

COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR RESTRUCTURING GROUP

2008 and 2009

THE OAKLAND EXPERIENCE – “Keeping It Real”

To: Alameda County Probation Staff
Urban Strategies Inc
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LENNY’S STORY:

Lenny shook his head in disbelief as this day and moment had finally come while sitting in the group with his peers. Attending six sessions of the cognitive behavior group seemed like a long time. “Man,” he murmured to the group. “I’m finally going get my piece of paper today!” he said with relief, referring to the certificate that he and his peers were on the verge of receiving. He could sense that most of his peers were excited as him despite showing their cool as if it was no big deal. But to Lenny, it was a big deal! It was huge and it was a major accomplishment thinking about all the crap that he had to go through. Life had not been so kind to him, but yet, he had to remember that he wasn’t too kind to it either-at least not until he was sentenced to probation for the second time as an adult. And now life was going to be kind to him today – or at least for this moment, for completing the cognitive group with a certificate. “Yeah man...I’m going to hang that piece of paper on my bedroom wall.” he thought to himself while gazing up at the ceiling with a proud smile. Within the next minute, Lenny received his certificate, and then he decided to share with the group why this meant so much to him. This moment was being kind to him and he wanted to explain his struggles with some kind and humble words. This was what Lenny had to say, **(to be continued....)**

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW:

The story about Lenny is also a nonfiction story about the cognitive behavior group that is described in a narrative format. This report is simply about the participation of young people in a group setting who are supervised on probation in the ROCK Program (Restructuring Ones Character through Knowledge). The Cognitive Behavior Group is designed for young adult offenders aged 18 to 25 years old who are classified in the high risk category. The cognitive behavior group is a major component of Evidence Based Practices of “What Works”, and in Lenny’s story it has to do with positive reinforcement that includes affirmation from the group facilitators and probation staff. Affirmation is about recognizing the client’s achievement with praise or a reward that will motivate them to pursue their next goal or objective with encouragement and optimism.

The intent of this report is not to expound on research or use official data with statistics where there is a comparative study to produce outcome measures with a recommendation. Instead, this report is intended to describe the experience of facilitating a cognitive behavior group through my personal observation as a Probation Officer who co-facilitated these groups with other Probation Officers in the ROCK program. Through personal observation, this report explores the dynamics of working with young people in a group setting and how they interact with the facilitators and each other. It also describes how they responded to each topic and participated in each session by expressing their thoughts, feelings and ideas with the facilitators and their peers. It should also be noted that this report is a segment of the Cognitive Behavior Groups in Oakland where I co-facilitated four out of the seven groups that were conducted over the last eighteen months. Therefore, it is hoped that the reader will gain a better awareness of the group dynamics that is categorized in the following order: **1) The Purpose & Objective; 2) Facilitator’s Role & Correctional Perspective; 3) Demographics & Group Size; 4) Curriculum & Group Dynamics; 5) Group Distinction & Personality; 6) Client Feedback & Facilitator’s Impression; and 7) Summary & Conclusion.**

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE:

The Cognitive Behavior Restructuring Group is one of the main ingredients of Evidence Based Practices “What Work”. It is also a major component of the program that is designed to guide and teach young offenders on how to make better choices in life by challenging their way of thinking. The cognitive behavior group is intended to help the clients to identify and reflect on their belief system (values) that rarely changes. Once the clients reflect on this, whether their value system might be different or in conflict with others, the clients learn that what is most important is their attitude (temporary mood/feeling) which can lead to their behavior (actions/what others see) that can be good or bad. Therefore, the focus is on their attitude and behavior that can be changed instead of their values. The whole purpose of cognitive behavior groups is to get maximum participation from the clients where they talk and participate during most of the group session. This means that the dialogue should come from them at least seventy five percent of the time while the facilitators listen, observe, clarify and engage the clients in the group discussions. **It is also imperative that the facilitators remain objective and nonjudgmental during the discussions.** Therefore, the clients take ownership of the group by giving each other feedback along with sharing their thoughts and feelings. This enables the group to also teach and learn more from each other due to being around the same age and generation where they share similar experiences.

