

**REDUCING JUVENILE DELINQUENCY THROUGH  
ENHANCED LIFE SKILLS**

**Institute for Court Management  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The Unified Judicial System Code of Intention, the Values and Mission Statement, and the Guiding Principles of the Court System support all viable, effective efforts to maximize our success rate in working with offenders. These documents underline the level of support for new and innovative methods of working with offenders.

The Court Services Department in South Dakota provides probation supervision to adults and juveniles in the state. The primary focus of this study is to identify four areas of interest in providing services to juveniles.

- The first area is to identify precursors to juveniles who enter the court system. It is widely believed that more risk factors that are existing in a child's life, the higher the likelihood that there will be court involvement.
- The skills that were identified as being most troublesome include, but are not limited to, the following: poor verbal and non verbal communication skills; poor problem solving skills, involvement in high risk behaviors, a lack of self-esteem, a lack of believing in them to be persons of value.
- The literature review and surveys helped to establish a blueprint; a variety of validated methods that, when implemented, are most effective in the endeavor to enhance the skills of juveniles in their major life areas. Further, it was consistently supported that by implementing the skills that are learned, a decrease in the incidence of further court involvement can result. The methods most touted as being effective includes using role playing to deliver the information. Juveniles in the groups must be encouraged to fully participate in the group sessions. Offering different situations for them to use their skills, thus teaching ways to use the skills

in a variety of situations, helps to instill those skills with more regularity, until the utilization becomes habit.

- The literature review, and through a variety of surveys, pinpoints observations and beliefs held by state and national professionals as to how effective a Life Skills Enhancement program can be.

Ultimately, the research has supported the belief that a Life Skills Enhancement Program is necessary, and that it has been effective enough to support the continuance of a Sioux Falls Life Skills program, and to implement similar programs in other probation offices across the state.

Included in this study was a search to determine the impact of the family on a juvenile's propensity toward delinquent behavior. Through a study of juvenile probationers in this circuit, statistics were accumulated to show the incidence of generational criminal behavior. Study #1 (page 46) will show a strong incidence of this occurrence. A survey of juveniles, both probationers and non-probationers,

Court Services Officer's and Chief Court Services Officer's were surveyed to identify their opinions on the perceived level of necessity for life skills training for probationers, and also to identify what would be barriers in their circuits to implementing a life skills program. The overall consensus was that a lack of life skills does in fact have a negative impact on juveniles, that the family plays an important role in the level of proficiency the juvenile has in regard to life skills, and there was 100% agreement that a life skills enhancement program would indeed be a positive step toward lowering juvenile delinquency.

A survey of community professionals was utilized to gather the collective knowledge regarding the needs of juveniles, in order to perfect the Sioux Falls Life Skills program. This survey supports the concept of a life skills program. It was identified that many juveniles lacking life skills are the ones most likely to exhibit the most behavioral problems.

Five existing Life Skills programs (in as many areas in the United States that provide life skills programming within their juvenile court system) were surveyed to identify specific methods utilized to implement their programs. The goal of this endeavor being to tap the knowledge of what has been learned in their specific program which may be used to enhance the efforts of the Sioux Falls Life skills Program.

The results of all surveys were compiled and analyzed.

The major area of concern regarding the Sioux Falls life skills class was the fact that 57% of the juveniles who started the class did not successfully complete them. Several changes will be made prior to the beginning of the next class. The juveniles will be more closely screened before entering the group: An improved method of screening participants will be employed; early intervention will be considered in choosing participants. The facilitators will consider other areas of concern with participants and make proper referrals. Parent support and participation will be mandatory to some degree. An effort will be made to encourage participation from all group members, and weekly assignments will be given that encouraged “practicing” the learned skills during the week.

Data that detailed the best practices for implementing life skill curriculums were gathered. The information learned will be incorporated into the curriculum being used in Sioux Falls. The facilitators will examine the data, and will make a determination of strategies that we feel would best enhance the program that we now use.

Overall, the findings showed that there is a strong belief by a majority of the people who work with juveniles that enhancing life skills will have a positive impact. Even to the smallest degree, it was stated that any additional services that can be provided to juveniles in need will have some level of success.

The Sioux Falls office will continue to provide life skills enhancement training for the medium level probationers that are on probation. Middle school age participants will be the target population, although, being slightly older or slightly younger will not deter participation.

The curriculum that is being used is very flexible and non-copyrighted, meaning that there is an open opportunity to share the curriculum with other circuits in the state. This is an area that will be discussed amongst the Chief's council, to determine if the program can be tailored to meet the differing needs of circuits across the state.

## **INTRODUCTION**

An overview of the court system in South Dakota will provide the scope of how the system is divided, how the levels are separated, and how juvenile court, the main focus area of this paper, fits into the system as a whole.

The Unified Judicial System in South Dakota is divided into three separate and distinct levels; Supreme Court, Circuit Court, and Court Magistrate.

Magistrate Court has jurisdiction over preliminary hearings for all criminal prosecution; they preside over trials for criminal misdemeanors, and small claims.

Circuit Courts have original jurisdiction in all civil, juvenile, and criminal actions. They have exclusive jurisdiction in felony trials, arraignments, and all types of civil actions except areas of concurrent jurisdiction shared with magistrate court. They also have appellate jurisdiction over magistrate court decisions. Circuit courts cover juvenile, civil, and criminal cases.

The Supreme Court is the highest level of the South Dakota Court System and has original jurisdiction in cases involving interests of the state, original and remedial writs. They render advisory opinions to the Governor on issues involving executive power, appellate jurisdiction over circuit court decisions, rule-making power over lower court practice and procedure, have administrative control over the Unified Judicial System, and they control admissions to and disciplines of the members of the state bar association.

The Supreme Court has oversight and policy making authority over all levels of the court system. South Dakota is divided into seven judicial circuits. Each circuit has a Presiding Judge who is appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and a Court Administrator who is appointed by the Presiding Judge. They manage all administrative

areas of the local court. They define local policies and practices and ensure that state and local policies regarding personnel rules are followed.

Each circuit has a probation department that is managed by the Chief Court Services Officer. The Chief Court Services Officer's are appointed in each circuit by the Presiding Judge. Based on the size of the circuit, three of the seven circuits also have Deputy Chief Court Services Officer's. A Chief's responsibility is to manage the probation services of their circuit. The Chiefs from the seven circuits form a council; they work together to establish uniformity in the delivery of probation services for court services on a state-wide basis. The Chief's council develops and recommends policies and procedures to ensure uniformity in the delivery of services across each circuit of the state. Any change implemented in regard to policies and/or procedures must be approved by the council of Presiding Judges, and ultimately, be approved by the Chief Justice of the South Dakota Supreme Court.

The Court Services Officer's role in South Dakota has changed significantly over the years, and continues to grow and evolve in practice. Historically, it has been presumed that Court Services Officers work from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, in their offices, with probationers coming in to see them as directed. Due to a change in philosophy and an active commitment to utilize procedures that are proven to provide optimum positive results, a Court Services Officer is now more likely to be in the field, visiting with probationers in schools, at their homes, or in their workplace. This role change is largely due to the change in ideology that has been embraced by the Unified Judicial System as a whole. The state is invested in practicing proven methods in line with a "what works" philosophy.

The South Dakota court system has adopted the Level of Service Inventory (LSI); a validated risk assessment to identify the high risk/high needs areas of a probationer's life. There is a heavy reliance on community resources to address these high risk areas.

The primary goal of the court services department continues to be to protect the community and carry out the orders of the Judge; it is also the goal of Court Services to offer the opportunities to probationers to maximize their chances of a successful completion of probation, and to lower the chance of recidivism.

As the focus of this paper is on the juvenile division of the South Dakota Court system, the following is a brief view of juvenile court:

There are two different offenses that can bring juveniles into the court system in South Dakota. The most serious are delinquent offenses, which include offenses that would be charged as felonies if the person committing the offense were an adult. For example, burglary would be a delinquent behavior because of the nature of the offense and the age of the defendant; it is an action that would result in court action whether the offender was an adult or a juvenile.

The lower levels of offenses are Children in Need of Supervision (CHINS). CHINS offenses are those that are illegal for juveniles, but the action wouldn't be illegal if they were adults (18 years and older.) This category includes running away, being out of the control of their parents and truancy. There are also status offenses such as, curfew and tobacco offenses, which fall under the CHINS definition.

Many juveniles only come through the court system once; they make a mistake, they make amends, and that ends their involvement with the court. Other cases, however,

come through again and again, and in many of these cases, the juveniles have extended family members who also commit, or have committed, criminal offenses. Upon a close look, one can see that when a parent lacks a certain skill, the same will be true of their child(ren.) This can include one or all of the skills that a person needs to move through life, jobs, and relationships. Examples would include a lack of self-esteem, a lack of appropriate and effective communication skills, using aggressive rather than assertive behaviors to have their needs met, and lack of knowledge of how to solve problems in an effective, appropriate manner. It seems logical to conclude that if parents lack these skills, they cannot teach them to their children.

The lack of basic living skills and the obvious effect on the lives of adults and children in the court system led to a search by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Circuit Court Services Officer's who work with juveniles to find a community agency that could provide life skills training for probationers. Finding none, resources were secured to purchase a life skills training curriculum which is implemented by juvenile probation officers in Sioux Falls.

A curriculum was purchased from the Philip Roy Company. The topics, arranged in the order that they are presented, are:

- You and the Law
- Verbal Communication
- Non Verbal Communication:
- Critical Problem Solving:
- Risk Taking
- Decision Making
- Self Concept

- Personal Awareness
- Self-control
- How to Get a Job and Hold a job

After having completed two Life Skills group sessions (with another one to start in January 2010), the curriculum and the method of delivery of the program is being augmented after each subsequent group session. This process, along with a literature review, surveys, and studies of various groups to include teachers, school administration, Court Services Officer's, Chief Court Services Officer's, and juvenile offenders and non-offenders will aid in answering the questions below:

- Will the enhancement of life skills affect juvenile's relationships at home and in the community?
- What is the most effective way to provide life skills training?
- Will the enhancement of live skills school attendance and scholastic success?
- Will the enhancement of life skills training reduce delinquency?
- Will enhancing a person's life skills have a long term impact?

A study was completed involving 193 juveniles who are currently on probation in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Research will identify the number of occurrences when juvenile probationers have parents who are involved, or have been involved, in the criminal justice system. Further, the study Research will also show that many of these juveniles lack the basic life skills that are needed for them to conform to the rules and expectations of society that they will be required to assimilate into.

Throughout the years, court systems have held a vast array of attitudes toward the criminal justice system, and attitudes of how persons who break the law should be

dealt with. Springing from those beliefs are numerous approaches that have been utilized to identify and correct behaviors that lead to criminal behavior. Popular approaches that have earned the buy in of “professionals” in the criminal justice field will be detailed, including the beliefs and approach which were adopted by the South Dakota Unified Judicial System to work with probationers. This paper will identify a wide range of the causal factors that result in a juvenile being involved in the court system. Studies will determine if the enhancement of life skills is an effective means to future criminal activity. Skills that can be enhanced, and methods that professionals can use to enhance these skills, will be identified.

The above findings will be implemented to identify the need and the probable outcomes that can be actualized in Sioux Falls, as well as state-wide. Further research on local, state, and neighboring states will divulge whether a life skills program can/will increase skills, and what level of impact can be expected.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Historically, the perception of the role of a Court Services Officer has been diverse, and most times, inimical.

“The criminal justice system relies on the association made between specific, in this case illegal behavior and the application of a painful or punitive sanction, which generally involves the removal of certain freedoms and exposure to unpleasant living conditions. The painful stimulus must be temporally associated to the behavior, consistently applied, and intense enough to prevent further such behaviors. The individual must not learn that the intrinsic reward properties of their behavior are greater or more consistent than the punishment. And finally, opportunities for preferred modes of behavior must be available. Due to the prevalence of low clearance rates, trial delays, inconsistently applied dispositions, legal loopholes, the learning of improper reward and punishment contingencies and a lack of available legitimate opportunities, the criminal justice system and society at large have been unable to meet the criteria for deterrence and prevention.”<sup>1</sup>

It often seems that public perception of the role of Court Services Officers falls into two distinct categories; one being a law enforcement model, in which supervision provided by the Court Services Officer is primarily responsible to enforce legal obligations as established by the court. The other perception is that a Court Services Officer’s job is to act as a social worker, to provide counseling and rehabilitation programs. It would be rare that the perception of a Court Services Officer’s responsibilities would encompass both of these viewpoints.<sup>2</sup>

These two diverse views of the role of a Court Services Officer are so globally opposite that, regardless of which opinion one holds, a negative connotation is given to the job of the Court Services Officer. Those who think that the court system should adopt a “lock ‘em up” attitude certainly do not appreciate the thought that these “criminals” are

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<sup>1</sup> Fishbein, Diana H. **Biological Perspectives in Criminology**, 1990, page 12.

<sup>2</sup> Christle, Christine A; Jolivette, Kristine, and Nelson, Michael C. **Youth Antisocial and Violent, page 5. Behavior: Prevention of Antisocial and Violent Behavior in Youth, a Review of the Literature.**

being coddled when they should be punished for their misbehavior. Those who believe in rehabilitation are shocked by the treatment of defendants in the court system.

That a punitive approach is considered by many to be an appropriate and necessary means of dealing with adults in the court/probation system is concerning. More concerning is the fact that the same perception is often linked to juveniles in the court system. “Get tough on crime.” “Zero tolerance.” “The War on Youth Violence.” These are slogans that are commonly heard in regard to society’s attempts to curb juvenile antisocial and violent behavior.<sup>3</sup>

A consequence of the differing views of the Court System and how they should approach crime results in a lack of faith in the court system.

“Many people believe supervision is limited to the enforcement of conditions ordered by the courts/and or parole board. In order for the public to be safer, as well as to ensure that supervision slows or ceases involvement in criminal activity, supervision agencies must be respected, focused on outcomes for offenders and staff, and committed to developing policies and practices that are based on science and the best available data.”<sup>4</sup>

Recent developments have led to a new and valid means of providing supervision based on principles of behavior management.

“By blending the law enforcement and social work models together, behavior management defines supervision as a comprehensive set of tools focused on changing offender attitudes and behaviors to enhance public safety. It emphasizes that the goal of public safety is met when supervision succeeds in assisting offenders to change their behavior. This requires motivating offenders to change, helping offenders acquire skills useful to be pro-social, and ensuring compliance with supervision obligations that are goal-oriented.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, page 3.

<sup>4</sup> Bryne, James; Shepardson, Eric; Taxman, Faye; with Gieb, Adam, and Gornik, Mark. **Tools of the Trade: A Guide to Incorporating Science into Practice**, page V.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, page 2.

The South Dakota Department of Court Services department has definite objectives in providing probation services. Primarily, it is the job of a Court Services Officer to carry out the orders of the court/judge. Court Services Officer's employ a variety of tools to work with probationers. The goal of using these tools is to identify all possible programs, options, community resources, etc, to increase the likelihood that the probationer will learn positive behaviors to replace the negative actions that led to their criminal behavior.

