning circle that I conducted during a three-day introductory training for facilitators. About 25 trainees observed the woman's circle from a larger one encircling the smaller one. Conducting a live circle is part of the training program for people to learn about this model, which has been piloted in Hawai'i prisons since 2004 (Walker & Greening, 2012).

Also participating in the woman's reentry circle were her counselor and a childhood friend. Her divorced parents, who live in other states, could not attend, but I spoke with each of them on the telephone before the circle and obtained their responses to the same questions that I ask all loved ones who attend circles. An empty chair, symbolizing their support and participation, was placed in the circle, which held the parents' responses that I wrote down. The woman's friend read the written responses during the circle. After the circle, I prepared a detailed plan that was developed in the circle, addressing the woman's vital needs for a law-abiding and sober life. I mailed the plan to all the circle participants, including her parents.

The circle for the training participants was held on the afternoon of the first day of the facilitator training. Participants reacted with surprise that I engaged with positive bias toward the woman's accomplishments. The training participants were mainly trained in traditional mediation skills, where neutrality is key. Mediators do not shake their heads, smile, and say "Wow!" with feeling, as I did. Finding facilitators who can adapt and learn to provide this model is important.

This reentry circle model is a strengths-based and goal-oriented social learning process (Walker & Greening, 2012). Stressing the positive accomplishments of individuals who have circles is a vital aspect of the model. "Seeing problems as learning opportunities, passages of growth, or hardships with an important

their innocence have also had circles. The process helped them reconcile with their wrongful incarceration and make plans for their futures.

In addition to the process facilitating healing, people learn from planning (Michaels, 1997). The circle process itself is based on public health learning principles. The World Health Organization (WHO) established criteria for health educators to apply in working to change behavior (World Health Organization, 1954). WHO defined four elements for effective learning:

1. Focus on individual's goals;
2. Use positive motivation;
3. Provide in group settings; and
4. Apply experiential activity-based processes.

Creating a clearer vision for the future and repairing or reaffirming relationships with supporters can be achieved through a circle.

message, helps in the replacement of shame with dignity" (Furman & Ahola, 1992, p. 161). Facilitators need to grasp and understand this concept in order to provide these circles.

Reentry Circles Are Based on Public Health Learning Principles

This reentry planning circle model is designed for an incarcerated person or someone leaving some sort of supervised status, including probation or a substance abuse program. It has been piloted in Hawai'i since 2004 with 71 adults and four youths. Two of the circles for adults were held outside of Hawai'i. A total of 373 people have participated, including prison staff who attend each circle, and 100% of all participants have reported that the process was positive, even if there is later reincarceration.

The process begins with individuals applying to have a circle. They invite loved ones whom they hope will be willing to attend their circle and a representative from the prison or program that they are leaving. Circles have also been successfully provided for imprisoned adults who have life terms, but who hope for a pardon or parole. People who maintain

Over the years, various aspects of each of these elements have been studied and validated for effective learning by well-respected social scientists (Bandura, 1997; Langer, 1998; Seligman, 1998; Dweck, 2006). The circle model uses each of the four WHO learning elements and applies restorative justice and solution-focused approaches.

While it is labeled a reentry and transition planning process, the circle model can be provided for and be helpful to someone with years of prison time to serve. Providing the circles as soon as someone is convicted or confined makes it likely that the person will set positive goals and address and repair damaged relationships with loved ones sooner. This makes it more likely that "good time" will be served while the individual is confined. Creating a clearer vision for the future and repairing or reaffirming relationships with supporters can be achieved through a circle. An incarcerated person's having supporters throughout his or her prison experience helps makes prison a growth experience and also helps with prison management.

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The process can also be used for people who do not go to prison, but who are on parole or probation. For example, the circles are being piloted in Monterey, California for people on probation pursuant to a new state law keeping low-level law violators in the community instead of prison (Office of Governor Edmund G. Brown, 2012). Anyone who has been convicted of violating the law and sentenced to probation or parole is likely to have needs for cultivating a law-abiding life that are similar to those of an incarcerated person. Reintegration into the community begins with addressing any harm caused by a violation of law that results in justice system intervention. When individuals charged with law violations are convicted, it is not the convicted individuals alone who are affected, but the people connected to them and their communities as well.

then asks their loved ones questions two and three. After the loved ones describe what the incarcerated person could do to repair the harm, the incarcerated person is asked whether he or she can do what is requested.