With this in mind, the goal of the cognitive group is to reduce the offending and recidivism rate of young adults on probation who are in the high risk category of the ROCK program. The ROCK program is an assessment driven program where a client is scored by an LS/CMI Assessment (Level of Service Inventory). Therefore, a client is determined to be **high risk** if his/her score is “**20 to 29**”. This category is a level below the **Very High Risk Category (Task Force “30 to 34”)** and two levels below the **GPS Category (Global Positioning Satellite “35 to 43”)**. When a client is identified as high risk, his or her chances of recidivism are nearly fifty percent. On the other hand, when a client scores lower than “**20**” on an LS/CMI assessment his/her chances are lesser. For example, when a client scores anywhere between “**0 to 9**” he/she is classified as **Low Risk** and do not need to be

supervised by a probation officer, and when the clients score between “**10 to 19**” they are classified as **Medium Risk** and only have to report to a kiosk machine for self-reporting. It is also important to note that the **Very High Risk Clients** with a score “**30 to 43**” (**Task Force and GPS**) are permitted to attend the cognitive behavior groups if their issues are not too severe where they are not a major distraction or being disruptive in the group.

The clients in the cognitive group were constantly reminded about how their LS/CMI score could be lowered in six months after their initial assessment when they are reassessed. They were informed that they had to be in compliance with their probation in order for this to happen, and if they were not in compliance that their LS/CMI score could go up or remain the same. This reminder was used as a source of inspiration and motivation for the clients to be in full compliance of their probation conditions by getting their score lowered to medium risk (self-reporting) or low risk (banked/unsupervised probation). It should also be noted that **Motivational Interviewing** is another component of Evidence Based Practices that is inherently utilized when communicating with the clients (individually or in groups) in helping them to be successful on probation. This is accomplished by asking **open ended questions, utilizing affirmation techniques, using reflective listening skills and summarizing the interview or discussion with the client(s) (OARS)**. Some of these skills and techniques will be described in the latter part of this report.

FACILITATOR’S ROLE AND THE CORRECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE:

When the public thinks of probation, they usually perceive our profession as a law enforcement agency that supervises offenders whom are mandated by the Court to participate in specific programs. The programs that come to mind are: community service, victim restitution, court fees and a referral to a mental health agency for counseling or substance abuse services. Moreover, the public perception is that if the offender fails to comply, they will be sentenced to jail or to prison. However, the public knows very little about the case management and the social work element of probation that emphasizes the rehabilitation of the

offender out in the community. This could include graduated sanctions and creative alternatives to hold the offender accountable out in the community in lieu of locking him/her up. Furthermore, many people outside of our profession, along with others in our profession, are even more surprised that probation officers facilitate groups and engage in counseling sessions with the people on their caseloads that can be used as a graduated sanction by directing the client to articulate their issues in a written assignment.

It is also important to note that whenever Probation Officers receive extensive training on facilitating groups, the training is usually provided by an outside representative who is employed with a Mental Health or Private Counseling Agency. In most cases, these professionals have no experience as probation or parole officers and, therefore, do not understand the probation or parole officer's role in facilitating a group. This is mostly due to lacking the perspective and insight from this role as a probation and parole officer who performs this duty with offenders –some of whom may be their clients.

Therefore, it is hoped that this report illustrates this insight and perspective from a Probation Officer's point of view. This point of view that describes the probation officer's role in facilitating group can be very complex that requires wearing two hats (law enforcement and social work) in relating to their clients in a group setting. For example, it can be somewhat of an unorthodox and an eccentric experience when a group of probationers open up and express their thoughts and feelings to a person who they know carries a badge and has the authority to send them back to court with a strike of a pen or countless taps on a computer keyboard. However, this is what can make the relationship with the clients so challenging and unique in a group setting that demands the skill of the Probation Officer balancing the two hats of not only in a group setting but also individually as well.

Facilitating a group in the community makes it even more challenging for the probation officer because the clients are expected to participate in the discussions with other peers in the group who they may not be familiar with or know. Moreover, these clients are coming from different parts of the City and

neighborhoods with people they do not even live with. This is unlike having a group session in a controlled environment, such as a residential treatment center or correctional facility, where the residents and inmates usually live in the same unit. The probation officer in his/her role as group facilitator is in a unique position where they can learn more about their clients in one group session than they could in several individual appointments due to the fact that they are observing their client in a group setting for one to two hours each week. This is due to the fact that they can observe and assess the clients on their caseload, during this time frame, and how they interact with their peers.