Over past years, the probation department of the Unified Judicial System has endeavored to follow national trends toward providing proven techniques to work with legal offenders. A change in policy brought a new and enlightened approach which continues to change and improve the delivery of services offered to offenders in a concerted effort to instill positive and lasting life changes. Following is the Code of Intention held by the Unified Judicial System of South Dakota to implement programs that are in line with the newest concept of "what works" in the delivery of probation services:

### **UJS Movement Toward Evidence Based Probation**

- A shared understanding of "evidence" which has been defined by Dr. Edward Latessa as, "results from controlled studies, involving distinguishing between experimental groups, and control or comparison groups."
- The evidence of "what works" in probation is a coalescence of research of the past 30 years and gives clear guidelines as to how to best expend resources allocated to the probation system. The evidence from research indicates that those criminals posing the highest risk of continued criminal conduct should receive the

greatest share of probation resources as this group of offenders pose the greatest risk but will also show the most significant positive change through appropriate programming such as cognitive/behavioral therapy and social learning models.

- The greatest amount of probation resources in terms of both manpower and programming should be directed toward the most at risk group of offenders with emphasis on targeting criminogenic factors that are highly correlated with criminal conduct. In other words, dynamic crime producing needs such as anti-social peer associations, substance abuse, lack of problem solving skills and self control skills are examples of criminogenic needs that should be targeted for change.
- The most effective programming to assist high risk offenders in overcoming criminogenic needs are behavioral in nature. Such programming is centered on the present circumstances of the probationer and is action oriented with a slant toward teaching new pro-social skills to replace anti-social skills such as cheating and lying.
- Central to a successful probation program in South Dakota is the validated and normed juvenile and adult risk and needs instrument (LSI-R and CLS/MI). It is absolutely vital that all Court Services Officers be adequately trained and periodically updated on the utilization and application of the instruments. A quality control component to ensure proper application of the instruments is needed in the near future. It is believed that Court Services can utilize an online quality control method such as being used in Iowa.

- From the risk/needs instruments a working case plan should be developed to identify those areas which can be changed in the probationer's life toward becoming a law abiding citizen. The case plan should be viewed as separate from the Court Order of the case. The case plan need not be a verbose document but rather single sentence goal for change identified from the risk/needs instrument.
- The most pressing programming need in the Unified Judicial System program at this time is the need for system wide cognitive/behavioral programs that center on the present circumstances of offenders and also address risk factors (criminogenic needs) that are responsible for the offender's criminal behavior. Such programming should be action oriented to teach offenders new pro-social skills and target anti-social attitudes, values, beliefs, peers, substance abuse, anger etc. Family based interventions that educate families about appropriate behavioral techniques should also be available for offenders and their families.
- In order to adapt, implement and wisely utilize the tools and time available to Court Services it is necessary to develop supervision strategies which expend the greatest amount of Court Services time and community based programming on the high and medium level offenders identified through the validated and normed risk/needs instruments. An automated management system will allow low and administrative cases to be safely supervised in the community with minimal Court Services Officer contact as the system will closely monitor financial obligations, criminal warrants, personal data, and new law enforcement contacts. The wrap

around/day reporting center concept is another promising strategy that could be used for the entire range of offender population.<sup>6</sup>

Along with implementing a new way of delivering services, the UJS has modified the goals and mission statement that have also been adopted. They are as follows:

Mission Statement:

Our mission is to serve the citizens of the State of South Dakota by preventing crime and repairing the harm caused by crime through public safety and crime prevention in the community, accountability, and opportunity for positive change of the offender, justice for the victim, and respectful treatment for all involved.

Guiding Principles to Carry Out Mission Statement

Our employees are our most valuable resource for accomplishing our Mission. Community protection can best be achieved by a role that balances supervision and supportive case management.

Vision

- To maintain probation as a cost-effective alternative to a prison sentence.
- To develop community based programming that will reduce recidivism of offenders through competency development and elimination of antisocial attitudes, values, and beliefs.
- To implement a validated nationally recognized offender classification system to address offender needs and community safety.
- To restore victims of crime through restitution collection, community service, and mediation.

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<sup>6</sup> **UJS Court Services Resources Guide**; <http://www.sdjudicial@ujs.state.sd.us>.

## Values

- To reach our Vision and accomplish our Mission, the Department will be guided by the following principles: reliability, honesty, excellence, and professionalism.<sup>7</sup>

The following literature review will show that the foundation of effective change is in identifying the basic needs of the probationers, to provide the resources needed for them to significantly enhance those skills, and to partner with them to incorporate these changes into their lives, and to be able to utilize the skill enhancement in all areas of their lives.<sup>8</sup>

The primary focus of this paper is juvenile justice and rehabilitation. What are the causes of juvenile delinquency, and what strategies best reach those goals?

While there is a plethora of literature to address those questions, one theory is widely agreed upon: there is no single cause for all delinquent behaviors, and no single pathway leads to a life of crime.

Nationwide, there are concerns about at risk children who exhibit antisocial behaviors. For the purposes of this paper, an at risk child is "any youth who, due to disabling, cultural, economic, or medical conditions is 1) denied or has minimum equal opportunity and resources in a variety of settings, and 2) is in jeopardy of failing to become a successful and meaningful member of his or her community."<sup>9</sup>

“Antisocial behaviors are disruptive acts characterized by covert and overt hostility and intentional aggression toward others. Antisocial behaviors exist along a severity continuum and include repeated violations

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Lieb, Roxanne. **Juvenile Offenders: What Works? A Summary of Research Findings**. Washington State Institute for Public Policy publication, October, 1994, page 3

<sup>9</sup> See note 2 supra, page 9.

of social rules, defiance of authority and of the rights of others, deceitfulness, theft, and reckless disregard for self and others. Antisocial behavior can be identified in children as young as three or four years of age. If left unchecked these coercive behavior patterns will persist and escalate in severity over time, becoming a chronic behavioral disorder.”<sup>10</sup>

There are noted similarities between the definition of antisocial behaviors and other research which identify important predictors of delinquency. These predictors are:

- 1) Early conduct problems-aggression, stealing, truancy, lying, drug use-are not only general predictors of delinquency many years later, but especially of serious delinquency, and in certain cases, or recidivism.
- 2) Children who have not outgrown their aggressiveness by early adolescence appear to be at high risk for delinquency.
- 3) Although juvenile arrest or conviction is a predictor of arrest or conviction in adulthood, the seriousness of the juvenile offense appears to be a better predictor of continued, serious delinquency in adulthood.
- 4) Individual family variables are moderately strong predictors of subsequent delinquency in offspring. Particularly strong predictors were poor supervision and the parents' rejection of the child, while other child-rearing variables such as lack of discipline and lack of involvement were slightly less powerful. In addition, parental criminality and aggressiveness, and marital discord, were moderately strong predictors. Parent absence, parent health, and socioeconomic status were weaker predictors of later delinquency.

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<sup>10</sup> Encyclopedia of Children's Health <http://www.healthofchildren.com/A/Antisocial-Behavior.html>, page 1.

5) Poor educational performance predicted later delinquency to some extent, but available evidence suggests that accompanying conduct problems may be more critical.

6) A majority of eventual chronic offenders can be recognized in their elementary school years on the basis of their conduct problems and other handicaps.<sup>11</sup>

A widely supported fact is that “the larger the number of risk factors to which a child is exposed, the greater is the likelihood that he or she will engage in antisocial or violent behavior.”<sup>12</sup>

As noted in #4 above, conditions in the home have a significant impact on a person’s likelihood of engaging in delinquent behaviors. Factors such as “parental criminality, harsh and ineffective parental discipline, lack of parental involvement, family conflict, child abuse and/or neglect, and rejection by parents” are very strong precursors to juvenile delinquency.<sup>13</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, “parenting behaviors that are characterized by warmth and consistency are associated with lower levels of antisocial behavior by the child.”<sup>14</sup>

According to an article in USA today, social scientists and law enforcement authorities believe that family influence may be “one of the most important and largely unaddressed factors in determining whether people adopt lives of crime.”<sup>15</sup> It often happens that children involved in the juvenile system will have extended family members who have also been or are currently under supervision. This can include brothers, sisters,

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<sup>11</sup> See note 2, supra page 12.

<sup>12</sup> Freeman-Gallant, Adrienne; Lizotte, Alan J; Krohn, Marvin D; Smith, Carolyn A; and Thornberry, Terence. **Linked Lives: The Intergenerational Transmission of Antisocial Behavior**. Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, Volume 31, Number 2, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Johnson, Kevin. USA Today: **For Many of USA’s Inmates, crime runs in the Family**. August 21, 2009 edition, page 1.

<sup>14</sup> Tessina, Tina B. **Dysfunctional Families and how they grow**. Excerpted from It Ends with you: Grow up and out of Dysfunction, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> See note13, supra page 1.

parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents. In support of this conclusion, a recent survey of prison populations in the United States suggest that almost half of all inmates in state prisons have relatives who are also in the prison system.<sup>16</sup> In fact, in a 1997 survey, 48% of the prisoners reported that they had family members who had been in prison in the past.<sup>17</sup>

The reasons for this generational criminality may have many origins. A predominant factor is the fact that parents often lack positive social/communication; they have never had role models to teach them the skills that they need. They have had no one to teach them how to establish healthy relationships, let alone what is involved in raising children. “These parents are products of their own parent’s lack of information and the cycle of incompetence may go back many years and generations. Families pass their habits, personality traits, and traditions down, generation after generation.”<sup>18</sup>

Parents follow the example that was set for them by their parents, which is in some families rife with criticism, severe punishment, and/ or neglect. Although most parents try to improve on their own parents’ methods, their skills still fall short of effective parenting.<sup>19</sup> “Parents who are aggressive, who have limited human and social capital, and who remain embedded in deviant social networks are less likely to have the personal and social resources necessary to effectively discharge the responsibility of parenthood.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See note 14, supra page 2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, page 5.

<sup>18</sup> See note 12, supra, page 174.

<sup>18</sup> Nasheeda, Aishath. **Life Skills Education for Young People; Coping with Challenges**. Counseling, Psychotherapy and Health, 2008, pages 20-21.

<sup>19</sup> Nasheeda, Aishath. **Life Skills Education for Young People; Coping with Challenges**. Counseling, Psychotherapy and Health, 2008, pages 20-21.

<sup>20</sup> Life Skills: Tobacco Free Youth Publication. World Health Organization, 2005, page 24.

The skills that adolescents learn will determine how they communicate with their parents, teachers, adults, and peers. Their skill level will also determine whether they are able to say “no” to negative peer pressure. Adolescents must use appropriate and effective social and communication skills if they are to adopt and adapt to a “healthy life style.”<sup>21</sup>

The need to learn positive, appropriate skills upon which to base all human interactions are of vital importance.

“Children who fail to develop the skills for interacting with others in a socially acceptable manner early in life are rejected by their peers and engage in unhealthy behaviors. One of the best predictors of chronic delinquent offending and violence in adolescence is antisocial behavior in childhood. Research has also indicated that about half of young children rejected by their peers do not have social deficits, but rather a high rate of aggressive behavior learned at home. These children tend to respond to their rejection by peers with aggression initiating a cycle of aggressive behavior and peer aggression that escalates as the children get older.”<sup>22</sup>

There are numerous Life Skills curriculums that are available for purchase. While the enhancement of Life Skills will not “cure” every adolescent and/or target their every need, much literature supports the fact that it can, in fact, make a pronounced difference in those who are involved in the process of learning to hone their life skills.

The World Health Organization defines Life Skills as “teaching abilities for adaptive and positive behaviors that enable persons to deal effectively with the demands and challenges in the family, community, and cultural content of their community.”<sup>23</sup>

Many sources view Life Skills training as a—something that is very necessary, and believe that issues that we now face with so many of our adolescents can be addressed through skill building.

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<sup>21</sup> See note 19, supra page 20.

<sup>22</sup> See Note 19, supra page 21

<sup>23</sup> See note 12, supra, page 176.

“Children raised in homes face lives that are full of anger; they are often subjected to years of emotional, physical and verbal abuse; they witness criminal behavior exhibited by parents, siblings, and extended family, and as a result they are much more likely to find themselves in the juvenile court system. This is because many of the behaviors that are exhibited in the home are adopted by the juvenile.; those behaviors include poor communication skills, poor anger management skills, problem solving skills, the ability to deal with peer pressure and learning to resist negative peer pressure, assertive skills; positive approaches to teach juveniles these needed skills are included in Life Skills curriculums.”<sup>24</sup>

“There is evidence that a parent's antisocial behavior increases the risk that their child will also display antisocial behavior, and that at least part of the association is transmitted via parenting practices.”<sup>25</sup>

“Life Skills Education is a series of self developmental sessions. Skills that are typically taught include the ability to make decisions, the ability to solve problems, the capacity to think creatively, the capacity to think critically, the ability to communicate effectively, the ability to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, knowledge of self; i.e., the capacity to know who they are, what they want, etc; the capacity to feel empathy, the ability to handle their emotions, and the ability to handle tension.”<sup>26</sup>

According to Asheeda Nash, Life skills education can result in:

“Enabling young people to handle stressful situations effectively without losing one’s temper or becoming moody, learning to disagree politely with use of appropriate “I” messages and assertive skills are important for development of self esteem, positive attitudes, making a firm stand on values, beliefs and cultural differences. When an individual learns all the basic skills to cope with challenges individuals will feel more confident, motivated and develop a positive attitude toward life, thus, make more mature and adult like decision, starts taking responsibility for their actions and in urn refrain from risk taking and risky behaviors and become more useful people for the next generation.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See note 19, supra page 20.

<sup>25</sup> See note 12, supra, page 176.

<sup>26</sup> See note 26, supra, page 31.

<sup>27</sup> See note 19, supra, page 24.

Broadly defined, a life skills approach develops skills in adolescents, both to build the needed competencies for human development and to adopt positive behaviors that enable them to deal effectively with the challenges of everyday life.<sup>28</sup>

Realizing that many probationers were lacking in Life Skills, and that their parents, siblings, etc, were also lacking, the Court Services Officer's who supervise juveniles were often frustrated in not having the tools to address this generational problem. A search of community agencies revealed that there were no programs where we could refer these adolescents that could provide life skills training. The failed search led to the purchase of a life skills training curriculum which could be implemented by juvenile probation officers.

The curriculum used in Sioux Falls was purchased from the Philip Roy Company. The decision was made after an extensive search of available Life Skills programs. The Philip Roy curriculum covered the topics that had been identified as most important skills to target. Further, the curriculum was constructed in a way that it could be easily modified to use with different age groups. Probation officers who work with juveniles in the Sioux Falls office facilitate the Life Skills groups.

Participants allowed into the group must be at a medium level of supervision, they must be between 12-17 years old, and they must be on supervised probation. There are ten modules, and the juvenile officers, in groups of two, facilitate two to three sessions. A session is held one time per week, at 50 minutes per session.