Solution-Focused Approach for Strength Identification and Goal Development

This reentry planning circle process applies solution-focused brief therapy (SF) language skills. It is strength- and goal-based, focusing on what positive developments are happening for people in the present and what they want for their futures (Dejong & Berg, 2008). SF abandons pathology and diagnosing people according to the past and problems. Instead, the SF approach assumes that all adults, no matter who they are or what they have done, are the best experts on their own lives (Lee et al., 2003). This assumption makes it vital that facilitators are generally optimistic and

is working and how those positive attributes can be directed toward solutions. For example, the phenomenon of eventual desistance from crime and substance abuse for most law violators and drug users (Maruna, 2001) is not widely discussed or even known by many criminal justice practitioners.

Learning how to apply an SF perspective and language is a critical aspect of the process. Therapists who use SF are extensively trained in its practices and theory (Dejong & Berg, 2008; Berg & deShazer, 1993). Because circle facilitators are not acting in the role of therapists, the SF training necessary to facilitate circles is abbreviated and targeted to specific tools useful for facilitation, such as the scaling question used with the woman above who was completing probation. Scaling questions are very useful, especially for probing assumptions of people who say they are going to stay clean and sober. Another SF tool is always to be respectful of circle applicants by using their exact words, as demonstrated in the opening anecdote.

The solution-focused approach is similar to motivational interviewing (MI), and the two approaches have been compared (Lewis & Osborn, 2004). Both are strength-based and nonpathological approaches. Both SF and MI are considered best practices and are evidence-based treatment interventions that are used successfully in the criminal justice system for substance abuse and violence cases (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011; Walker & Hayashi, 2009). The main difference between SF and MI is that SF is less expert dependent. In MI, the *stages of change theory* is applied, and a counselor determines the level of change that the client has reached and communicates with the client accordingly, while no "stages of change" determinations are used in SF (Lewis & Osborn, 2004).

Programs administering this circle model should strive to provide ongoing opportunities for practice groups to meet continually and brush up on forming solution-focused questions and responses. The paradigm shift away from problem solving and toward solution building is difficult, and it is easy to fall back into our deficit- and problem-focused thinking and language.

The text *Interviewing for Solutions* (Dejong & Berg, 2008) is a useful

Most potential facilitators want to be optimistic, and many embrace the opportunity to abandon pathological models and negative assumptions.

Restorative Justice for Reconciliation

The array of individual needs addressed at the circles begins with recognition of the need to plan for *making things right* after a criminal conviction and imprisonment. Usually the restoration of damaged relationships is addressed with loved ones who attend the circles. At the beginning of this model, circles address how to repair and reconcile the harms caused loved ones and others, including the community at large and unknown victims. Facilitating a reconciliation plan takes most of the time at the circle, sometimes up to two hours of the complete three-hour process.

The circle facilitator asks participants three basic restorative questions:

1. Who was affected by the crime and/or incarceration?
2. How were they affected?
3. What can be done to repair the harm? (Zehr, 2002).

The facilitator asks the incarcerated individual the first two questions, and

willing to adopt a positive outlook about people, regardless of their histories of bad behavior.

It can be challenging for some facilitators to adopt an SF approach, especially when working with people who have committed crimes and are incarcerated. Most imprisoned people have made some seriously poor choices. It can seem too bold for some prospective facilitators to view these people with a strengths perspective. Our experience teaching this model, however, shows that most people and potential facilitators want to be optimistic, and many embrace the opportunity to abandon pathological models and negative assumptions.