DEMOGRAPHICS/GROUP SIZE AND CLASSES:

The Cognitive Behavior Restructuring Group was held at the Probation Center in the conference room on the fourth floor. There were a total of four different cognitive groups that I co-facilitated with another Deputy Probation Officer. The first group (**Group 1**) ran for a total of seven classes in the summer of 2008. The second group (**Group 2**) also ran for total of seven classes in the summer of 2009. Each of these classes ran for ninety minutes. The third and fourth group (**Group 3 and Group 4**) was held in the late summer and fall of 2009 for a total of four classes. There were two sessions for each class (one hour per session) that ran longer (two hours) in order for the clients to complete the group in four weeks. This was due to “**fast tracking**” in order to offer more groups for the high risk clients in the ROCK program to complete the classes within a reasonable time frame.

In all four of the groups, there were a total number of forty one (41) clients who had attended the cognitive group sessions. There were a total of nine (9) clients who attended **Group 1**, a total of fifteen (15) clients that attended **Group 2**, a total of ten (10) clients that attended **Group 3** and a total of seven (7) clients that attended **Group 4**. Out of the forty one (41) clients that attended the group sessions, a total of twenty nine (29) clients completed the classes where each one of them received their certificate: **Group 1** graduated six (6) clients, **Group 2**

graduated eleven (11) clients, **Group 3** graduated eight (8) clients and **Group 4** graduated four (4) clients.

The racial make-up of the group was predominately African American males where there was a total of thirty six (36) out of forty one (41) clients who had attended the sessions. Out of the other five clients: three (3) were African American females and one (1) of was a Mexican American male and one (1) a Native American male. In regards to the racial make-up of those clients that had graduated from the classes: twenty five (25) were African American males, two (2) were African American females, and one (1) Mexican American male and one (1) Native American male. These statistics obviously show an over-representation of African American males who are or were assessed and scored in the high risk and very high category that were expected to attend the cognitive groups. **This is a DMC (Disproportionate Minority Contact) issue including all of the clients being People of Color.**

All of these clients were residents of Oakland as most of them resided in high crime areas on the East and West Side of the City where there is a high degree of homicides, violence and drug activity. Many of them resided in homes or neighborhoods that are low income and at the poverty level. It should also be noted that some of the clients were transient (not exactly homeless but living place to place) by staying with relatives, friends and significant others. A majority of these clients were unemployed, not enrolled in school or in college. Many of them did not have a high school diploma or GED certificate. It is also worth noting that half of the clients who attended the group sessions are parents with small children.

THE CURRICULUM AND GROUP DYNAMICS:

The curriculum of the cognitive behavior group has a total of six topics for six sessions. There is also a make-up session (seventh session) that they are allowed to attend if they missed only one session. The topics are in the following order: Session I (**Values, Attitudes, Behaviors**), Session II (**Victimization**), Session III

(Trust), Session IV **(What Has It Cost?)**, Session V **(Staying in Control)**, Session VI **(Good Communication)** and Session VII **(Goals)** which is the make-up session.

It should also be noted that the clients are required to take a pre-survey in the first class (prior to Session I) and then take a post-survey in the last class after Session VII. The purpose of these surveys is to test the clients' knowledge of the topics in the curriculum and to see if they comprehended the material that was discussed in the sessions.

The group discussions and the dynamics are at the very heart of the purpose of this report and what it wants to describe in this section. Therefore, the focus in this section is in reference to the group's response and interaction with each other and to the curriculum. In order to get a good picture of the group's response and their interactions with each other, there were always two facilitators in each cognitive group to monitor this element of the group dynamics. Therefore, **the group always sat in a circle with the two facilitators sitting at opposite sides from each other, in the circle, where we could see all of the clients' facial expressions and their body language.** For example, if I have two clients sitting next to me, I will not be able to see their facial expressions or body language unlike my co-worker who is sitting directly across from me in the circle. The same thing would apply for my co-worker who would have difficulty seeing the facial expressions of the two clients sitting next to him/her. Therefore, four eyes are better than two to get a better observation and feel of the group dynamics.

In Session I, the group was asked to define **Values, Attitudes and Behaviors** and what it means to them. With values as defined as a belief system, the consensus among the clients participating in the discussion said that they valued their lives, freedom and families. Having money was also a value to many of them where some of them identified it as a need to live comfortably while others said they valued it as having power, importance and prestige. Some clients also valued religion, spirituality or the higher power and elaborated as to why they believed this. There was also some discussion about their values regarding their physical appearance (fashion, hair style) and verbal gestures (street slang and dialect) in

their generation which they felt it was important for them to fit in and be accepted by their peers. Therefore, most of the group seemed to understand that their values (belief system) are who they are and recognize that people should respect it whether they agree or disagree with it. They also seemed to understand that they have to do the same thing with others who have a different belief system from them.