Two groups have been completed so far, with another to start in January, 2010.

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<sup>28</sup> **New Life Skills Approach to Child and Adolescent healthy Human Development.** Pan American Health Organization, Division of Health Promotion and Protection, Family Health and Population Program, 2001, page 5.

Following are the modules that are provided, and what is entailed in each one. These are listed according to the order that they are delivered. The groups are closed; i.e., after a group starts, new participants are not allowed to join in.

**You and the Law (One (1) session):**

This section covers understanding the law, confidentiality, and learning important facts about the law. For example, topics covered are how juveniles can be brought into the court system, the different charges that can be brought against juveniles and possible repercussions for different offenses.

This module will make the participants aware that for every situation that they face, they have a choice. “Taking positive actions will ensure that they will not receive harsh consequences, and that making positive choices can and will have positive effect on their future.”<sup>29</sup>

**Verbal Communication (One (1) session):**

This section details how to ask questions (asking rather than demanding,) making statements in a tactful way, being mindful of their tone of voice and their choice of words, as well as when and when not to use slang.

Teenagers need to learn that the way that they present themselves will be vitally important to how they are perceived, and the ease with which they reach their goals.<sup>30</sup>

**Non Verbal Communication (One (1) session):**

This section covers awareness of body language, and appropriate vs. inappropriate use of gestures. Role playing is used in this presentation to show how their actions and feelings may be misunderstood; they should be aware of the signals that they are sending.

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<sup>29</sup> The Success Foundation. **Success for Teens: Real Teens Talk about using the Slight Edge, page 2.**

<sup>30</sup> Ibid page **98.**

The look on a person's face, their posture, their stance, even the people that they surround themselves with all of these factors can speak louder than words.

Teens should be aware of the fact that their attitude shows itself in everything that they do; their body language is a loud statement of their attitude. "Teenagers can greatly benefit from the realization that their attitude is so powerful that people can sense it before they say a word."<sup>31</sup>

### **Problem Solving/Critical Problem Solving (Two sessions):**

This module teaches participants how to identify and deal with problems in a positive manner.

Problem Solving that is the ability to solve problems is essential to everyday activities. Often offenders have never learned how to methodically address problems in their everyday lives. Decisions then are made that can lead the offender back to criminal behavior.

Participants are shown that their reactions to situations are going to impact the outcome. A negative occurrence with a negative reaction, e.g., fighting, yelling, etc., can exacerbate the repercussions of the original problem. They can gain control of how they react to different life circumstances.

### **Risk Taking (One session):**

This section discusses making positive choices, and how to avoid peer pressure. High risk behaviors, such as drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, gang affiliations, and risky sexual activities; all of these high risk behaviors will very likely have a negative impact on their lives.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid page 31.

Participants can identify behaviors that they consider high risk, and discuss ways to avoid getting involved, or being talked into or participating in these activities.

Setting personal goals is an important part of this section; if a person has goals for their future, considering these goals and how different behaviors/actions can impact, this goal is a good reminder when facing a struggle.

**Decision Making (One (1) session):**

This includes a discussion on belief systems, consequences for inappropriate behaviors, and the importance of having a positive intent in the actions that they take. This module teaches the pros and cons of positive and negative behaviors.

Choosing to make positive decisions can help people turn their lives around. Little steps like getting up on time in the morning, showing up at school, doing their homework-these. “What that means is that by doing the small, positive things, you increase the chances that other positive things will happen to you. It’s like tossing a rock into a pond-you’ll see a splash and the ripples spreading out, but those ripples can go far beyond what you see. They can go all the way to the opposite shore.”<sup>32</sup>

**Self Concept/Personal Awareness (Two (2) sessions):**

The module on *Self Concept* discusses how people see and react to others based on the way that a person presents themselves, how to change the image that they present, and how to set goals and accomplish them. It also covers personal space, substance abuse, sexual behaviors, and how their behavior affects others.

As stated in Success for Teens: “Remember, you are the most influential person in your life. There is nobody more effective at supporting your success-and nobody more

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid page 10.

effective at undermining it.”<sup>33</sup> Teenagers are often devastated by what they consider to be failure. Anything from poor grades in school, a falling out with friends or boy/girlfriends, or problems at home, all impact how they feel about themselves. The way that they face, deal, and hopefully learn from these problems will have an impact; teenagers can learn that their reactions are under their control, and what they take away from any situation is up to them.

Failure *can* create unexpected opportunities.<sup>34</sup>

The *Personal Awareness* part of this section discusses emotions, e.g., how to not let emotions rule their actions, and how to avoid being manipulated into doing things that will have detrimental impact on their current and future lives. There is a discussion on making good decisions and being mindful of the possible impact of decisions that are made. Discussion and practicing of different ways to manage anxiety is covered in this module.

### **How to Get a Job and Hold a job (One (1) session):**

This module uses sample job applications for participants to complete. Discussions on how to dress appropriately for an interview, conducting mock interviews, and drafting budgets are part of this session. Attitude, presentation, the language that they use, their body language; all of these skills learned in previous sections will be necessary for them to use in a job interview.

As can be observed by reading through the module descriptions, there are many common themes which run through each module, which reinforces all of the skills that they learn each week. Topics such as verbal and non-verbal communication, attitude,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, page 27.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid page 82.

presenting oneself in the best light, and making good decisions, setting goals, maintaining self control; all of these skills are a common threads through each module.

Also stressed in each module is the fact that to benefit to the fullest, participants must put the skills into action on a daily basis, until eventually, they become habit. Overall, this is what is hoped to be stressed to the participants; "...there is no treading water in life, no running in place, no standing still. If you're not continually learning-if you're not taking advantage of opportunities to increase and use your knowledge-you're not on an upward path. And if you're not headed upward, you're heading the other direction."<sup>35</sup> In preparation for the next Life Skills group which will start in January, several issues that arose with the first two groups will be addressed in future groups, in hopes of a higher level of success for all participants.

A wider variety of teaching methods will be employed. Studies show that utilizing a variety of teaching methods will have the greatest impact on the participants, including more role playing and group discussion and less "lecturing."

The first two groups started out with 12 participants; by the end the group, only seven or eight remained mainly due to probation violations. The officers will discuss the various reasons why different juveniles failed to complete the sessions. Also, incentives will be offered each week for those who attend; this may be in the form of movie tickets, admission for roller skating, fast food meal coupons, etc

Criteria for client participation will be more closely screened. The participants will range in age from 12-17, but their maturity level will also be considered when

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid page 98.

deciding who will enter the group. Group participants will be chosen from probationers who are on a “medium” level of supervision.

Each Court Services Officer strives to find methods and approaches that are most effective in reaching the participants. The Court Services Officer’s spend time discussing their groups, sharing ideas of what works well and what doesn’t work as well.

The results of 170 control group studies with juvenile delinquents showed the following approaches *did not* work in reducing delinquent behavior:

- Desk or office probation casework.
- Diagnostic assessments and/or referral only.
- Behavior modification for complex behaviors.
- General discussion groups.
- School attendance alone.
- Occupational orientation.
- Field trips.
- Work programs.
- Insight-oriented counseling.
- Psychodynamic counseling.
- Therapeutic camping.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the bleak outlook that lists those approaches that do not work, there is a substantial amount of information that guides the implementation of what does work.

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<sup>36</sup> See note 8, *supra*, page 4.

According to Diana Fishbein, “The earlier the intervention, the more favorable the outcome will be.” It is often noted that children are “targeted” as being antisocial long before the “system” takes notice of, or acts on, their behaviors.<sup>37</sup>

New research indicates that an “evidence based” approach to teaching life skills is the most advantageous. This approach identifies policies and programs by “putting the best available evidence from research at the heart of policy development and implementation.” Evidence based practices consist of three principles 1) there is a definable outcome, 2) it is measurable, and 3) it is defined according to practical realities, such as recidivism, victim satisfaction, etc.<sup>38</sup>

A favored approach is to teach life skills by combining both social skills and key cognitive skills: problem solving and decision making. “Problem solving” teaches how to make the transition from a present problem, to a desired future outcome. “This process requires that the decision maker be able to identify possible courses of action or solutions to a problem and to determine which the best alternative solution is.”<sup>39</sup> Another important aspect of an evidence based cognitive approach is to convince people that they possess the power to make positive decisions in their lives. “People who believe that they are causally important in their own lives tend to “engage in more proactive, more constructive and healthier behaviors related with positive outcomes.”<sup>40</sup> Examples of Cognitive Based approaches to teach life skills include, but are not limited to, the following:

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<sup>37</sup> See note 1, supra, page 9.

<sup>38</sup> Correta Pettway. Community Based Tool-Kit: Community Corrections and Evidence Based Practices. Ohio Institute on Correctional Best Practices, page 1.

<sup>39</sup> See note 29, supra, page P 25

<sup>40</sup> Loc. Cit.

- Teaching the process of how to manage difficult choices, especially under stress, by helping them to identify issues or problems and deterring their goals, to assist in identifying alternative solutions, and envisioning possible consequences.<sup>41</sup>
- The method for teaching these skills includes having participants who are actively involved in and supportive of the process. Program activities may involve the participants through peer facilitation, role playing techniques, games, presentations, and other interactive events.<sup>42</sup> Small groups work best in teaching adolescents, as this allows questions and feedback, and offers an open opportunity for questions, clarification, and practice.
- Journaling and incorporating games into the learning experience is also advantageous.<sup>43</sup>
- Teaching juveniles relaxation skills is thought to help young people to calm themselves, allowing them to think clearly before taking actions. Being able to deal with the frustrating situations that they face in a calm and appropriate manner has an obvious positive impact on their relationships.
- Adolescents may learn certain skills, but they need to be able to apply the skills learned in different life situations. Role playing, group discussion which allows feedback, positive reinforcement for appropriate behaviors can all be utilized to instill the new skills.
- Adolescents need to be able to identify “triggers” that are likely to cause a relapse into their old behaviors. “Each slip requires care and attention to its causes, and

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid page 44.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid page 29.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. page 28.

the development of a preparation and/or action plan to address the people, places, or situations that triggered the slip.”<sup>44</sup>

- Offering incentives; the goal is to “use incentives to hold the offender accountable, and to develop intrinsic responses to situations.” Incentives can include something as small as a compliment or affirmation to a gift or token of some type, or taking away an existing punishment or restriction, such as requiring fewer drug tests, or fewer visits with their Court Services Officer.<sup>45</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

Life Skills training should include teaching alternative, positive behaviors to replace those that have been troublesome in the past. To increase positive behavior, skills must be taught that will aid in enhancing communication, coping skills, conflict management, and independent living skills.

Typically, the degree of positive change is based on the level to which improvement of their skills, attitudes, beliefs, and changes in behavioral outcomes can be identified. Skill enhancement gauged based on participant self assessment, as well as by posing questions to parents, teachers, or any other persons who are closely involved in the lives of the participants.

There is an overabundance of information relating to life skills, and it would be difficult to capture all of the finer points of those studies. It was the goal of this writer to provide a encompassing, overall look at the different facets of this topic to be able to offer a study that utilizes the information relative to the benefits of providing this type of program, and to identify how best to implement such a program.

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<sup>44</sup>See note 4, supra, page 18.

<sup>45</sup> See note 4, supra, page 59.

## **METHODS**

After having collected an in-depth literature search on topics relating to Life Skills for juveniles, five surveys were completed and tallied, and one study was conducted regarding the status of juveniles who are currently on probation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Circuit, Sioux Falls Court Services Office.

The study will show the parent status of each of the probationers, including how many of the juveniles are involved with both parents, how many of the juveniles have mothers who have or have had felony and/or misdemeanor court involvement, and the same with the fathers of the probationers.

The surveys are directed to service providers; professionals in this community, state, as well as around the country who have direct contact with juveniles and were willing to share their expertise in the area of the needs of the juveniles that they work with.

All surveys were pre-tested by a Court Services intern. The Court Services Officers who facilitate groups also pre-tested the surveys used. Finally, all surveys were pre-tested by a Social Work student from St. Cloud State University.

The surveys specific to Chief Court Services Officers and Court Services Officers were pre-tested by the Chief Court Services Officers.

The process of disseminating and retrieving surveys posed no problems. The survey participants were very forthcoming and thoughtful in their responses, and ultimately, strong in their willingness to share their knowledge.

### **Study#1: Family Situation of Current Probationers:**

A study was conducted to identify the incidence of juveniles having both parents in the home, or even in their lives, as well as to show the percentage of parents who are also involved in the court system. The study groups were separated by risk level, based on the Youth Level of Service Inventory (YLSI) which is the risk assessment utilized by the Unified Judicial System, Court Services Department in South Dakota. The risk levels are high, medium, low, and administrative.

The survey group included those juveniles on whom at least one parent could be identified through the courts computer system. Some juvenile cases may have not been included due to the cases being new; therefore, no parental information yet had been entered into the system. Another excluding factor would be that the child lived with someone besides parents, such as grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, etc.

Those who were included in the survey included 38 cases are an “administrative” risk level, 79 cases on a low risk level, 68 on a medium risk level, and 9 on a high risk level. The statistics will be displayed on a percentage basis.

### **Survey #1- Court Services Officers: Appendix A**

This survey was completed by Court Services Officers in South Dakota who work exclusively with juvenile offenders.

The purpose of this survey was to utilize the experience of the Court Services Officer’s in South Dakota in regard to what they see as the needs of the juvenile that are being supervised on probation. The survey included a cover letter (See Appendix A) to explain the objectives of this project; that being that Court Services in Sioux Falls has

implemented a life skills group, as well as that Life Skills is my chosen topic for this paper.

The survey consisted of five questions. All questions required multiple choice or yes/no, responses, with one option to elaborate on their thoughts.

The answers to the questions would supply the following information; popular opinion on when intervention is most beneficial, as well as to determine if there is a consensus on a certain population (i.e., high level, medium level, low level or administrative level) that would be most likely to benefit from life skills enhancement. One question, with multiple choices, helped to identify what was perceived as the top three consequences that can result from a lack of social/life skills. The survey also relies on the Court Services Officer's knowledge of their probationers, probationers families, and their community by identifying an estimate of the incidence of extended family being on probation, and finally, their thoughts on if a similar program would be valuable in their community.

There were 29 respondents. The survey excluded Court Services Officers who work exclusively with adults, and excluded the Sioux Falls Juvenile Division of Court Services who facilitate the life skills program.

### **Survey #2: Chief Court Services Officers (Appendix B)**

A survey was completed by all Chief Court Services Officer's from the state (with the exception of this writer.) There were a total of five questions posed in this survey.

The first question required a yes/no answer to identify if the Chief Court Services Officers considered a lack of life skills as a common factor with juveniles in the court system. As all responded to the affirmative, they continued to the remaining four

questions. Two questions utilized a Likert Scale, one a multiple choice, and one open ended question; the responses to these questions identify the likelihood that a Life Skills program could be implemented in other circuits around the state; specifically, the survey measured how the Chief's felt about whether a life skills would be helpful, and if it would be practical to expect, that their circuits could support and implement such a program. Further, if there is a perceived doubt as to their ability to implement the program, to identify what the obstacles would likely be.