During facilitator trainings we discuss the traditional problem-solving model and how prison systems, and American culture too, are deficit focused. The problem-solving focus is on examining and analyzing maladaptive behavior. Lots of thought and discussion goes into *what is wrong* with someone and *why things went wrong*. Most of the energy goes into *explaining* things. There is scant discussion of what

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resource for all circle facilitators to add to their libraries and consult as a reference for developing and improving SF techniques. Establishing groups to meet regularly to practice SF language and questions is a good training strategy. Groups that have replicated this circle model have set up study groups where facilitators practice regularly.

Consistent practice and training for every level of facilitator is important for maintaining top skills. We all should strive to improve, no matter what our skill level is: "Never become so much of an expert that you stop gaining expertise. View life as a continuous learning experience" (Waitley, 2010, p. 653).

Facilitator Training

Comprehensive training is critical to understanding the nuances of this unique process. Facilitators attend a 24-hour training course provided over three days. As with the circle process itself, the training is designed to be as engaging as possible. We recognize that "training is not simply telling."

Training participants sit in circles and participate in applied learning activities. An actual live circle is observed on the first afternoon of the training. Observing the live circle gives trainees an immediate understanding of what the process is all about and makes the remaining training more meaningful. If possible, the live circle is held in a prison. If going to the prison and watching an actual circle is not possible, finding someone recently released from prison, parole, probation, or a substance abuse treatment facility to come to the training and have a circle is a good alternative. There is also a *modified* reentry and transition planning process that we have developed and used at trainings when an individual's family cannot participate and other supporters attend instead (Walker, 2009).

After the 24-hour training course, the facilitator trainees observe at least two interviews in the prison. After watching the interviews, where trainees are also invited to ask solution-focused questions, the trainees observe the convening of a circle.

To learn how to convene the circles, trainees listen to the telephone conversations while a supervising facilitator contacts the people whom the incarcerated person listed as potential partici-

pants. Next trainees observe at least two circles in the prison. While observing the circles, trainees fill out an observation form, which helps them engage in the process. The form also gives trainees something to relate to afterwards, when they debrief with the facilitator and the recorder. The debriefing takes about one hour to go over the important aspect of the process. Two people can be trained together and share in discussions and debriefing with the supervising facilitator.

After observing two circles, facilitator trainees are ready to record circles. After recording at least two circles, or as long as the lead facilitator believes is necessary for trainees to understand the process sufficiently, trainees are ready to interview applicants under the supervision of the lead facilitator. The lead facilitator will supervise trainee facilitators for at least two circles and record with trainees for two more circles before trainees

to fill them out after the circle. If the prison where the circles are held allows refreshments, the recorder is also responsible for providing them. The recorder debriefs with the facilitator after each circle on the process, and if any unexpected incidents occur during the circle, he or she informs the program coordinator about them.

Listening Skill Training

Listening skills are key for facilitators and recorders providing this reentry and transition planning process. Role-playing circles are a large part of the facilitator training, along with at least four hours of listening-skill development, including learning how to apply the *Compassionate Listening* model (Hwoschinsky, 2001) and *mindful listening*. Compassionate listening recognizes that what people feel is important for healing and that identifying what people value is important for recognizing their strengths and dealing with hostility.

***Compassionate listening recognizes that
what people feel is important for healing and
that identifying what people value is important
for recognizing their strengths and dealing
with hostility.***

are left to facilitate without supervision. Every person is unique, and the precise amount of training time will differ for each individual.

Recorders

Circle recorders perform an important role in the circle by collecting the participants' information that will become part of the written "circle summary" and transition plan. Many recorders go on to become circle facilitators after a few months, but some prefer to remain in the role of the recorder. The recorders take the same 24-hour training as the facilitators and are supervised by the facilitator during the circles.

Recorders provide feedback to facilitators and help conduct the circle. In Hawai'i the recorders bring the large sheets of paper to attach to the walls for recording, felt pens for writing, and copies of participant surveys and pens

The mindful listening that we teach in training is based on the Buddhist practice of *mindful meditation*. Mindfulness has been applied to psychology as a therapeutic intervention to assist troubled people. *Cognitive restructuring*, popular in many prison rehabilitation programs today, is recognized to have roots in Buddhist practice (Ellis, 1991).