Respect was always a key word when the group discussed attitudes and behaviors. They discussed that an attitude can be good or bad that can determine one's behavior just by how someone treats them. For example, some of the clients stated that they can have a bad attitude towards a family member or their baby's mother that said something to them that they didn't like. This type interaction with a family member or friend could trigger bad behavior where they would get into a heated argument or into a fight. Some of the clients have identified their bad behavior as passive aggressive where they would avoid the person that they were mad at or avoid responsibility when someone was dependent on them. Therefore, they became more cognizant of their behavior which is what others see (good or bad) and how respect plays a role in it.

Victimization (Session II) was a topic that the clients learned in the discussion on how individuals and society can be victimized. Not surprisingly, many of the clients discussed how they were victimized especially by authority figures such as the police and the courts. Some of them felt that they received unfair treatment and were screwed by the system. This was a very common response from many clients on probation when discussing this topic even outside of the group sessions. However, it gives the facilitators more information about the clients mindset in terms of taking responsibility for their offense and if they have any remorse for what they did. This was one of the more challenging topics for the group to grasp and comprehend due to the fact that many of them did not truly understand how their crime victimizes others and society in general. This is especially true with many of the clients who are convicted for a drug offense. One client commented, "I know what I did (selling drugs) was wrong, but I did it to help support my family, and I would do it again if I have to!" Drug Offenses, shootings and homicides were the most challenging, but yet --- intriguing when

discussing victimization. Challenging to where the clients would admit to not “snitching” if they witnessed someone committing a crime or killing someone, knowing full well that this would continue to happen in their neighborhood if they did not report it. But yet depressing and thought provoking, because it could mean their lives, and sometimes their families, if they took a stand that could result in retaliation from the assailant. When exploring this issue, and their mistrust of the police and the court system, they were looking at their own survival instead of the good of the community. Therefore, when discussing victimization, their own safety was more important than other’s victimization as it pertains to that old saying “Looking out for number one!”

Session III (Trust) was always the most insightful in the group discussions when the clients defined trust and what it means to them. Out of all the six topics, it received the most diverse response from the clients as their definitions varied. Some of the responses were: “trust is love, trust is friendship, trust is loyalty, trust is family, and trust is having money”. The word “Trust” despite being a very common word that people seemed to understand and can define is actually a very vague term that has different meanings to different people which came to fruition in these group discussions. There were some clients who stated that they, “do not trust anyone!” while a few would say they “only trust themselves” and one or two who would say that they “do not even trust themselves.”

Nevertheless, what came out of these discussions about trust is that it can be situational and have levels or degrees of how much and how little you can trust someone. For example, it was discussed that you could trust your co-worker to get the job done at work if that person has a good reputation and work ethic. However, you may not be able to trust this same person with your personal problems. Or you could be good friends with someone, but not trust them with a particular skill that they lacked. “Johnny is a real cool Dude, but I’m not going to ride with him because he drives like a madman.” Or “Felicia is my girlfriend, but I do not trust her to keep a secret.”

When the group elaborated about trust they were asked to compare it to love and if they could trust someone that they love. After giving this some

considerable thought in the sessions, some of the clients admitted to not trusting some of the people that they love, especially in their families. Many of the young men, most of whom, were abandoned by their fathers stated that they didn't trust their fathers due to their fathers not being there for them. Some explained because their fathers were in prison for life ever since they were small children, and others said that their fathers just left their family period. Some of the clients talked about not trusting their mothers due to their drug problem and addiction or their siblings having the same problem despite loving them. There were also some clients who had a very concrete and unconditional mindset about trust by believing that either you trust someone one hundred percent of the time or you do not trust them at all. However, the main point that was emphasized in group was to look at trust as situational that depends on their level of trust with people. The clients seemed to understand when exploring trust as it pertains to responsibility that they must be dependable and rise to the occasion if they want others to trust them at this level. One example that was explained to the group was "Their Probation Officer giving them permission to travel out of state because they trust them at this level when they're in compliance with their probation."