### **Survey #3: Survey of Sioux Falls Court Services Officer's: Life Skills Program facilitators**

#### **(Appendix C)**

The Court Services Staff who co-facilitate the Life Skills Program were the respondents for this survey. All officers responded.

After having completed two cycles of the program, the Court Services Officer's who facilitated the groups were given this survey to identify issues that were faced in the first two groups. There were three questions asked in this survey.

The first question identified the number of referrals that had been made to the program, and how many of those successfully completed the program. This would help to identify the completion/success rate of our first two groups.

Following the first question, and in regard to those who did successfully complete, their current status was sought to identify their recidivism rate.

The third question sought reasons for those cases that did not complete the program, allowing us to pinpoint possible future problems and identify ways to reduce the incidence of a failure to complete the program.

Finally, an open ended question asked for suggestions on how to improve the program, and how to decrease the number of those who do not successfully complete. Future statistics will be maintained to identify the long-term impact on the juveniles who have completed the program.

#### **Survey #4: Juvenile Probationers/Non-Probationers (Appendix D)**

The survey for probationers and non-probationers was developed to identify if there were differences in the perception of juveniles who are on probation vs. juveniles who are not on probation.

The only demographic requested was male vs. female. There is also an identifier which asks if the person completing the survey is, or ever has been on probation, and if either of their parents have had involvement in the court system. There were five questions on the survey. The results were accumulated by presenting the survey face to face, explaining the reason behind the questions, and answering any questions that were asked.

The first two questions offered multiple choices to answer. The first was asked to determine how each respondent felt that they would rate themselves on six different life skills. The second question asked who they think was most influential in their lives in regard to their level of life skills.

Questions 3-5 were open ended questions that allowed responses to questions aimed at determining which life skills they thought were most important to learn, which are not important, and which those feel are most important to their future. Question #6 sought their opinion on teaching styles that are most effective, in an effort to indentify the

chosen method of same age participants. Finally, Question #7 asked if they had future goals, and a Likert Scale was used to allow them the flexibility to show their certainty.

### **Survey #5-Community Professionals: (Appendix E)**

A survey was completed utilizing the expertise of professionals in the community who work with juveniles.

The objective of this survey was to determine the perception of need in regard to the enhancement of juvenile life skills. The survey contained 5 questions.

The cover letter (Appendix E) explained that the juvenile probation department had implemented a Life Skills enhancement program for the juveniles. The program curriculum was included, as well as the specifics of the program; i.e., that Court Services Officer's facilitate the program, that there are ten sessions that last 50 minutes each and who completed the program. Also listed in the cover letter were the desired outcomes that were being sought through providing this program for juveniles. The persons receiving the surveys were asked to answer the question, as well as to provide their input on the questions.

The first two questions helped to identify the stance of each participant on the need for a life skills enhancement program; the questions were presented in the form of a Likert Scale. The remaining five questions allowed an open opportunity to provide feedback on areas that requested specific input based on their experience in working with juveniles and what they (professionals) have identified as needs, preferred teaching methods, and finally, their input on deficiencies in children's lives and the resulting problems.

A total of 16 out of 25 community professionals responded to the survey. This group was represented by following entities: Juvenile chemical dependency therapists, various school personnel, juvenile residential facilities, counseling agencies, a state attorney and public defender, a representative from the Department of Mental Health, representatives from the Job Corp program, and faculty of juvenile related college programs, criminal justice professors/trainers, and a Criminal Justice intern. Seventeen of twenty- five persons responded to the survey.

The community professional's survey was pre-tested by Court Services Officer's in the juvenile division of the Sioux Falls Court Services office as well as by the office intern, Angie Jones.

**Survey #6: Survey of Existing Program-Five total, from five different states (Appendix F)**

This survey was developed to identify other areas of the country that have Life Skills training programs for juveniles.

There were a total of four questions asked. The answers were collected via telephone contacts with the service providers. An intern with Court Services identified the persons who would be involved in the survey, and through telephone contact, she conducted the surveys, accumulated the answers and tabulated the results.

This project was explained to the persons surveyed. It was explained that the Sioux Falls juvenile probation department has instituted a Life Skills enhancement program. They were given a synopsis of what the curriculum covers. They were then asked if they would be willing to share information about their programs in an effort to assist the Sioux Falls project to maximize our efforts in the delivery of the curriculum, to improve the skills of our probationers, and ultimately, to reduce recidivism.

There were a total of nine questions in this survey.

Questions 1-3 were specific to the respondent's views on the value of providing life skills enhancement. Questions 4-10 were posed to identify what is perceived as the areas of highest needs/highest liability to the juveniles if left unaddressed. Questions 11-14 were open ended questions intending to solicit the knowledge gained through their implementation of Life Skills.

Five out of five respondents were willing to offer their suggestions and expertise to this project. The respondents included directors of juvenile courts in Fargo, North Dakota, Orange County Probation in Kissimmee, Florida, Alameda County Probation in Oakland, California, Texarkana Arkansas District Probation, Texarkana, Arkansas, and Kerr County Probation, Kerville, Texas.

## **FINDINGS**

An overwhelming number of responses were very positive, supportive of the concept of a life skills enhancement program being instituted. Likewise, a majority of participants in the surveys believe that enhancing life skills can have the potential to reduce recidivism, and on a larger scale, to teach skills to juveniles that can have a positive effect on many life areas, both in the present, and in their future.

The research has identified the most necessary skills to be taught, as well as the most effective techniques to teach life skills to adolescents.

Of the persons surveyed, the responses were very similar. A majority believe that criminality is generational, and further, while early identification and intervention is ideal, any services, offered at any time, are going to have an impact on the juveniles that probation services work with.

## **STUDY A: JUVENILE PROBATIONERS**

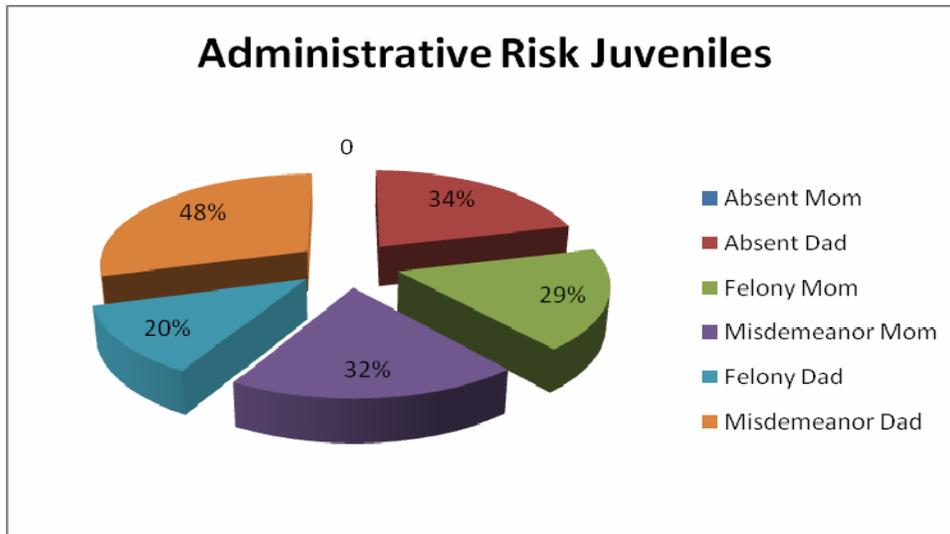


Chart 1: Administrative Risk Probationers

Of the administrative risk probationers in this survey, the following statistics were found:

- 20% of the homes were absent the maternal figure;
- 34% of the homes were absent the paternal figure;
- 29% of the mothers had at least 1 felony charge;
- 20% of the fathers had at least 1 felony charge;
- 32% of the mothers had at least 1 misdemeanor charge;
- 48% of the fathers had at least 1 misdemeanor charge.

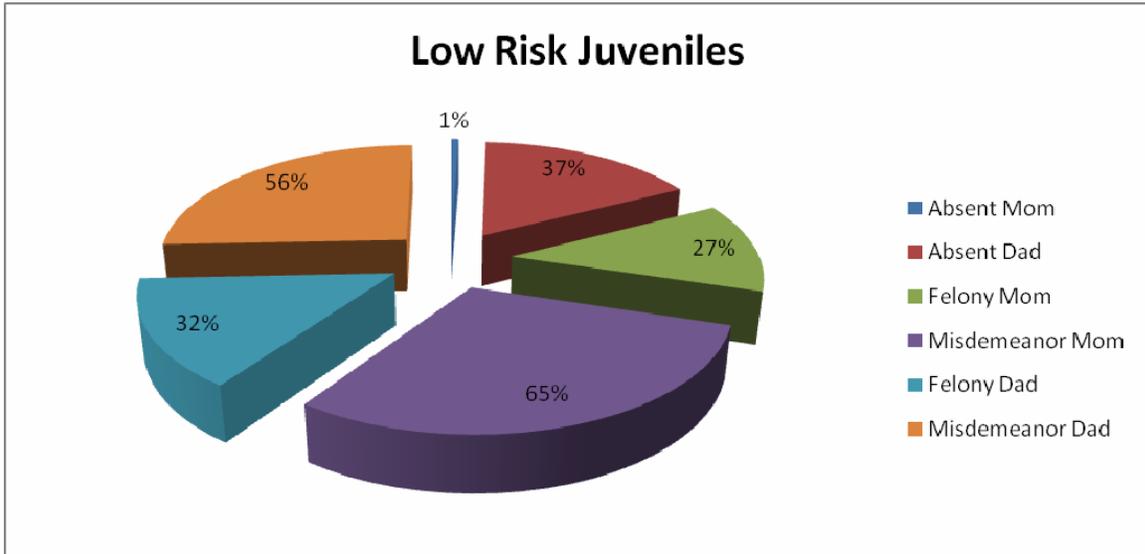


Chart #2: Low Risk Juveniles

Of the low risk probationers in this survey the following statistics were found:

- 32% of the homes were absent the maternal figure;
- 37% of the homes were absent the paternal figure;
- 27% of the mothers had at least 1 felony charge;
- 32% of the fathers had at least 1 felony charge;
- 65% of the mothers had at least 1 misdemeanor charge;
- 56% of the fathers had at least 1 misdemeanor charge.

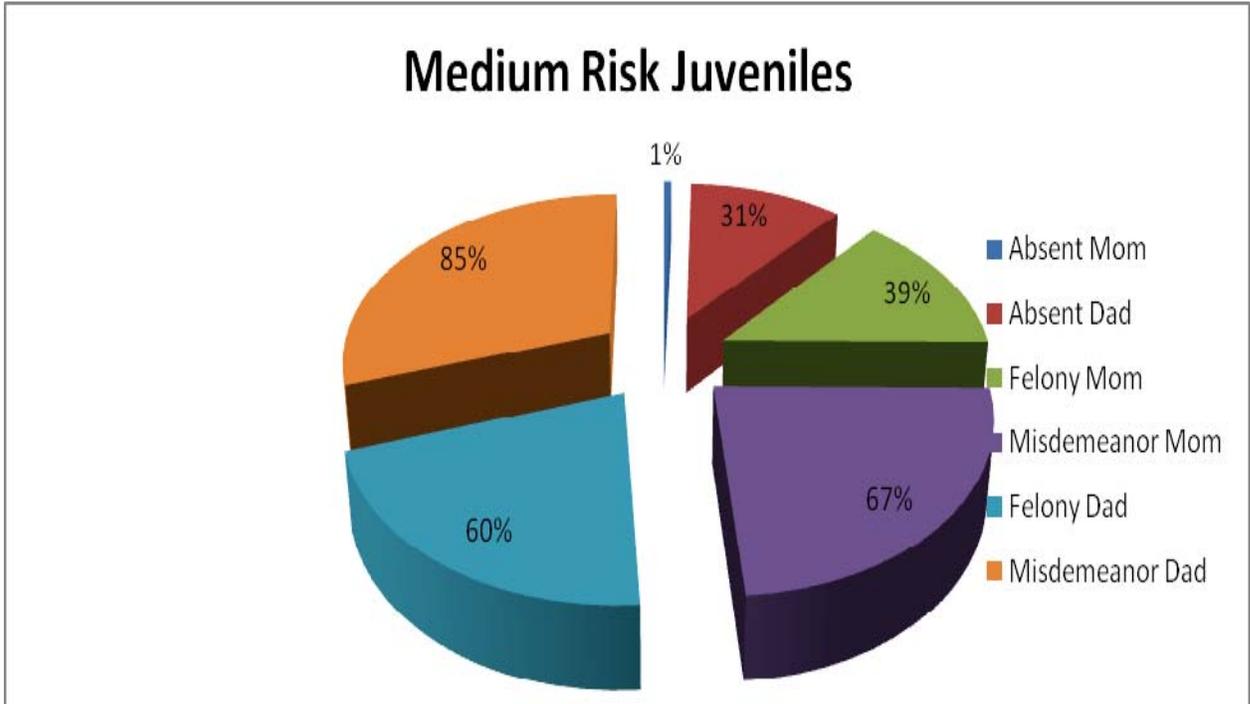


Chart # 3 Medium Risk Juveniles

Of the medium risk probationers in this study, the following statistics were found:

- 1% of the homes were absent the maternal figure;
- 31% of the homes were absent the paternal figure;
- 39% of the mothers had at least 1 felony charge;
- 60% of the fathers had at least 1 felony charge;
- 67% of the mothers had at least 1 misdemeanor charge;
- 85% of the fathers had at least 1 misdemeanor charge.

