

# ***Working with Reformativ Trainees***

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January 2007



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# Introduction

## **The Reformative Training Centre**

The Reformative Training Centre (RTC) houses youths below twenty-one years of age on the day of conviction and deemed by the court as suitable for reformative training. The purpose of the reformative training is to provide rehabilitation. Sentences are between eighteen to thirty-six months. Under the Young Offenders Section (YOS), the Court can order residents of the Boy's Home to serve their remaining term in the Reformative Training Centre (RTC), if they had breached the Home's rules. Alternatively, the Court can order the boys to serve 6 months in RTC and then complete their term in Boy's Home.

The key to the rehabilitation of the trainees is a personalized plan of institutional training and treatment (residential phase) followed by a period of close supervision (supervision phase) after their discharge. In the residential phase, the trainees undergo counseling, religious activities and compulsory academic and vocational training. Each trainee has a personal supervisor who serves as a role model and carer.

Trainees who are keen to pursue academic education are transferred to Kaki Bukit Centre (Prison School). The school offers courses in BEST (Basic Education for Skills Training), WISE (Worker Improvement through Secondary Education), GCE "N", "O" and "A" Levels and vocational training in electronics at NITEC (National Institute of Technical Education Certificate) Intermediate Level. In addition, the trainees undergo the Lifeskills Programme, Specialised Treatment Programme, Family Involvement Programme and Community Re-integration Programme.

In the supervision phase, the aim is to facilitate their re-integration into society. The trainees are expected to work or study and perform community work while under the care of the Prisons Aftercare Officers. The Singapore Prison Service took over the supervision of trainees from the Ministry of Community Development in July 1998.

## **Our mission**

Beyond Social Services, a Voluntary Welfare Organisation established in 1969, is committed to working with youths affected by the criminal justice system under its Restorative Care Programme. The program aims to better prepare RTC youths for their re-integration into the community as resilient and responsible members through restorative practices. The programme objectives are:

- To instil moral intelligence and a sense of personal and social responsibility;

- To bridge the gap / strengthen the ties between RTC youths and their communities;
- To enable RTC youths to plan for their future with the help of their support network.

The programme consists of three main components:

- Activity-Based Group Sessions (Community Encouragement)
- Community Service Project (Community Involvement)
- Family Sessions (Community Bridging)

Restorative Care provides the opportunity to understand the criminal justice system and to challenge not only our own values, but those of society as well.

Beyond Social Services, is a distinct organization, touching many aspects of the criminal justice system. Programmes work with toddlers, adolescents and teenagers and vary in nature. While some programs work with incarcerated youths, others are preventative, targeting youths at-risk. Utilizing a strengths-based approach, Beyond Social Services attempts to increase the control, disadvantaged children and youths have over their lives.

The application of the principles of the strengths model, moral reasoning, counselling and social capital throughout the Restorative Care Programme, ensure that the RTC youths are treated with the respect and dignity that they deserve as human beings. For the purpose of this thesis, I will be focusing on the first phase of the Restorative Care Programme, which is the Community Encouragement Component, which uses experiential learning and moral reasoning activities and discussions, respectively, as its main tools of engaging the RTC youths.

## **The Strengths Model**

RTC is run very much similar to all prisons around the world. Punitive measures are put in place to ensure control amongst the inmates. Upon contact, visitors are immediately greeted robotically by the RTC youths and exposed to them squatting, in twos, whilst waiting for instructions. You gain an immediate sense of the loss of dignity among the youths, when you see them squatting at toilets, designed low and in full view of the staff. Bearing in mind some of the reasons that lead them to RTC was the fact that they had low self-esteem, the RTC environment does little to improve their self respect. The youths lose some sense of identity as they are uniformly presented with shaven heads, white t-shirts, shorts and slippers. The shock to the system puts any visitor in a sombre mood.

Given the abovementioned rigidity of the RTC, the strengths model lends a breath of fresh air as it respects and celebrates the uniqueness of the youth. This approach

is a paradigm shift from the deficit medical model to highlighting the youths' strengths (Smith, 2006). The first point to note is: firstly, that the youths are not criminals but housed within the prison confines; Secondly, punitive measures do not address the cause of their behaviour. Research indicates that providing educational and other supports to youths and their families is a more effective approach rather than traditional approaches, such as incarceration (Greenwood, Model, Rydell, & Chiesa, 1996). Leone et al. (2002) suggest that providing services and supports through community-based, family-focused, and prevention-oriented collaboration are better approaches. The strengths model places a premium on human beings as "purposeful organisms".