In Session IV, the group discussed "**What Has It Cost?**" which means how did their crime cost them and what did they lose by being convicted of a felony and placed on probation? Not surprisingly, many of the clients stated that they have less freedom, especially when they served time in jail and being locked up with other convicts. One client commented that, "It's not worth doing something stupid to be in that place. It's no joke!" when referring to the time he served in Santa Rita Jail. Many of the clients also commented that being on probation had cost them job opportunities due to their felony conviction and their privacy with the four way search clause. "It seems like every time I walk on my block, I keep getting jacked by the police...and I don't be doing anything!" said one client. They also said that being on probation has affected their family and made it hard on them with the four way search clause when the police come over and search their homes. In some cases, a few clients said that this had cost them a permanent residence or place to stay because their family, relatives or significant others do not want the police to come in and ransack their homes. Moreover, in some

cases, it could mean that their family and significant others could lose their residence if they have a convicted felon living with them in public housing.

Other things the clients have cited what their crime had cost them is: money, court fines, restitution, community service, reporting to the probation officer, attending these groups because it costs them their time, money and energy.

Some of the clients stated that coming to these group sessions, on a weekly basis for an hour or two, takes half of their day away when they have to catch the bus along with a few transfers. "I have to leave the house before eight o'clock this morning to get here at ten, and then not get home, sometimes, until after three o'clock because this group ain't over until twelve." explained one of the clients.

Session V "Staying in Control" this topic focused more on anger management and how to avoid violence and aggression. Due to all four of the groups being predominately males, most of the discussion revolved around domestic violence and how to avoid it with their girlfriends and baby's mothers. Some of the young men complained how their baby's mother would give them a hard time about seeing their child or argue that they were not doing enough to help support their child. These arguments would turn into shouting matches where they would describe that their lady or baby's mother would be aggressive with them by pushing them or getting up in their face. A lot of these young men stated that they would walk away to avoid a physical altercation because they knew that, being a man and on probation, they would be the ones that would get arrested even though their lady or baby's mother started the fight. When the group elaborated on "Staying in Control" they talked about avoiding these situations altogether, especially, if they knew that their lady or baby's mother was full of drama. One of the young men in the group commented that, "Whenever, I plan to see my kids, I try to bring one of my partners with me because I need a witness in case their mama trips on me!" This young man further explained that his "ex" (baby's mother) lied on him in the past and that she is jealous because he is with another lady.

There was also some discussion about "Staying in Control" as it pertains to avoiding conflict with other guys. Due to the high rate of violence and homicides

in Oakland which is where these young men live, a lot of them stated that they try to stay out of the way and out of people's business. They realized that they could easily get hurt or killed just by looking at someone the wrong way. They discussed that it was no problem for them to walk away from conflict rather than stay and deal with it on the streets. However, when it came to control and how they defined this term, almost all of the clients had a distorted meaning about it. They all thought that control meant being in charge and the leader of people. However, after reviewing the exercises and exploring this through discussion they became aware that control also means "No one can make you happy or sad!" and that you cannot let people push your buttons where they can control how you are going to respond and behave. Therefore, when discussing control in these sessions, the clients focused on self-control where they have to control their behavior instead of others.

Session IV "Good Communications" the group discussed how they could improve their communication skills with others. They gave examples how they should think before they say something to other people by choosing their words more carefully. Most of the discussions regarding this topic revolved around seeking employment. Therefore, it is not only how one verbally communicates, but it is also how one dresses, looks and carries themselves when it comes to a job search. One of the young men commented that he learned the reason why he was rejected for a job that he could have been hired for by admitting to messing up during the job interview. He said a person that he knew that sat in during the interview told him that they would have hired him if he would have showed more confidence in responding to their questions. Therefore, in these discussions the group learned about improving their social skills and how to make a better impression on people. Some even commented that they knew how to switch from 'street slang' to using proper grammar depending on whom they are around.

"Goals" The Make-Up Session was where the clients who missed one session would discuss their plans and strategy on how they would reach their goals. They discussed their short-term and long-term goals. As what would be expected, their goals varied. In regards to their short-term goals, their answers were: "finish

these groups, get a job, get their GED, get their driver's license or state ID, and get their supervision reduced to kiosk or bank" As for their long-term goals, their answers were: "get off probation, become an auto mechanic, own their business, become a rapper or hip hop artist, make a lot of money, get married and raise a family, get out of Oakland and move to another State" After sharing their goals in the group, they learned about the steps that they must take to reach their goals and how to apply it from the topics that they discussed in the previous classes.