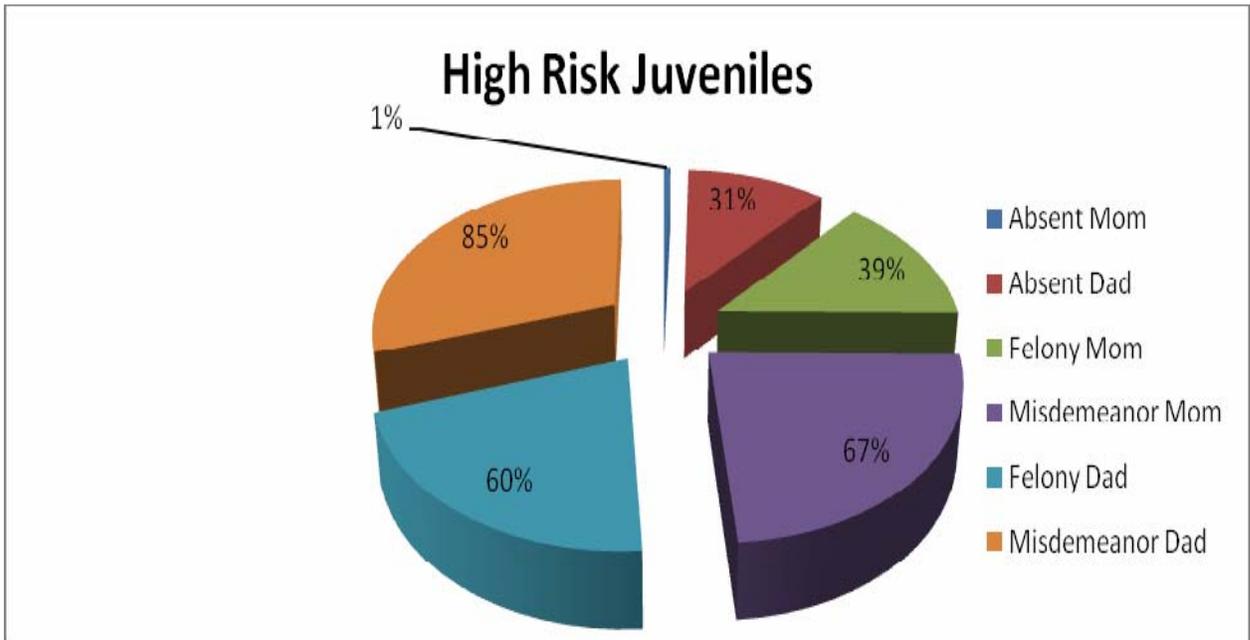


Chart #4 High Risk Juveniles

Of the high risk probationers in this study, the following statistics were found:

- 1% of the homes were absent the maternal figure;
- 3137% of the homes were absent the paternal figure;
- 39% of the mothers had at least 1 felony charge;
- 60% of the fathers had at least 1 felony charge;
- 67% of the mothers had at least 1 misdemeanor charge;
- 85% of the fathers had at least 1 misdemeanor charge.

## SURVEY 1: COURT SERVICES OFFICERS

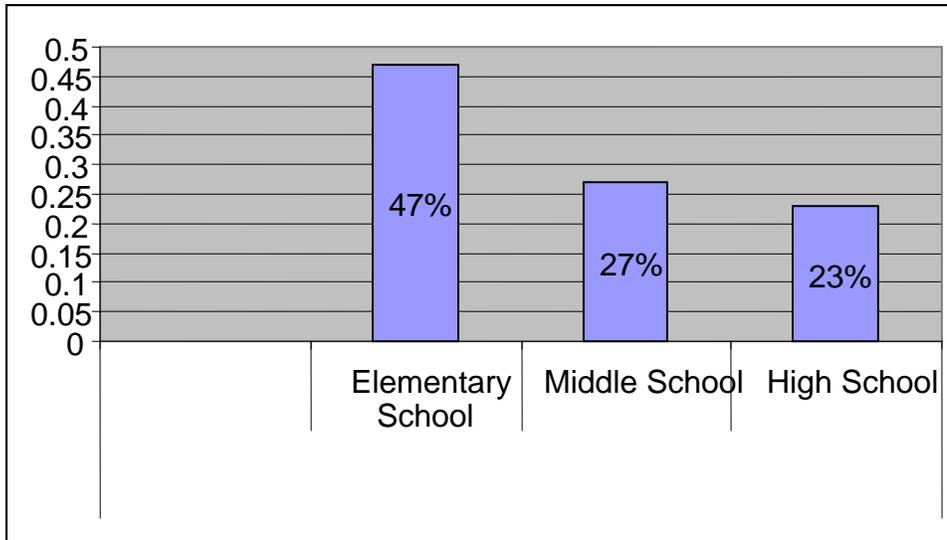


Chart # 5, Question 1: At what age are juveniles most likely to benefit from training on how to improve their life skills?

The results showed that:

- 47% of those surveyed believe that Elementary School age students would likely benefit from this training.
- 27% of those surveyed believe that Middle School age students would likely benefit from this training.
- 23% of those surveyed believe that High School age students would likely benefit from this training.

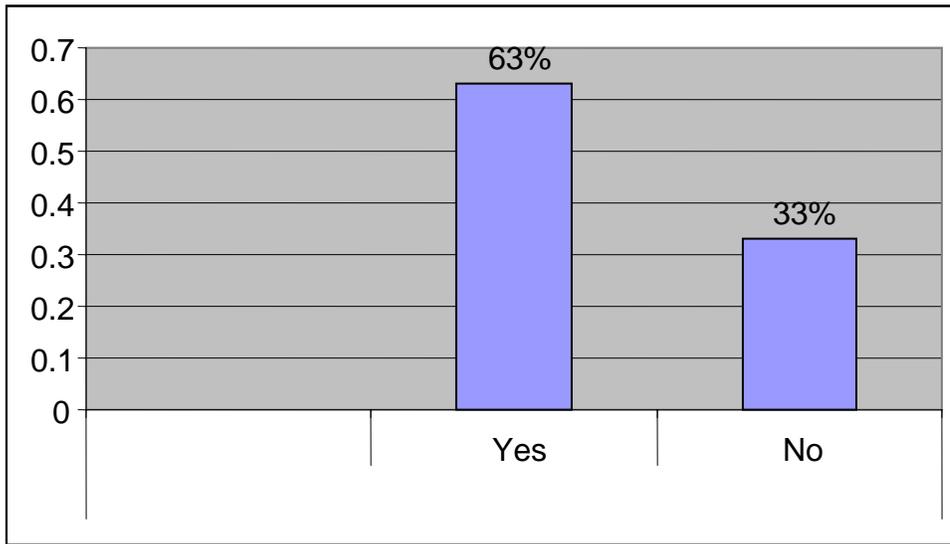


Chart #6, Question 2: Does the risk level of the juvenile impact their ability to learn these skills?

The results of this survey are as follows:

- 63% of those surveyed feel that the risk level of the juvenile does in fact affect the ability to learn life skills.
- 33% of the participants feel that the risk level of the juvenile does not affect the ability to learn life skills.

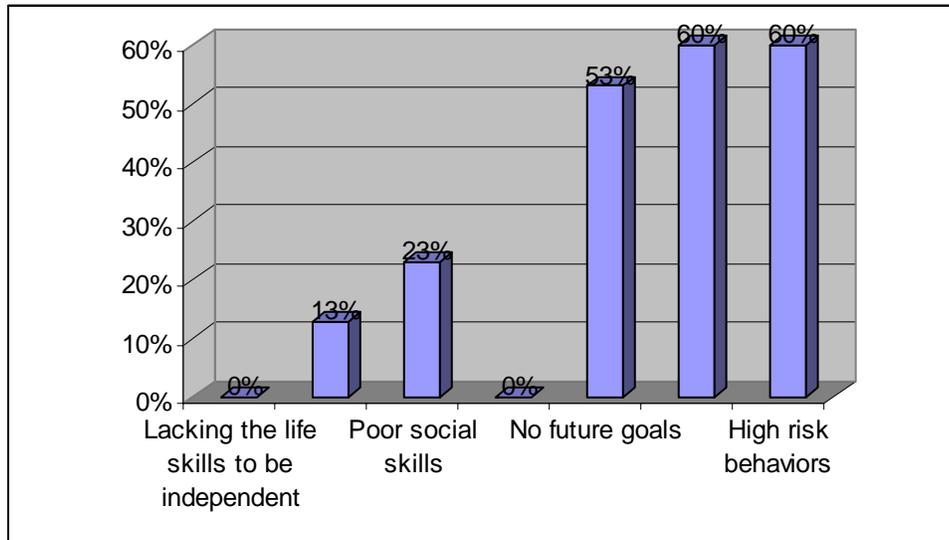


Chart #7, Question 3: What do you see as the most problematic areas with the juveniles that you supervise?

None of the respondents noted the lack life skills as being one of the most significant issues.

- 13% identified poor communication skills as being problematic.
- 23% identified poor social skills as being problematic
- None of the respondents noted poor academic achievement as one of the most problematic areas.
- 53% identified the lack of future goals as being highly problematic.
- 60% rated poor decision making skills and high risk behaviors as being the most problematic issues with juveniles.

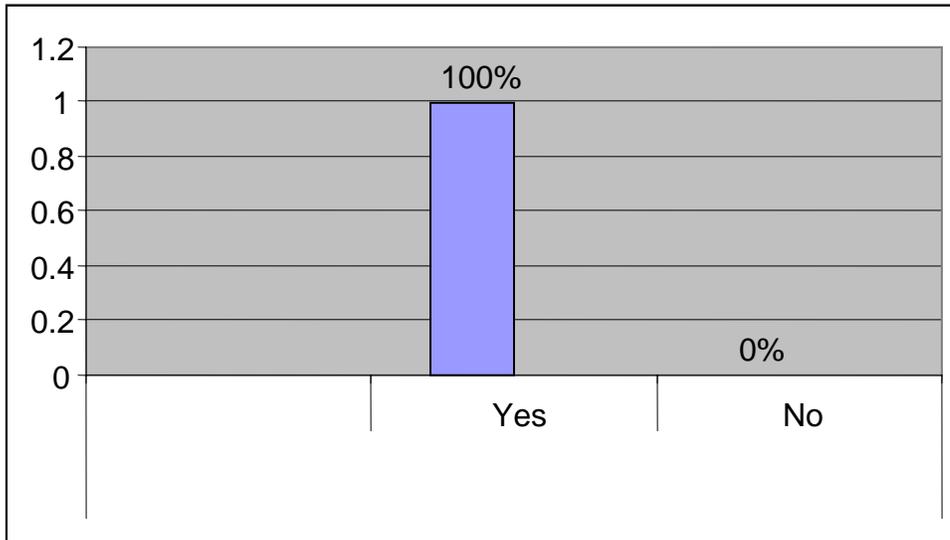


Chart #8, Question 4: Do you believe that enhancing life skills with juveniles that you supervise on probation can have a positive affect on their behavior and school performance?

- 100% of the participants of this survey believe that enhancing the life skills of juveniles will improve their school performance and behavior.

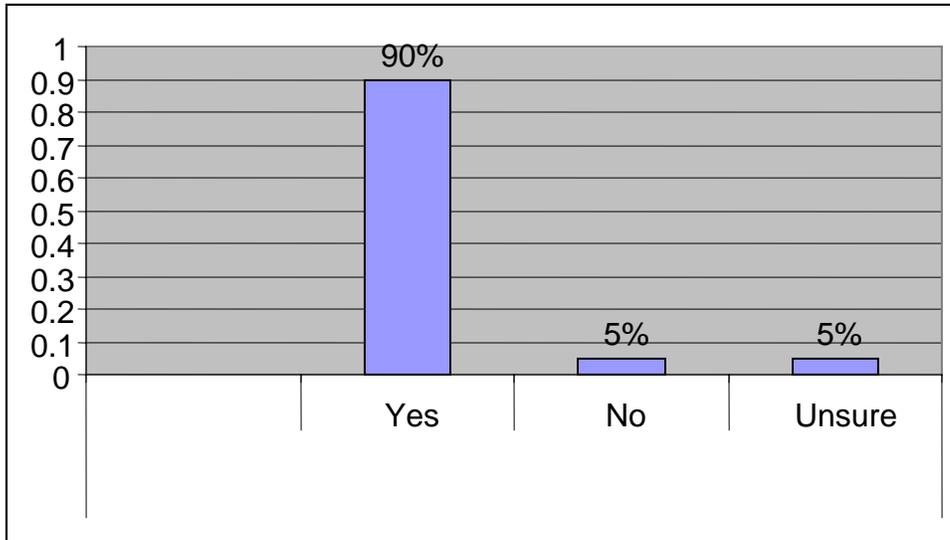


Chart #9, Question 5: Do you believe that the possible degree of positive change would justify implementing a life skills program in your circuit?

- 90% of those surveyed feel that the possible degree of positive change would justify implementing a life skills program.
- 5% of the participants feel that the degree of positive change would not justify implementing a life skills program.
- 5% of those surveyed are unsure of the result.

**SURVEY 2: CHIEF COURT SERVICES OFFICERS**

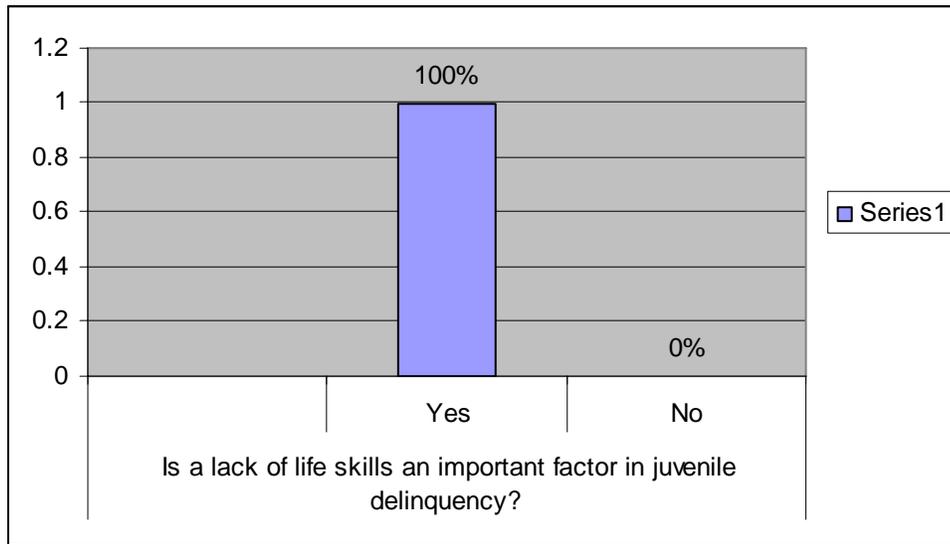


Chart #10, Question 1: Is a lack of life skills a common denominator of juveniles in the Court System?

The response to the posed question was 100% affirmative.

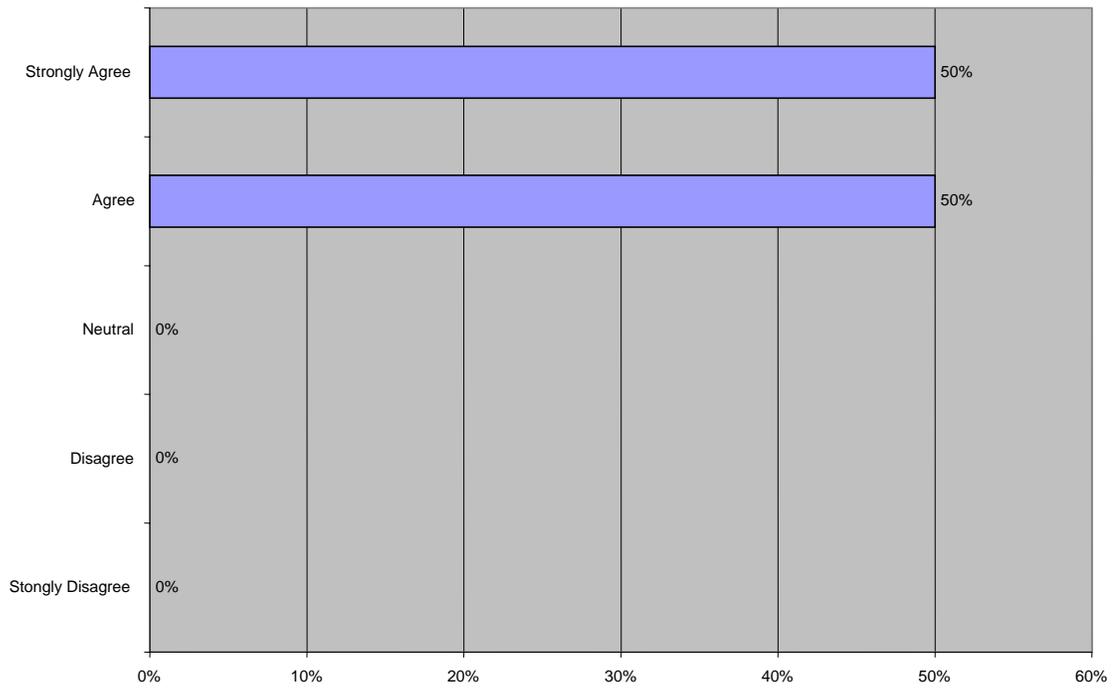


Chart # 11, Question 2: Is a lack of life skills a generational issue?

