What’s Diversion?

New Heights Community Diversion Model
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Understanding Diversion: Why it Works

Definition: Diversion programs are part of the criminal justice system. These programs can be lead by police departments, courts, district attorney’s offices or health human service agencies. Diversion programs are designed to benefit offenders by allowing them to avoid criminal charges and a criminal record by completing a variety of requirements. No two diversion programs are alike.

Requirements for completion of a diversion program may include:

- Educational classes aimed at preventing future offenses
- Community service hours
- Avoiding situations that may cause committing another offence (such as contact with certain people)

Population: Diversion programs deal primarily with first-time low-risk offenders. Typically it is struggling high school adolescents who have had first time contact with police.

Research: University of Colorado studied comparisons between an experimental group of diverted youth and a control group which received regular handling by the juvenile justice system. The diversion program administered individual, parental, and/or family counseling to the diverted youth group, resulting in lower recidivism rates than in the control group (Heilbrun et al., 2005).

Savings/Investment: A study on the cost effectiveness of the Behavior Management through Adventure Program (BMTA) found they could save the state of Georgia over $900,000. The Study showed that BMTA program achieved significantly lower re-arrest one, two, and three years after release compared to outdoor therapeutic programs and the states YDC program (Gass, 2008).

Why Adventure?

Statistically Relevant: New Heights’ adventure component is crucial in reducing youths’ maladaptive behaviors. A well-designed adventure component has been shown to lead to statistically significant outcomes, including the improved moral development and constitution of its participants (Gillis et al., 2008). Additional studies have found such outcomes to be crucial building blocks toward increasing youths’ resiliency and performance in school, which represent key protective factors.

Personal Empowerment: Other benefits from programs that incorporate adventure-oriented components have been shown to include better grades and higher school attendance as well as improved self-concept, stronger internal locus of control and leadership skills, (Cason, D. & Gillis, H. 1994; Hattie et al., 1997).

How It Works: In order to provide such opportunities of personal empowerment and growth these trips require each participant to fulfill specific roles as well as create individual goals. These roles could be referred to as: Leader, Navigator, Cook and Cleanup, Medic and Hydration and Sunscreen Monitor, or Fire Chief. Within each capacity, participants are assigned specific tasks and assume significant leadership roles. For instance, if the Navigator misreads a map and the group takes a wrong turn, instructors do not step in and “fix it.” Instead, they allow participants to realize the error and fix the problem themselves.

Why It Works: By placing participants in challenging, real-world situations such as rock climbing, snow shoeing, backpacking, or volunteering. An adventure component develops an ability to socialize, share, and learn how to rely on others by problem solving; reinforcing techniques to make the right decisions.

References: Line

New Heights Adventures for Teens, Portsmouth, NH
Interview with Parents
- Once weekly mentoring at New Heights Teen Center (12 visits)
- Complete once monthly service project
- Attend once monthly adventure weekend

Portsmouth High School
- Once Weekly single-sex group counseling
- Meets during the school day

Community Diversion Program, Greenland, NH
- 12 Week Program
- CDP enrollment interview and formal assessment
- Youth is then enrolled in afterschool program
- Once weekly co-ed group meetings

“I don’t like getting told what to do, I know that this program is all about learning how to be responsible and change you so you are able to make better decisions, but I think I already know that, I feel like. But maybe I don’t.”

- New Heights Diversion Participant