ICE BREAKER EXERCISES:

One subcomponent of the curriculum that always evoked a lot of discussion and opinion with much compassion from the clients was the "**Alligator River Story**" which was part of the **Values, Attitudes and Behaviors** session. It is an exercise about a man and a woman in a romantic story that couldn't see each other due to being separated by a river that was full of alligators, crocodiles, piranhas and sharks. They were very much in love and the only way the woman could cross to the other side of the river to see her lover was on a ferry. However, she had to agree to spend the night with the man who had a boat to ferry her across the river, which she reluctantly did. When she told her lover about this after getting to the other side of the river, he got upset and dumped her. After this occurred, she told a stranger (another man) about it who beat up her ex-lover. This exercise challenges and defines the client's value system because there is no right or wrong with whoever they rank as the worst character in the story. Their answers varied on who they ranked as the worst character in the story. This story always gives the facilitators much insight about the male client's relationship with females because many of them cited some examples on how they would have handled the situation.

Another exercise that was an ice breaker for the clients to participate in is the quotations where they would come up with a phrase or saying. A quotation could be anything that they want it to be whether it is something that they articulated from their creative use of words or from a prominent public figure. For example, some of the quotations that the clients stated that were from prominent figures

are, "Keep your head up!" Tupac Shakur; "Knowledge of self makes you take on the great virtue of learning." Elijah Muhammad; "Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed." Martin Luther King Jr.; or came up with more common quotes such as, "Anything is Possible, Never Give Up! or Real Men Cry!" In addition to this exercise, the clients were asked to name their favorite celebrities (singers, rappers, musicians, movie stars or athletes) and to explain why they like them or their work. What this ice breaking exercise does is help the client to reflect and define their own value and belief system by expressing their philosophy in an adage or phrase.

Due to the over-representation of African American males attending the cognitive behavior groups, there were also some culturally specific ice breaking exercises such as the Black History and Community Awareness Quiz. In these quizzes, the clients had to identify current and historical African American Public Figures and People of Color who could serve as an inspiration to them. We had a brief discussion about these public figures such as: President Barack Obama, Attorney General Eric Holder, U.S. Congresswoman Barbara Lee, Mayor Ron Dellums and former Mayor of Oakland, Lionel Wilson. The clients were informed that the purpose of this quiz and discussion relates to **DMC (Disproportionate Minority Contact) where these individuals are or were under-represented in their respective professions as African Americans which is in contrast to them (the clients) being over-represented in the Criminal Justice System as African American men.**

GROUP DISTINCTION AND PERSONALITY:

As stated in this report, there were four different cognitive groups that I co-facilitated over the last year and a half. Although the curriculum was basically the same, except for Group 1, each of these groups was unique and different and had their own personality despite being predominately comprised of African American males.

Group 1 was comprised of all males that were the most educated, articulated and shared their personal problems the most with each other out of the four groups. Out of the six clients that graduated from the group, four of them had either a high school diploma or GED certificate. Three of the clients were either attending college or had attended college. The mean age of this group was around 22 years old.

Group 2 was the largest class that had eleven clients who completed the sessions. It was the group that had the only two females that graduated from it that I co-facilitated. Due to having two female clients in the group along with a female co-facilitator, this group was unique where it had more of a women's point of view that challenged the young men's belief system when it came to how they perceived the opposite sex. However, it also made the two females more aware of their male peer's issues in how they viewed females and their own manhood. This group was the least educated and youngest of the three. There were times when this group had difficulty engaging in the discussions, and did not share their personal issues out of the four groups.

Group 3 graduated eight clients and this group was the most active and vocal of the four. This group loved to converse where every client participated in all of the sessions. This group was so talkative and full of energy that they had to be admonished to slow it down and talk one at a time because there were many times when a few of them would be talking at the same time. Because of this, the young men had problems listening to their peer's point of view and feedback.

This group was comprised of all males, but however, it should be noted that there was one female who attended the first class and never completed it. Out of the eight men in the group, seven of them are fathers, and this group focused a lot on this issue when discussing some of the topics in the curriculum. Especially when they discussed their values, along with trust and victimization, and what their crime had cost them. Therefore, most these young men expressed much love and concern for their children. They also understood and realized that being in the criminal justice system put them in a situation where they could possibly not be there for their children if they get locked up and sent away to prison. It should

also be noted that many of these young men shared how their fathers weren't there for them, and that they did not want to abandon their children because of that experience.