Jon Kabat-Zinn, who received a Ph.D. in molecular biology from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is a professor of medicine at the University of Massachusetts, founded the world-renowned *Stress Reduction Clinic*. He is the author of numerous books on learning mindfulness meditation and applying mindfulness to daily living.

According to Kabat-Zinn:

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose,

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in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. This kind of attention nurtures greater awareness, clarity, and acceptance of present-moment reality. It wakes us up to the fact that our lives unfold only in moments. If we are not fully present for many of those moments, we may not only miss what is most valuable in our lives but also fail to realize the richness and depth of our possibilities for growth and transformation (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4).

Mindful listening applies these concepts and is learned and increased by practicing being fully engaged in whoever is speaking and not in one's own thoughts.

Individuals, no matter what sorts of problems they face, know more about their capacities and goals than anyone else, including the highly educated professionals working with them.

Mindful listening is about giving another person one's whole attention.

Mindful listening is embodied in the words of Henri Nouwen:

True listeners no longer have an inner need to make their presence known. They are free to receive, to welcome, to accept. Listening is much more than allowing another to talk while waiting for a chance to respond. Listening is paying full attention to others and welcoming them into our very beings. The beauty of listening is that those who are listened to start feeling accepted, start taking their words more seriously and discovering their true selves. Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which you invite strangers to become friends, to get to know their inner selves more fully, and even to dare to be silent with you (Nouwen, p. 74).

Compassionate listening, another skill rigorously taught to circle facilitators and recorders, is also derived from Buddhism, and specifically from the teachings of the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh (Green, 2010). Compassionate listening is an exercise in identifying someone's

values (defined as positive motivations), feelings, and the specific facts of the situation. When people are complaining, angry, or even hostile, beneath their troubled state there is something positive that they value.

Imagine the angry and hostile feelings of a mother whose daughter has relapsed and is back in prison for the third time. The daughter has again left her three young children in the care of their grandmother. The positive value beneath the grandmother's anger could be that she values parenting and wants the best for her grandchildren. The mother believes that her imprisoned daughter has the capability to be a good parent. Her hostility is based on these positive values. Recognizing upset individuals' positive values and

the motivations underlying their anger and frustration helps to defuse their misery and can provide them some healing. When circle facilitators help identify these values, there is increased understanding and peace between people, and within individuals too.

Listening skills are also key for facilitators in learning and applying solution-building language. One of the most important tenets of the solution-focused approach is that all individuals are the experts on their own lives. Individuals, no matter what sorts of problems they face, know more about their capacities and goals than anyone else, including the highly educated and experienced professionals and experts working with them. To become skilled at applying solution-building language takes much practice in concentrated listening. Efforts to improve listening skills have lasting value not only for those who are listened to in this way, but for the practitioner also.

Roles and Responsibilities for Facilitators and Recorders

The following is a list of suggested facilitator roles and responsibilities,

which can be adapted to an organization's needs:

- Report to the circle coordinator; receive training in the circle process, and become certified to facilitate;
- Pass security clearance with the prison system;
- Complete any volunteer training program that the prison system provides;
- Interview applicants at prisons and explain the program requirements and process;
- Convene circles by making reasonable efforts to contact all individuals whom the incarcerated person has requested to participate (e.g., perform Internet and White Pages searches to obtain contact information);
- Provide information to prospective participants on the nature of the circle process, including sending a brochure;
- Coordinate a mutually agreeable scheduling of the circle;
- Prepare all paperwork necessary to conduct the circle;
- Coordinate the scheduling of the circle with the program coordinator, recorder, and any observers;
- Conduct the three-hour circle;
- Disseminate and collect data-collection instruments for all participants immediately following the circle;
- Prepare a draft circle summary and transition plan within three working days of the circle;
- Send the draft circle summary and transition plan (usually six to eight pages) for review by the program coordinator, who will return it with any revisions within 24 hours;
- Revise and finalize the circle summary and transition plan within 24 hours of receiving it from the coordinator;
- Disseminate copies of the circle summary and transition plan to all circle participants and to the coordinator within five working days after conducting the circle;
- Provide any immediate follow-up and/or referrals for circle participants; and
- Inquire regarding re-circle within six months of the first circle, or sooner, if necessary.