The Strengths Model posits: The youths are captains of their lives, i.e., they are people who are successful in using their strengths to attain their aspirations and goals. Embracing this perspective, it allows the youth worker to respect the youth's abilities, beliefs, values, support systems, goals, achievements and resources. This orientation in youth work seeks to fulfill the youth's qualities, yet acknowledges the existence of societal problems, family dysfunction and individual malady.

The Strengths Model of Youth Work is accredited to many contributors, including Saleebey, Rapp, Weick, Kisthardt, Sullivan, Hepworth and Larsen. It assists the worker and youth to collaborate in all phases of the working relationship.

## **Applications**

It is easy to say that we apply the strengths-based practice in RTC, but in reality, it is extremely difficult to work under its set of values, principles and philosophy. If we plan to obtain a holistic picture of the youth, we will first need to do some soul searching, i.e., to reflect on our past practices and to start thinking of where we were not using the strengths model.

As the Restorative Care Programme in prisons is new, it would be very simple for me to say: "It is a new programme so let's put in place measures that look good on paper in terms of good youth work practice." However, this is not the case, because one of the ways in which adults learn is by making sense of the newly acquired information based on past experiences. My experience, when a case is presented, is that we are concerned with the presenting 'problem' of the youth. *What is 'wrong' with the youth or the family that needs fixing?*

If we are to be applying the strengths model within prisons, we need to throw out that kind of philosophy. We were glad that RTC took some time before they gave us the profile of the youths, as that enabled us to work with the youths without prior knowledge about the crimes they had committed. Without our lenses, we were blinded and had no pre-judgement about the youths.

Within the first few weeks of working in prisons, however, it is poignant to note our difficulties with changing our perception. Whilst we wanted to see the youths as equals, in a lot of ways, they were not, and so easily, we fell back into the trap of the system and kept treating them as prisoners requiring treatment.

The trick then was to rethink how we looked at the youths in RTC. *How do we see them as equals?* For they really are individuals with their own minds, wants, needs, dreams, aspirations and goals. In the first phase of the Restorative Care Programme, we met the youths in an experiential learning group setting, each one of them was an individual in his own right. The initial stages of the group work process, did not take into account, the youths being individuals or equals, we chose their groups for them, we decided who should be on which team. We were so afraid to let go of the 'controls' so to speak. *Who were we protecting?* It is easy to say that we are doing this with the boys in mind. We are guarding their safety. We are protecting the Restorative Care Programme.

It took me some weeks to realize what this really meant, and to eventually work on fixing this faulty thinking. I did not believe that the boys were equal and that they could, in fact, run a soccer match on their own, with: referees, score boards, linesmen, captains and friendly competition, safely! I was worried about the lack of control and took it upon myself to put in place a Crab football match, where the boys played football on all fours. It allowed me to look at their dynamics with greater control, as being on all fours meant that the game was slowed down. *Was this really necessary, seeing as how they were already exposed to so much regiment-styled control?* It took me 4 weeks to understand this and an additional 2 weeks to translate this into my work. *What is different at the end of this 6-week process?* When we believe in the youth's ability, they rise to the challenge.

At the end of six weeks, I saw 18 youths, running a captain's ball match all on their own: Some youths took charge of the refereeing, some took charge of the score board, the captains decided on where the players should be placed for optimum results, the youths took the games seriously and we saw a different kind of confidence in the youths. Though difficult to describe, even the youths felt it and we saw it on their faces, but they refused to mention it during the debriefs. Loss of face issues, refusing to admit amidst the 'tough' exterior, the youths, plastered with tattoos, who had been involved in gangs or robberies, had actually enjoyed the simple game of captain's ball because it raised their self confidence. It gave them leadership. They felt powerful. They were in charge. For a change, it felt good! *Why?* Because, we, as facilitators finally saw them as equals! Each one of them had their own strengths and abilities: The referee who conducted fair play, who was able to manage conflict, who was able to stand up to his peers during fouls; the team captain who was able to decide, based on strengths, where each player should play; the star players who displayed their defending and attacking skills; the score keepers who recognized that the scores were not right and made the necessary amendments, optimising their thinking and organisational skills. *Good job, you say?*

*Nay, I say!* The part that we missed out, or need to work on, in future, is: to get the youths to do the debriefing and evaluations instead of the facilitators. A difficult task we have ahead of us, but to get the youths to see their own strengths and abilities, by running their own programme and conducting their own debriefing or evaluation, then and only then, would we have truly arrived at seeing the youths as equals. The key take for me, at this point, is being very self-critical of our thinking, values and philosophy about the strengths model.