Group 4 was the smallest of the four groups with four graduates. The attendance to this group fluctuated when seven clients attended the first class, followed by only two clients attending the second and third class. It should be noted that the other two clients, who did not attend the second and third class, graduated because they only had to make up one session (Session I/Values, Attitudes, Behaviors) due to attending the previous groups. In the first class, the clients were the most active in the discussion due to it being the largest group. Although the participation was good when only two clients attended the second and third class, the discussions lacked the variety of opinions and feedback that would have occurred in a larger group.

CLIENT FEEDBACK AND FACILITATORS' IMPRESSION:

All four of the groups had a little graduation ceremony where the clients received their certificates. Food and refreshments were provided that varied from each group such as pizza or chicken along with soft drinks, potato chips and snacks. Each group was asked for their input regarding what they wanted for refreshments. Also, three out of the four groups were asked to pick a name to define their group. Group 1 named their group, "**The Real Leaders**" Group II named their selves, "**Da Group**" and Group III named their selves, "**Get Banked Up**" referring to their goal of getting their LSI score down to the low risk category (Banked). There were also a variety of pictures taken of the first three groups. Most of the clients had no objections to having their pictures taken while some preferred to only having their pictures taken with their back turned to the camera. **Taking pictures of the group seemed to be a positive moment for the clients. It captured them in their moment of accomplishing something that was positive instead of getting their mug- shot taken in custody after a new arrest or probation violation.**

In regards to the probation clients' opinion and feedback about the cognitive behavior classes, it should be noted that attending the Cognitive Behavior Group was not the most desirable thing for them to do on their wish list. Therefore, it was seen more as going to the doctor or nurse for a needed check-up or getting their car repaired. However, most of them expressed that they got something out of attending the sessions, and liked coming after warming up and becoming more familiar with each other in the group. Some of them said that they liked attending the classes because it gave them a voice to express their opinions and how they feel about things without someone passing judgment on them by saying, "they are wrong or being stupid". Others said that they liked the group because it was for young people around their age and that it was harder to relate to someone ten or twenty years older than them. One client stated, "I'd rather attend these groups than NA meetings because you have nothing but just a bunch of OG's (older men/over forty) down there who tripped on some heavy drugs"

The Deputy Probation Officers who co-facilitated these Cognitive Groups with me in Oakland said that they enjoyed the experience. **Deputy Sherritta Cornist co-facilitated Group 1, Group 2 and Group 4** with me, and **Deputy Winfred Stephens co-facilitated Group 3** with me. It should also be mentioned that we had an outside provider, **Ron Owens, to assist with co-facilitating some of the sessions in Group 2 and Group 3**. Despite our experience in facilitating various groups in our careers, we all learned so much more about the clients who participated in the discussions including the ones who were reticent. What made the experience enjoyable and worthwhile was our chemistry and feeding off of each other's ideas, talents and viewpoints which helps when you have two professionals facilitating a group. We also learned not only about our own clients in group, but each other's clients as well. Sometimes, it helps to get a different viewpoint on a client on your caseload from a co-worker who observes them in group. Therefore, the group experience from the facilitator's (Probation Officer) perspective was also a shared experience and, in many cases, helped us to have a stronger bond and better rapport with our clients who completed the classes.

LENNY'S STORY (CONTINUED):

Lenny told the group after receiving his certificate, "This is the first time that I had ever gotten a certificate for something. I mean...it's almost hard for me to believe.... Man." he said shaking his head before continuing, "I never finished high school. I dropped out in the tenth grade. Do you know what I'm saying? I never finished anything!" Lenny explained with urgency. Lenny further explained that he: never completed probation, never finished his stay in a foster home, never completed any programs and that he ran away from a group home. "I even got kicked out of programs for being a big knucklehead." He added. Then Lenny paused for a few seconds before concluding, "I never finished anythingat least until now!" he said while holding back tears that wanted to drip from his piercing brown eyes. Lenny didn't want the group think that he was soft after living a hard life on the streets.

However, during the last six weeks, he subconsciously revealed his soft side without really knowing it by sharing with the group about his family background. He was abandoned by his Father, who he never knew and thinks the man might be in prison somewhere in another State. His mother is an alcoholic who had a history of getting battered by his step-fathers and her live-in boyfriends where she has produced eight children from those unions as six of them are Lenny's half siblings.