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The following is a list of suggested recorder roles and responsibilities, which can also be adapted to an organization's needs:

- Report to the program coordinator;
- Receive training in the circle process and become certified to record process;
- Pass security clearance with the prison department;
- Complete any volunteer training program that the prison department offers;
- Coordinate circle scheduling with the coordinator and assigned facilitators;
- Obtain all necessary supplies to conduct the circle (e.g., pens, easel paper, tissues, etc.);
- Perform recording of the three-hour circle;
- Assist in the dissemination and collection of data-collection instruments for all participants immediately following the circle;
- Perform debriefing with the circle facilitator; and
- Notify the coordinator of any significant issues or events that require immediate attention (e.g., concerns regarding unexpected events with relationship to the circle program).

Facilitator and Recorder Qualifications

We make every effort to recruit facilitators who represent the community and who are optimistic and good listeners. The facilitators are important role models. Ideally we will eventually have some facilitators who themselves have had circles. A formerly incarcerated person requires five years after being off parole or out of prison to become eligible for a security clearance back into prison, however. We have tried to recruit participating family members who were interested in facilitation, but none have yet been trained.

Most people in our community cannot afford the vast amount of time it takes to become trained and experienced in providing the circles and then to provide them regularly. It can take up to 20 hours to provide one circle, which includes interviewing the imprisoned person, contacting all the potential participants, and preparing and delivering the resulting written plan. Additionally, while we

wholly support volunteer work and service (we do many circles pro bono), we want a base of reliable, experienced facilitators who represent our community and people in prison. Paying facilitators even a stipend for transportation, babysitting, etc., helps ensure that they will be able to regularly provide the circles. Experience in providing circles improves facilitation quality.

The following list of qualifications is suggested for a facilitator, which can be adapted to an organization's requirements for staff/independent contractors:

- Bachelor's degree or background in indigenous or other conflict-resolution practices;
- Experience with traumatized individuals and people suffering serious stress;

from being expanded enough to provide circles for most of the people who apply for them, however. We are collaborating now with another community organization that will provide the program eventually, because the program is finally close to becoming institutionalized and we mainly focus on developing pilot programs. Groups in New York, Virginia, California, and Texas are replicating the circles in their communities. There is also interest in the process from foreign countries, and I have done trainings and presentations on the circles in Europe and Asia.

The research shows that the circles are effective for helping families heal while the process also addresses the two most important aspects of criminal desistance: relationships with law-abiding people

The circles facilitate the repair of damaged relationships with law-abiding loved ones, and they address ways of finding meaningful employment.

- Certification by a providing agency as competent to facilitate circles;
- Good communication skills, including listening, writing, and speaking;
- A state tax number or status for independent contractor, if required; and
- Ability to pass a state prison department security background check to gain access to prisons.

The following list of qualifications is suggested for a recorder:

- Good communication skills, including listening, writing, and speaking;
- Legible handwriting;
- Certification by a providing agency as competent to record circles;
- A state tax number or status for independent contractor, if required; and
- Ability to pass a state prison department security background check to gain access to prisons.

Family Healing Is Enough

Almost eight years have passed since we began providing these reentry circles in Hawai'i. I have facilitated most of the 75 circles that we have done to date, but we have had no difficulty in finding people interested in being facilitators. A lack of resources has prevented the program

and meaningful employment (Maruna, 2001). The circles facilitate the repair of damaged relationships with law-abiding loved ones, and they address ways of finding meaningful employment and assessing the interests of imprisoned persons.

The attractive blond woman who had the circle at the facilitator training relapsed, but she went back into treatment and is optimistic that she will eventually stay sober, and so is her family. While the research has not been extensive enough to establish that the process prevents repeat crime, that it addresses family healing is sufficient justification to provide the circles.

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