### **The engagement phase**

As we are still new to RTC work, let me inject a past experience as an example to illustrate this phase of the strengths model. My first contact with Mei Mei was with coloured lenses, in an office setting, totally blind to her level of discomfort. I thought I was the expert. I was totally oblivious to the fact that I had a youth who was working at KFC which was already a strength as she obviously had to: be punctual for work, be able to calculate money to handle the cash register, possess communication skills to speak to the customer and colleagues and be organized to follow a monthly roster. If I had highlighted these qualities to her during her weekly visits, and not focused on the problems, which were based largely on her parents' complaints, I would have been able to align with her and engage her because I would not have been approaching her from an area of conflict, but rather, she might have seen me as understanding where she was coming from. Moreover, I did not realize the importance of meeting her in her comfort zone. I heard that she hung out in the void decks or frequented BBQs at the east coast, but I did not know which one or exactly where, respectively. I lost her after the 3<sup>rd</sup> session. A difficult but, nonetheless, valuable learning process.

### **The approach**

As mentioned before, we need to change our values, principles and philosophy of RTC youths:

1. They are not criminals but are held within the parameters of the prisons, due to a lack of resources.
2. It is rather ironic that RTC's ultimate goal is to re-integrate the youths back to society. For any successful re-integration to take place one must start from the root of the problem, i.e., from the community from which the youth came, rather than removing the youth from the environment which was influencing his behaviour.
3. *Is the police doing a good job of reeling in RTC youths or are we less tolerant as a society?*
4. The RTC youth is the expert of his world. I do not know his background, his family, his friends, the school he went to, the community he lived in, where he 'hangs out', so he is the 'expert'. The only way I can know this

information is to ask him what he wants to tell me, to take a '1 down position' and let him be the expert in telling his story.

For example, last week, a youth mentioned that he wanted to exit from the gangs that he was involved in upon his release from RTC. To take a '1 down position' in working with him, I would need to throw out the philosophy that: *I think I am right in knowing that he will have to go through some ritual in order to get out; that a meeting would need to be arranged in order to settle these issues with his gang leaders; Sure, I have been sent for youth training in order to understand this, but then again, what I know is general information about gangs, per se.*

What the youth would be able to convey to me is so much more and if I come in with a '1 up position', he may choose to disengage. *Why?* Because I may come across as his parent or teacher whom he may not want to tell, to avoid them 'nagging' at him. Sometimes in a self-righteous, '1 up mode', it is so easy to get trapped into wanting to 'advise' the youths. "Try to get out of the gangs, lah". The youths already know what they should do, they may be struggling with the 'how'. *As adult role models, when we say that we want to 'help', are we prepared to go that extra mile, or just give lip service? Are we willing to ask the youths: What exactly needs to happen for you to exit from the gangs? Who are the people or stakeholders? Who should we prepare as back up? What are some safety precautions that we need to take? Who in your family would stand by you in all this? Who, in your gang, can you find out more, about the ritual process? How do we get information about who's who in the gang?*

To obtain this kind of information from the youth we would have to adopt a '1 down position', because he knows this information and we don't. Again, he is the expert of his world.

## **The strengths assessment**

The RTC youth possess abilities and skills. This comes through in our weekly reports of the boys' achievements and abilities. You will notice, in these reports, that each boy is unique, possessing different qualities. Some are eloquent – they possess the ability to gain the crowds attention when they speak, they are charismatic, they are able to get their points across – natural leaders; whereas, others are more athletic – they possess speed and agility and can pick up any sport quickly – natural sportsmen.

As part of the on-going case assessment, we apply the strengths assessment on a case-to-case basis. We try to include the recognition of the youth's 'strengths and abilities' in each youth's file. The wants, aims, and aspirations of the youth helps us to move forward, to clarify what resources are needed from whom, in order to achieve them, and to identify what barriers or difficulties may need to be overcome.