- 50% of the respondents strongly agree that a lack of life skills is generational.
- 50% of respondents agree that a lack of life skills is generational.

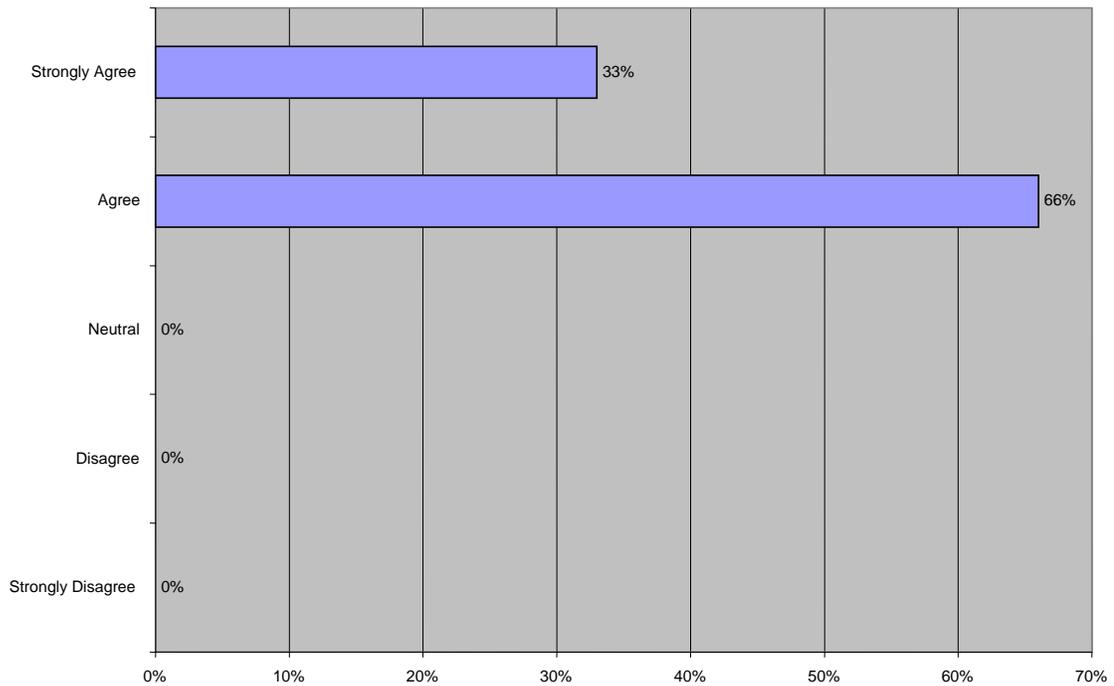


Chart # 12, Question #3: Will enhancing life skills decrease generational criminal behavior?

- 33% of the respondents strongly agree that enhancing life skills could reduce generational criminality.
- 66% of the respondents strongly agree that enhancing life skills could reduce generational criminality.

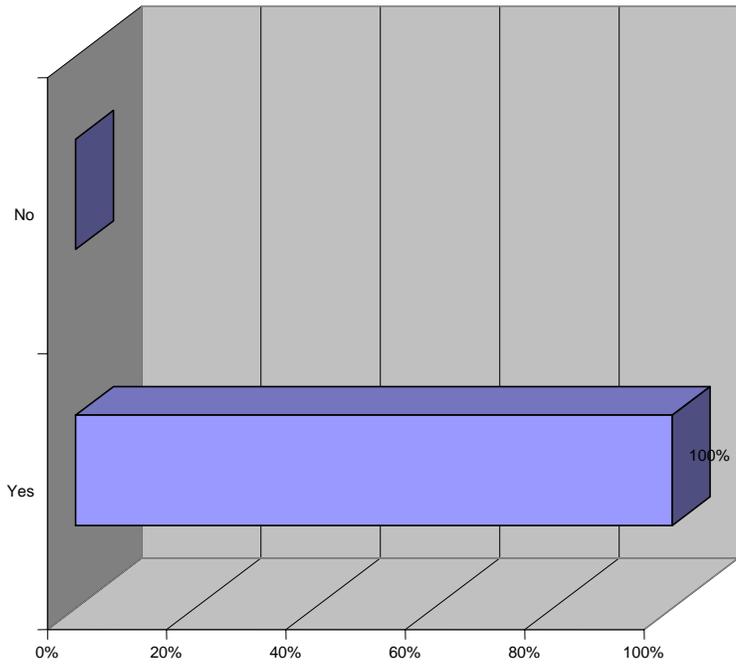


Chart #13, Question #4: Would you consider implementing a life skills group for the probationers in your circuit?

- 100% of the respondents would consider implementing a life skills program.

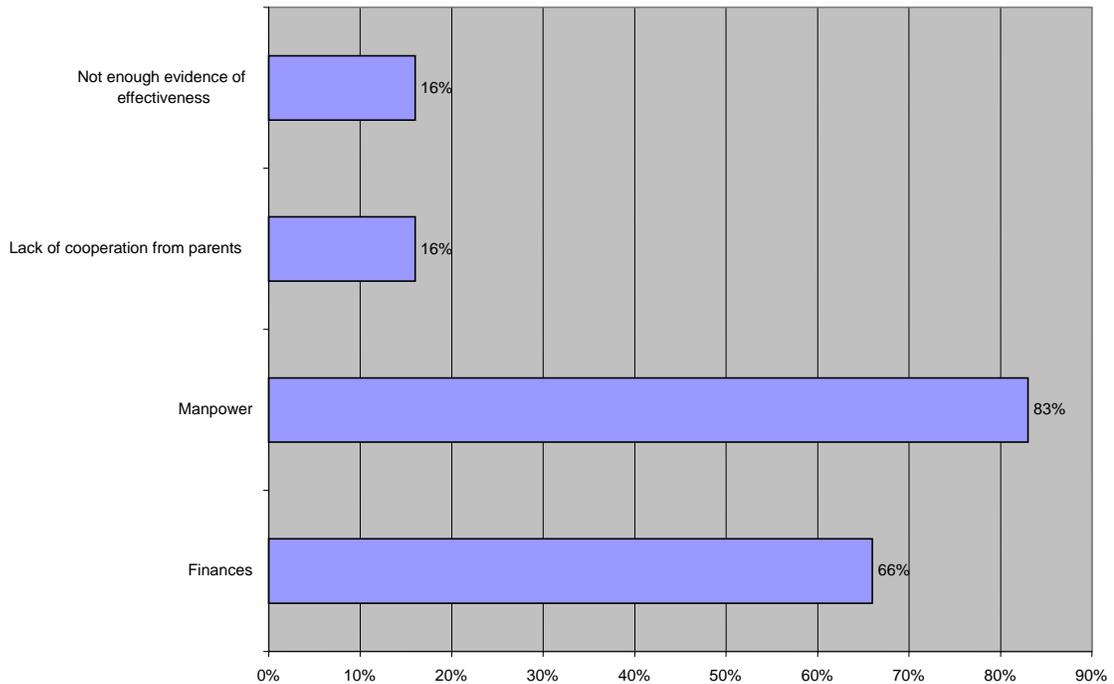


Chart #14, Question 5: Which, if any, could be possible roadblocks to implementation in your circuit?

- 16% of the respondents would consider a lack of evidence that the program is effective to be a roadblock to implementation.
- 16% of the respondents consider a lack of parental cooperation a roadblock to implementation.
- 83% are concerned with a lack of manpower to offer the group.
- 66% note finances as a possible roadblock to implementation.

### Survey 3: Sioux Falls Life Skills Facilitators

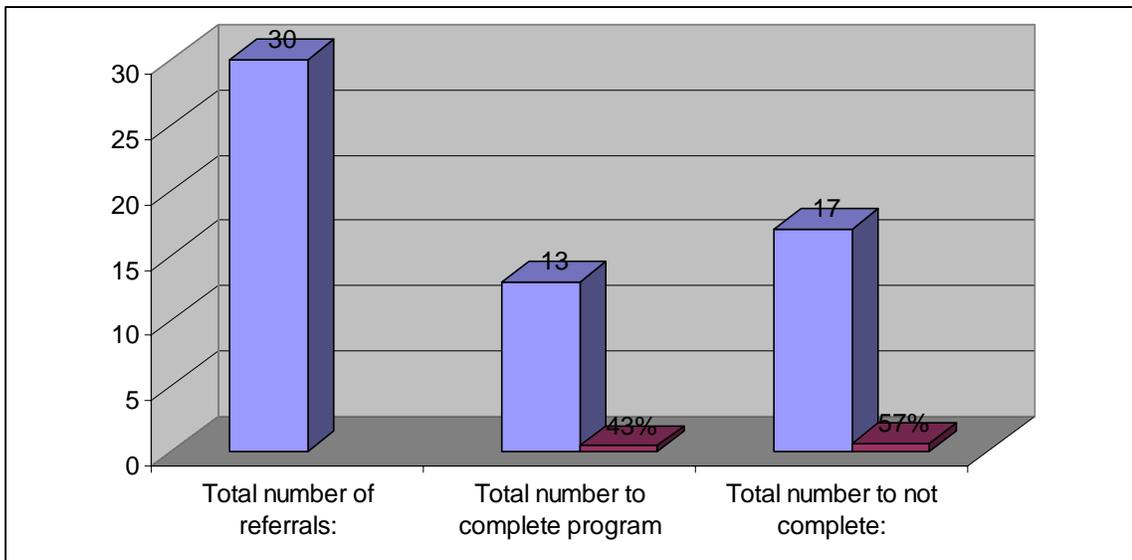


Chart #15, Question 1: Between the two life skills group, 30 students were identified to be participants.

- 13 of the 30 participants completed the program
- 17 of the 30 failed to complete the program
- Of the 13 who did successfully complete the program, 100% have not returned to court.

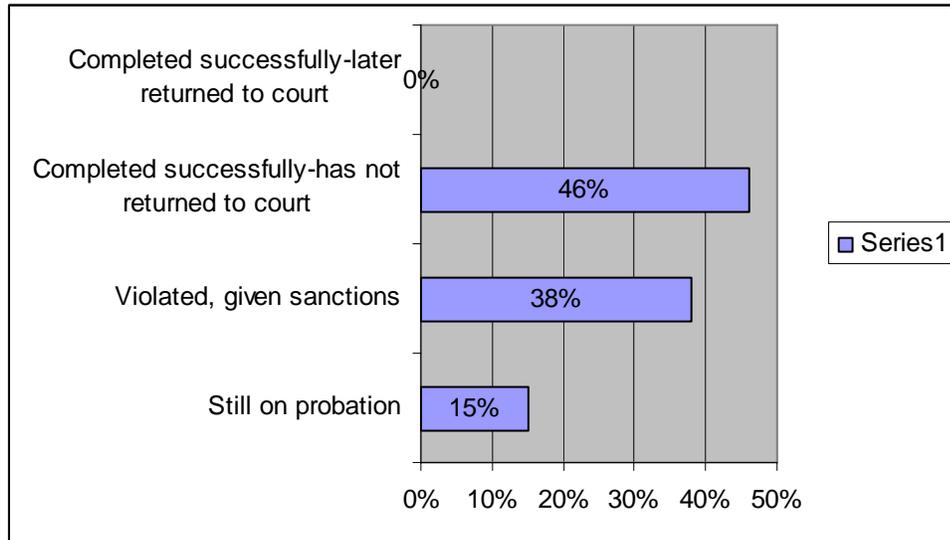


Chart # 16, Question 2: What is the present status of the juveniles who completed the program?

- 46% of the juveniles referred to Life Skills have completed the program.
- 15% of the juveniles that were referred to Life Skills are currently on probation.
- 38% of the juveniles referred to Life Skills have violated.

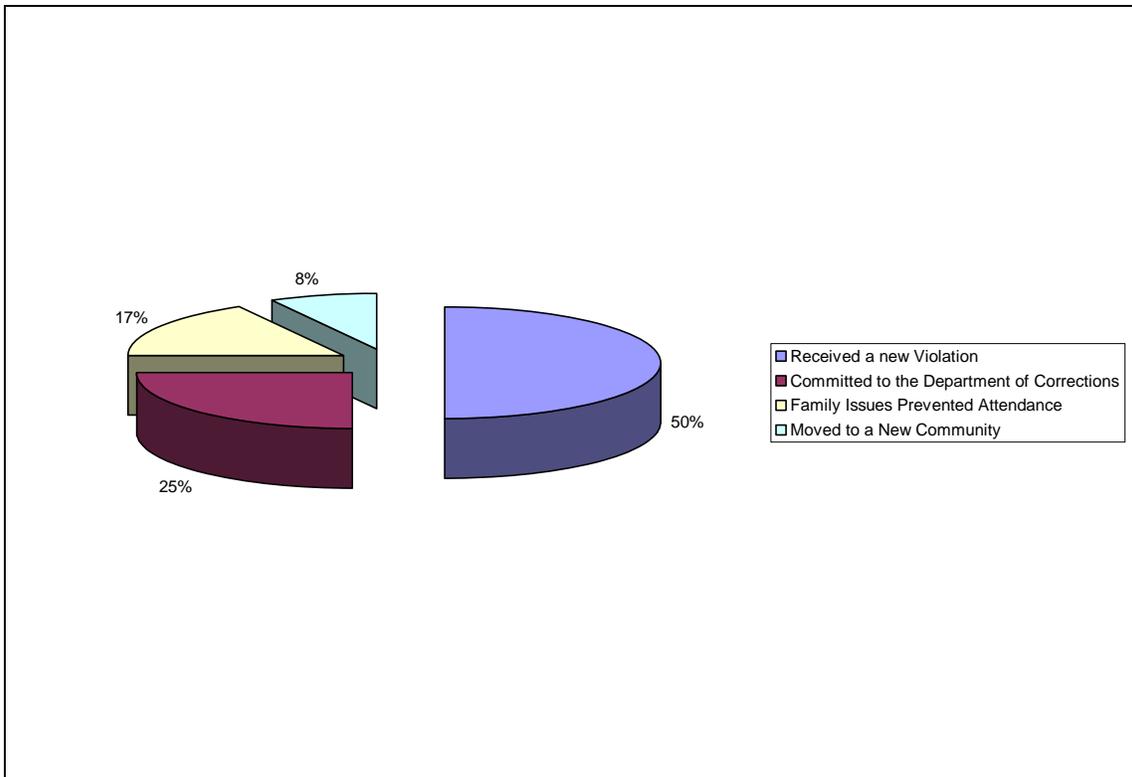


Chart 17, Question 3: Of those who did not complete the full program, what were the reasons for their failure to complete?