Lenny suffered from physical abuse from these men and later got into physical altercations with some of them when he got older where he put one of them in the hospital while defending his mother. This got him placed on probation as a juvenile and sent to a group home as his mother took the side of his step-father at the time. From there, Lenny never successfully completed juvenile probation and was terminated after landing in jail due to picking up a charge as an adult for a drug offense (selling crack/cocaine). Now at the age of twenty two, he was convicted of another felony which was for Auto Theft. He took his baby's mother's car without permission and wrecking it after driving under the influence (alcohol). So here was Lenny, a young man who didn't have a driver's license, a high school diploma or GED certificate with a history of quitting and not finishing

anything. But now this moment was being kind to him because he allowed it to happen. He allowed it to happen by giving this class a chance with perfect attendance and excellent participation. Affirmation was what Lenny needed and affirmation was what he received for this accomplishment.

Lenny shared one other thing with the group in his moment of glory. That he used to be a pretty good student in school until reaching the eighth grade. He used to make A's and B's and really liked school when he was a little boy. However, that all changed when he didn't receive affirmation from his mother who would just give a blank stare at his grade card, and then walk away puffing on a cigarette saying, "I would really be happy if you get your butt out there and hustle for some money to help me out like Danny." Danny was his mother's live-in boyfriend, at that time, who was a drug dealer. She teased Lenny about being a nerd, and that no one from their family had ever graduated from high school or received their GED certificate. School was not that important to their family and it was something that they didn't value except for her collecting Social Security and ADC. However, after receiving his certificate that gave him the recognition of his achievement with plenty of affirmation, Lenny was thinking of his next goal of enrolling into a GED program to get his certificate. Then after accomplishing that goal he would, perhaps, attend a college or a technical school, down the road, where he would take up carpentry or auto mechanics to become certified in one of those professions. To Lenny, it felt damn good having that piece of paper! Now it was something that he valued.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

Lenny's story explains and sums up the purpose of the cognitive behavior groups. He is a fictional character and not a real person in the group. However, there are many young adult clients on probation like him who come from similar backgrounds and share the same experiences where they lack the parental support and positive role models to give them the positive reinforcement with affirmation. There are some people in our profession who state, 'So what is the big deal? Probationers are supposed to attend programs and complete them.

They don't need recognition." Although this can be a valid point when taking into account of how many of us in our profession had support from our parents and extended families while growing up, this point of view doesn't consider the underlying factors of what our probation clients did not have when they were growing up as small children and teenagers. A little thing to us in our profession can be a big thing for them.

What we expect and take for granted is something that they can see as nearly impossible and overwhelming. When the majority of our probation clients come from families that lack structure and positive support this is a big obstacle for them to overcome when they are expected to complete school and obtain steady employment. Moreover, when many of them are residing in urban areas where there is a high volume of crime, drug activity and violence along with poverty, inadequate schools and health care, our probation clients are forced into a situation where they must navigate their survival in hostile environments. These environments are socially excluded from mainstream America's values of a good education, well paying jobs and a good work ethic. Moreover, these mainstream values stems from strong middle class values with an intact family structure and positive role models that set high standards. In comparing these two worlds, it is like comparing the haves with the have not's. Who do you think is going to appreciate a good meal more? The person who gets fed well every day, or the person who is starving?

However, our worlds can be similar when fighting an illness or an addiction which forms from bad habits. After all, shouldn't a person be complimented or receive affirmation for staying sober and completing a drug treatment program just as a person who lost over a hundred pounds by completing a weight watchers program that lowers their blood pressure level back to normal? After all, there has always been fitness and nutritional shows and programs on television that recognizes this accomplishment with plenty of affirmation. Although both of these scenarios differ when it comes to breaking the law (one is illegal behavior the other is not) they are both public health issues. Many Americans struggle with their weight, diet and smoking problems which are no different from drug addiction that are hard habits to break. Therefore, we need to think twice before

believing that our clients do not need recognition or affirmation. For some clients, their appreciation of life is day to day and week to week. One client commented in **Group 1** last summer, **“I’m just glad to be alive as a young Black man and not get killed where I’m staying!”**

When factoring these issues that are related to public health, this brings the focus back to cognitive behavior groups where our probation clients must address their problems and issues by abstaining from a criminal lifestyle. This lifestyle, in some ways, can be addictive through bad habits and choices that they make when facing adversity and stressful situations. The cognitive behavior group is that support system for probation clients who have the opportunity to share their ideas, concerns and problems with each other in order to learn coping skills to refrain from reoffending. Moreover, it is that affirmation along with support from staff and their peers where it can empower them to learn from each other by being active participants in the group sessions. In retrospect, the group experience can be an extended family for many of our probation clients that could provide the positive support and affirmation that they may have lacked in their own families and from their social acquaintances.