- 50% received a violation
- 8% moved from Sioux Falls
- 17% had family issues preventing attendance
- 25% were remanded to the Department of Corrections

## **SURVEY 4: JUVENILES (PROBATION AND NON-PROBATION)**

### Chart # 18

This is based on 41 respondents; 25 males, 16 females.  
Persons surveyed ranged from 12-19 years of age.

#### **Q. 1 How would you rate yourself on the following skills?**

##### **Communicating effectively**

1- Strongly disagree	3%
2- Disagree	5%
3- Neutral	29%
4- Agree	34%
5- Strongly agree	29%

##### **Making positive choices**

1- Strongly disagree	3%
2- Disagree	12%
3- Neutral	29%
4- Agree	39%
5- Strongly agree	17%

##### **Resisting peer pressure**

1- Strongly disagree	5%
2- Disagree	12%
3- Neutral	20%
4- Agree	21%
5- Strongly agree	42%

##### **Getting along with your peers**

1- Strongly disagree	0%
2- Disagree	7%
3- Neutral	12%
4- Agree	27%
5- Strongly Agree	54%

##### **Getting along with your parents**

1- Strongly disagree	3%
2- Disagree	10%
3- Neutral	17%
4- Agree	29%
5- Strongly agree	41%

##### **Following directions from teachers**

1- Strongly disagree	3%
2- Disagree	10%
3- Neutral	21%
4- Agree	34%
5- Strongly agree	32%

#### **Q. 2 Who has been most influential in teaching you the skills that you possess?**

Mother	40%
Father	8%
Both parents	20%
Friends	12%
Siblings	4%
Other	16%

**Q. 3 Which skills are most necessary?**

Communicating effectively	20%
Making positive choices	52%
Resisting peer pressure	4%
Getting along with peers	4%
Getting along with your parents	12%
Following directions from teachers	8%

**Q. 4 Do you have plans for when you graduate from high school?**

Yes	68%
Somewhat	20%
Not at all	8%
Other	4%

**Q.5 Which teaching style is most effective?**

Lecture	12%
Practicing skills as you learn them	56%
Role playing	7%
Written	4%

**Q. 6 Have you ever been on probation?**

Yes	42%
No	58%

**Q.7 Have either of your parents been involved in the legal system?**

Yes	42%
No	58%

## SURVEY 5: COMMUNITY PROFESSIONALS

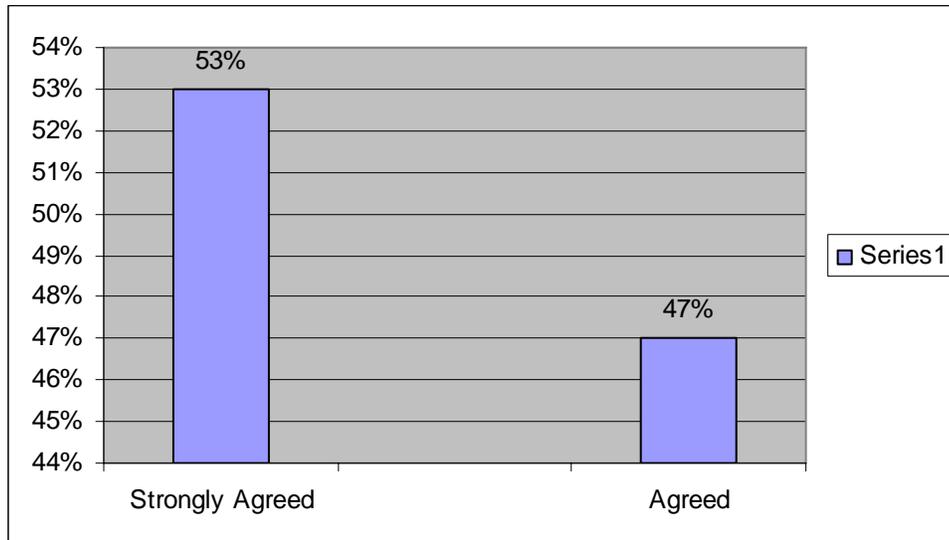


Chart # 19 Question 1: To what degree does the lack of life skills impact the juveniles that you work with?

- 53% of those surveyed feel that the lack of life skills have an impact on the juveniles that they work with.
- 47% of those surveyed felt this as well, but to a lesser degree.

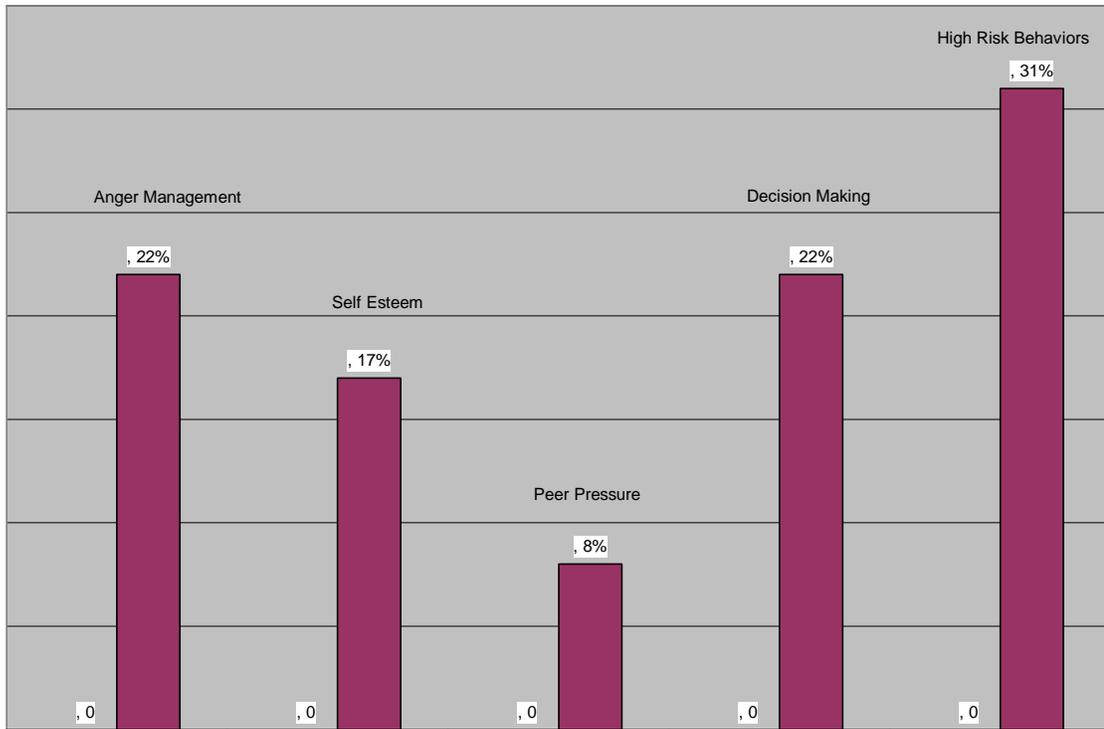


Chart # 20, Question 2: Which factors contribute most to juvenile delinquency?

Factors contributing most to juvenile delinquency are as follows:

- 31% of those surveyed believe that High Risk Behaviors is the category that would be the largest factor.
- 22% of the participants feel that Decision Making areas and Anger Management issues are the largest factors.
- 17% feel that Self Esteem plays the largest role.
- 8% believe that Peer Pressure is the dominant factor.

Question 3: What life factors have a significant effect on juveniles present and future well being? Open ended question; the top ten most listed answers follow:

- Family drug and alcohol abuse;
- No importance placed on academic achievement;
- Inadequate parenting;
- Family mental health issues;
- Family criminality;
- No positive role models;
- Lack of respect for authority;
- Economic status; poor home environment;
- No spiritual connection;
- Lack of opportunities for positive involvement.

Question 4: What teaching methods do you find works best in teaching juveniles?

Open ended question; the top eight most listed answers follow:

- Mentoring;
- Role playing;
- Role modeling;
- Incorporate a variety of teaching methods (e.g., role playing, classroom, etc.)
- Testimonials;
- Participants need to feel included, important, and heard;
- Teach relaxation techniques;
- Provide opportunities to do community service;

Question 5: How can Court Services most effectively work with the community to improve juvenile's present and future chances of success:

- Partner with community agencies to meet the needs of children and their families;
- Develop mentoring and education programs/opportunities;
- Make participation in the life skills program mandatory;
- Develop a similar program for parents, and make it mandatory;
- Offer incentives to participants;
- Stay apprised of current "What Works" strategies.

## SURVEY 6: EXISTING LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMS

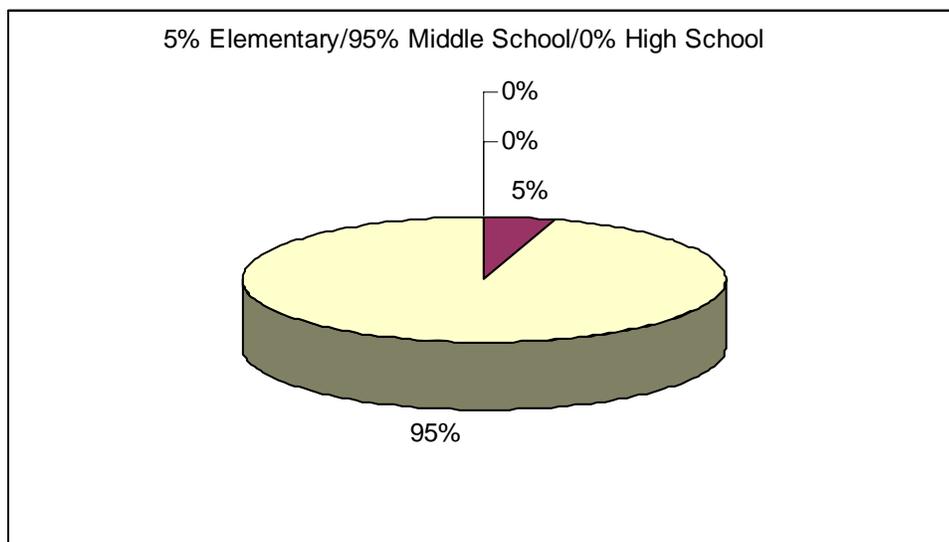


Chart #21, Question 1: At what age is the enhancement of life skills most beneficial?

The individual results of this survey show:

- 95% of those surveyed believe that enhancement of life skills is most beneficial at Middle School age.
- 5% feel that Elementary School aged children would be a better age to teach life skills.

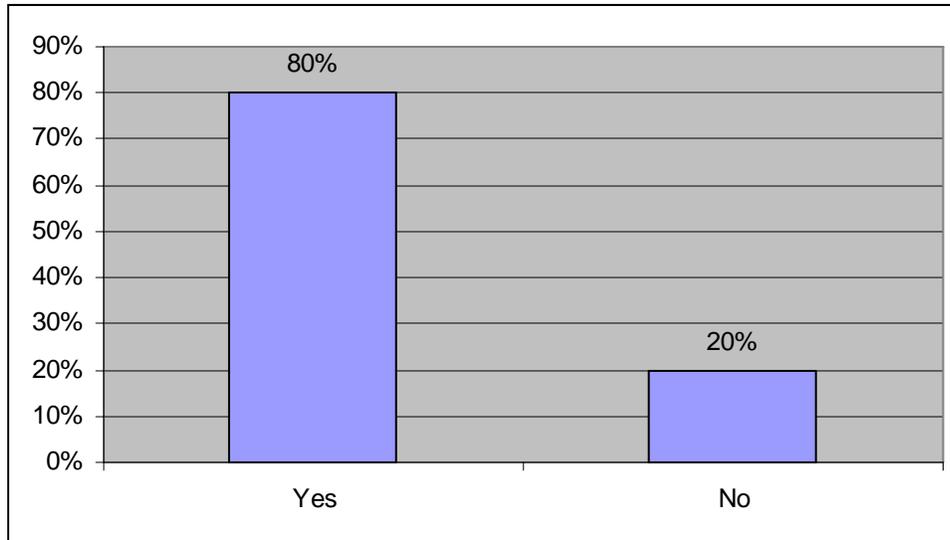


Chart 22, Question 2: Does the risk level of the child impact their likelihood to benefit from life skills training?

- 80% of the participants of this survey feel that the risk level of the child impacts their likelihood to benefit from life skills training.
- 20% of those surveyed feel that the risk level of the child does not impact their likelihood to benefit from life skills training.

Question 3: What have you found to be the most effective teaching methods?

(Open question)

- Encourage everyone to participate
- Incorporate games and fun/activities
- Need a relaxed setting
- The younger youth will
- Use energetic facilitators who show enthusiasm about the subject
- Choose group participants
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Hands on activities
- Role playing

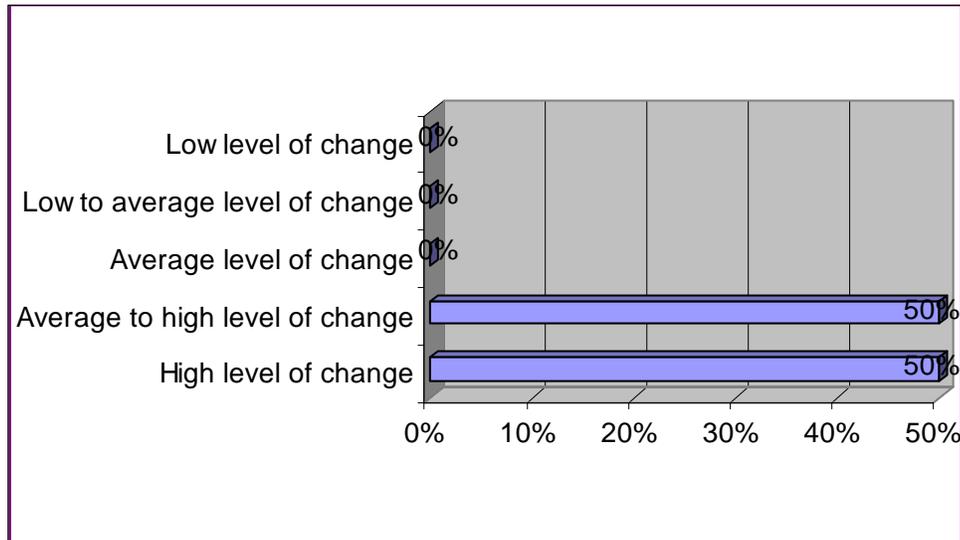


Chart #23, Question 4: How big of an impact do you see as a result of your life skills group?

- 50% feel that they saw a high level of change as a result of the life skills group.
- 50% of the participants surveyed feel that they have seen an average to high level of change as a result of the life skills group.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Life Skills programs have become recognized as a proactive approach to reducing the likelihood of juvenile delinquency and criminal behavior. As was noted throughout the literature review, there are numerous organizations utilizing this approach to provide skills to juveniles. Those skills include strengthening their ability to communicate effectively, to handle problems in an appropriate manner, to make positive life choices, to make appropriate and responsible choices, and to have respectful relationships with the people in their lives. South Dakota has embraced the “what works” philosophy in its efforts to increase the effectiveness of the services that we provide to probationers; i.e., to give our clients the necessary skills to live productive, crime free lives.

Enhancing social skills has been proven to address this issue, and to alleviate the continuance of the actions that lead to continued court involvement, and further, the likelihood that criminality will be passed from generation to generation. It is obvious that the lack of the skills which prevent a person from making poor decisions will be passed along to the children of the offender, thus supporting the theory that criminal behavior is, in fact, a generational issue.

While common sense also tells us that enhancing life skill is not the end all/cure all answer to criminal behavior, evidence supports the fact that it is a factor that, if recognized and acted upon, can and will make a difference with the people that we work with.

### **Conclusion #1:**

Overall, the findings showed that there is a strong belief by a majority of the people who work with juveniles that enhancing life skills will have a positive impact. Even to the smallest degree, it was stated that any additional services that can be provided to juveniles in need will have some positive level of success.

The previous two life skills groups were closely scrutinized; there were several areas of concern to be considered prior to implementing the next series.

- 57% of the juveniles who started the class did not successfully complete. There were various reasons for this, the two most common being a failure by the parent to deliver their child to class, or a new probation violation that led to some form of incarceration.
- The wide age range and maturity level of the participants resulted in a lack of group cohesiveness. This became obvious based on the incidence of the younger members exhibiting inappropriate behaviors; either due to the fact that they were uncomfortable and nervous with the more mature members, or perhaps it was in an effort to gain the attention of the other class members.
- Facilitators may benefit from the incorporation of new techniques to present the curriculum.

### **Recommendation #1:**

- Resources (incentives, learning tools, etc.) will be identified to encourage juveniles to remain in the group.
- Parents will be held responsible for getting their children to life skills group.

- A method that will allow closer scrutiny of the need, maturity level, etc, will be incorporated into the selection process for future groups. This can be accomplished via facilitators sharing their findings of what has worked well for them. Also, data found through the literature and surveys as to “what works” will be incorporated when appropriate.

**Conclusion #2:**

There is a wide range of data available regarding services that have been proven to be effective in reducing juvenile delinquency. Much of what is available via the web is specific to life skills programs. The available data is a valuable tool for Court Services Officer’s to utilize, in an effort to enhance the services that they deliver, as well as to maximize the probability of successful outcomes for juvenile probationers.

**Recommendation #2:**

A frequent search will be conducted to remain knowledgeable of what is new in “best practices.” As appropriate, these concepts will be incorporated into the life skills curriculum, as well as to use this information in all areas of probation work to enhance the outcomes of efforts.

The tools now being used in the Sioux Falls groups will be scrutinized to determine effectiveness. Those methods that are not effective will be eliminated, and replaced with methods that have been shown to work.

**Conclusion #3:**

Part of the “What Works” philosophy South Dakota urges the use of evidence based practices. With the enhancement of a life skills curriculum, establishing indicators to measure the success of the program would be particularly advantageous.

Without the tools to measure outcomes, identifying parts of the curriculum that are most likely to benefit the participants would not be known. This information would be imperative to track the success rate of the program.

**Recommendation#3:**

South Dakota will soon implement a new computer system. It would be advantageous to incorporate the ability to gather statistics necessary to identify what does and does not work in providing life skills enhancement training to juveniles.

**Conclusion #4:**

Support for a life skills program was unanimous throughout the state, as shown by the positive responses of the Chief Court Services Officer's and Court Services Officer's. It is believed that a lack of life skills is a common denominator, leading juveniles into the court system. It is also believed that criminality is a generational issue, and providing a life skills class could contribute to breaking the cycle.

The Sioux Falls officers who facilitate life skills groups strongly believe that the program has proven successful; of the juveniles who successfully completed the two previous programs, none of them have had subsequent violations or have returned to court with new charges.

Concerns were identified, from all parts of the state, regarding several issues: Is a life skills program effective? Is it practical to expect that the smaller circuits will be able to devote the amount of time and energy necessary to provide this course? Is it financially feasible for each circuit to purchase a life skills curriculum? These are all very real concerns; the size and breadth of the more rural circuits often result in a one or two

person office, thereby creating a lack of community support and resources to rely on for assistance in working with juveniles.

**Recommendation #4:**

- To determine the outcomes of the program, statistics will be kept from each Life Skills group that is completed. Follow up occur with all juveniles who successfully complete the program. This will occur at six months and twelve months after the juvenile is released from probation.
- The curriculum that is being used is very flexible and non-copyrighted, meaning that there is an open opportunity to share the curriculum with other circuits in the state (no cost beyond making copies of the literature.)
- Courses can be delivered to groups of juveniles, by one-on-one teaching, or it can be given as homework (for example, when the probationer leaves the office, he/she will be given homework to complete before the next scheduled appointment.
- These facts, and the issues that arise, will be discussed by the Chief's council, to determine the practicality of state-wide implementation. Affirmative results will be presented to the Presiding Judges council and the State Court Administrators office.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Court Services Officer's Survey**

Court Services Officer's:

I am conducting a study regarding juveniles and life skills; the title of my paper is Reducing Juvenile Delinquency by Enhancing Life Skills.

My reason for pursuing this topic is that Sioux Falls Court Services has implemented a life skills group for our juvenile probationers. There is extensive information available regarding how best to provide these groups, what type of life skills are most important, etc, but I would appreciate a view from a local level and from our local experts, which would be all of you! And besides just being on a quest to provide all possible benefits that we can to our juvenile probationers, I am currently involved in the Court Executive Development Program through the NCSC (you may recall receiving a survey from Nancy Allard last year in regard to safety issues-this is the same program.) My interest in the area of providing life skills to juveniles led me to choose this as the topic for my (required) paper.

I will use all of the information that I accumulate from all of you as well as through web studies, surveys of other existing life skills programs, and surveys from other professionals in the field in South Dakota to perfect the program that we are currently using in Sioux Falls. I would also like to share this information with the rest of the circuits if the findings show that enhancing life skills will, in fact, reduce delinquency.

I would greatly appreciate your time and thoughts on completing the questions on the attached page. Thank you!

Court Services Officer's Survey

1. At what age do you think juveniles are most likely to benefit from training on how to improve their life skills?

Grade school  middle school  high school

2. Do you think that the risk level of the juvenile affects the ability to teach these skills?

yes  no

3. What do you see as being the most problematic areas with the juveniles that you supervise?

Problems getting along with teachers/peers in school

Poor social skills

Poor communication skills

Poor decision making skills

High risk behaviors

Poor academic achievement

No future goals

Lacking goals to be independent-such as getting a job,

managing resources, etc.

4. Do you believe that enhancing life skills with the juveniles that we have on probation can affect their behavior/school performance/home behavior, etc?

yes  no

5. Do you believe that the degree of positive change (if any) would justify implementing a life skills program? Yes  no

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Chief Court Services Officer's Survey**

As you all know I am involved in the Court Executive Development Program (CEDP) through the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), and I am writing a paper on enhancing life skills for juveniles in an effort to reduce juvenile delinquency.

I would appreciate your input on the attached survey. If you could complete the questions and return this to me by September 28, I would appreciate it.

Note: The questions are in regard to life skills. Any and all of the following would fit into this category: Problems getting along with teachers/peers in school, poor social skills, poor communication skills, poor decision making skills, high risk behaviors, poor academic achievement, no future goals, lacking goals to be independent-such as getting a job, managing resources, etc.

### **Chief Court Services Officer's Survey**

1. Do you consider a lack of life skills to be a significant in juveniles entering the court system? \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_no

2. Do you agree that a lack of social skills is a generational issue in families?

Strongly Disagree.....Disagree.....Neutral.....Agree.....Strongly Agree

3. Do you think that enhancing life skills of juvenile probationers has the potential to break the cycle of generational court involvement?

Strongly Disagree ..... Disagree.....Neutral.....Agree.....Strongly Agree

4. Would you consider implementing a life skills group for the juvenile probationers in your circuit?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

5. Which, if any, could be possible roadblocks to implementation of a life skills program in your circuit?

\_\_\_\_\_ Finances

\_\_\_\_\_ Staff manpower and/or community resources

\_\_\_\_\_ Lack of support from higher office

\_\_\_\_\_ Lack of experience

\_\_\_\_\_ Not enough evidence to show it's effective

\_\_\_\_\_ Other:

\_\_\_\_\_ No obstacles

### **APPENDIX C**

#### **Sioux Falls Juvenile Probation Officers Survey (Life Skills Facilitators)**

1. How many juveniles have you referred to the Life Skills programs, and how many completed the full program? # \_\_\_\_\_ referred      \_\_\_\_\_ # completed

2. Of those who did complete the program, what is their present status?

\_\_\_\_\_ Still on probation

\_\_\_\_\_ Violated and given more stringent sanctions

\_\_\_\_\_ Successfully completed but have since returned to the court system

\_\_\_\_\_ Have successfully completed and not returned to the court system.

3. Of those who did not complete the full program, what were the reasons for their failure to complete?

\_\_\_\_\_ A new violation

\_\_\_\_\_ Moved to another city

\_\_\_\_\_ Family issues preventing attendance

\_\_\_\_\_ Other

4. What methods do you think should be employed to increase the number of juveniles who successfully complete the program?

**APPENDIX D**

\*\* This survey was conducted via face to face interviews:

**Probation and Non-Probation Juveniles Survey**

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

Please use the rating system below, with one being the lowest, and five being the highest:

1. How do you think that you rate in each of these areas?

Communicating effectively            1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Making positive choices            1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Resisting peer pressure            1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Getting along with peers            1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Getting along with your parents    1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Following directions from teachers 1.....2.....3.....4.....5

2. Who has been most influential in helping you develop the skills that you have?

\_\_\_ Mother

\_\_\_ Father

\_\_\_ Teacher

\_\_\_ Friends

\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Which of the above life skills do you think is most important to learn?

4. Are there any skills listed above which you feel are not important?
5. Which life skill(s) do you think will be most important to your future happiness and success?

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Community Professionals Survey**

Greetings:

My name is Patty Vonsik, and for those of you who do not know me, I am the Chief Court Services Officer in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Circuit Probation office (Minnehaha and Lincoln Counties.)

Our juvenile probation department implemented a Life Skills enhancement program for the juveniles that we have on probation. We have completed two groups so far, and intend to continue to provide this opportunity to those juveniles that we feel are likely to benefit from the program. The juvenile officers facilitate the groups, there are two officers presenting per session, and group is held one time per week, 50 minutes per group. The topics covered are:

- You and the Law: which covers understanding the law, confidentiality, important facts (for example, how juveniles can be brought into the court system, the different charges that are in place for juveniles, and possible repercussions for different offenses.)
- Verbal Communication: This section covered how to questions (asking rather than demanding,) making statements in a tactful way, when and when not to use slang.

- Non Verbal Communication: This section covers awareness of body language, gestures (appropriate vs. inappropriate.)
- Critical Problem Solving: This teaches participants how to identify and deal with problems in a positive manner.
- Risk Taking: This section discusses making positive choices, and being able to avoid peer pressure.
- Decision Making: This includes a discussion on belief systems, consequences for inappropriate behaviors, have positive intent in their actions, and the pros and cons of positive vs. negative behaviors.
- Self Concept: This discusses a review of how other people see and react to you based on the way that a person presents themselves, how to change that image (if their image has been tarnished), and how to set goals and accomplish them.
- Personal Awareness: This covers personal space, substance abuse, sexual behaviors, and how their behavior affects others.
- Self-control: Discussion of emotions, e.g., how to not let emotions rule your actions, and manipulation.
- How to Get a Job and Hold a job: This uses sample applications, how to dress appropriately for an interview, mock interviews, and budget/checking accounts.

We believe that enhancing life skills will have a positive impact on the juveniles who complete the program. The desired outcomes are improved behavior, better decision making skills, the ability to withstand peer pressure, avoiding high risk behaviors, and generally learning to exist in society minus the problems that brought them into the court system.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in helping us to further hone our ability to teaching these skills, based on the expertise that you have gained by working with children in your chosen professions. Please feel free to offer any information/thoughts that aren't listed in the survey.

Thank you in advance for your valuable feedback.

Questionnaire for Community Professionals:

1. On a scale of 1-5 (with 5 being the most significant), how big an impact does a lack of life/social skills have on the juveniles that you work with?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

2. On a scale from 1-5 (with 5 being the most significant) please rate the impact of the following issues in regard to juveniles success in the home, school, and community:

Anger management 1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Self esteem 1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Influence by peer pressure 1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Poor decision making 1.....2.....3.....4.....5

High risk behaviors 1.....2.....3.....4.....5

3. Can you name other problems that juveniles display that are likely to have a negative effect on their present and future well being?

4. What teaching methods do you find works best in teaching juveniles skills that they can learn, and generalize into other areas of their lives?

5. How can Court Services work more effectively with your agency to enhance life skills of our probationers, and thereby improve their present and future chance of success?

## **Appendix F**

### Existing Life Skills Program Survey

Dear Madam/Sir,

I am working as an intern for the Minnehaha County 2<sup>nd</sup> Circuit Court Services/Probation Department. I am working under the direction of Chief Court Services Officer, Patty Vonsik.

A life skills group for juvenile offenders is being designed and implemented by the Court Services Officer's who work with juvenile officers. The curriculum being utilized includes some of the following: Teaching adolescents better ways to get along with teachers/peers in school as well as to improve academic achievement; improving poor social skills poor communication skills; enhancing decision making skills. The program also aims to address high risk behaviors and the ability to make better choices. Realizing the necessity of having future goals, and how to plan a strategy to meet those goals.

We are seeking current research that is available on existing life skills programs; this is in an effort to provide all possible benefits to our juvenile probationers. There is extensive information on this subject and I would appreciate a few moments of your time and of your expertise in this area. I would appreciate a few minutes of your time to complete this survey:

1. At what age is the enhancement of life skills most beneficial?  
Elementary age \_\_\_\_\_ Middle School Age \_\_\_\_\_ High School Age \_\_\_\_\_
2. Does the risk level of the child impact their likelihood to benefit from life skills training?      Yes \_\_\_\_\_      No \_\_\_\_\_
3. Please note what you have found to be the most effective teaching methods?
4. How big of an impact do you see as a result of your life skills group?  
Low.....low to average.....average.....average to high.....high

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