It gives us a positive inventory of achievements, resources and aspirations unique to each youth. 'Strengths working' is a continuous process that develops over time. Circumstances change, as may the youth's aspirations; therefore the assessment is not fixed, and new facets of the youth continuously emerges. In RTC, the assessment is conducted in an informal, conversational manner, rather than a structured interview. It is conducted on the youth's own 'territory'. It develops at each youth's pace and comfort level.

For example, to keep the sessions informal and within their space, we approach the boys during our activities and chat with them about the activities: *What needs to improve? How we can incorporate their interests? What are their interests?* In doing so, the youths feel comfortable and non-threatened and they begin to share about their home backgrounds and their goals. All this happens within a time span of 5 to 10 minutes.

In a strength assessment with the RTC youth, we collect information on a range of 'life domains' e.g. housing, finance, health, occupation, social relationships, cultural and spiritual beliefs. Thus, we get a holistic picture of the youth's life. It provides the essential positive information and resources needed to work constructively with risk.

### **Creating the personal plan**

Each RTC youth has a dream, a goal. For example, one of the youths mentioned that he wanted to be the best Sepak Takraw player in Singapore. It may differ from our dreams for him: *he should get a stable job so that he can help support his aging mother.* We can't take his dreams away from him, as his dreams are his hopes. He needs hope to survive. So, we sit with the youth to device a plan, based on his abilities and skills, to achieve, say, connecting with a Sepak Takraw club within his community, perhaps source from the internet: the venues that competitions are held or the best coach or player on the market whom we can ask to provide that coach/mentorship. This aspect touches a little on our other principles, namely, social capital.

Along the way, our Sepak Takraw champion discovers that in order to be a good player he will need skills such as: A good physique, he would need perseverance in training, he would have to have good Sepak Takraw skills, he would have to communicate well with his team mates, he would have to be responsible for his training regime. Thus, indirectly, he will come to realize the need for him to take responsibility over his own life and he would have acquired the skills to support others long the way.

### **Resource acquisition**

Taking the previous example further, our Sepak Takraw champion would then inform the worker of any Sepak Takraw clubs that he is aware of, so the worker can then help make the connections and work in partnership with the club. In addition,

the boy may have friends who are already within these clubs and, thus, could be introduced into the clubs through his friends. Alternatively, the youth's uncle may be working for a company that sponsors sepak takraw jerseys, and a tripartite partnership could be formed so that the youth would be given the opportunity to participate within that club. Looking at this from a social capitalist point of view, the agency gains a new source of support, for supplying jerseys to other youths within the agency. If we take this further, he may be able to introduce us to other clubs that he may be supplying to and connect us with those clubs for our other youths living within the vicinity of the club. Social Capital is very similar to the 'Amway' multi-level marketing approach, where each new contact provides a link to other contacts.

Resource acquisition is about doing research to find the youth's interests and then looking at the resources that are available, building and cementing connections where there is none or little, respectively. Some of the tools we may use to obtain this information might be: the genogramme or an ecomap. Either of which drafts the youth's social network, a map of where the networks need to be enhanced or existing relationships strengthened. As with the strengths model, it is changeable and adaptable, according to where the youth is at and in line with his goals.

It is a pity, due to the constraints of working in the Singapore Prison system, we were not able to replicate any of the genogrammes created by the RTC youths. We were amazed at the art work that went into their genogrammes. I saw caricatures of mother's dressed in 'tudong'. I saw families displayed in 'Japanese art or Anime fashion'. Some of the boys come from such large families, as 10 siblings, all of whom in close proximity in age. Others showed details of step-parent relationships and drew links to their mother to indicate the natural child relationship. Yet others showed details of their wives and children. Each genogramme was unique in its own right. I lost about 10 minutes of my session, just admiring the painstaking work done by the youths. My assessment of that was that the care and attention with which they put their effort into their work indicated their relationships with these individuals, the strong bonds that they had built and suddenly, began to empathise with their loss. It took great courage to create their genogrammes. For the youths who could not complete the exercise, my assessment is as follows: they did not trust us enough, they did not feel safe to reveal their private information to us, perhaps, we had not engaged them yet, or, maybe, they did not have strong bonds with their families.

As mentioned and illustrated, this part of the strengths perspective is in line with and overlaps with Social Capital. It is the part of community building and bonding of social capital that applies in resource acquisition.

## **Moral Reasoning**

Moral reasoning is individual or collective practical reasoning about what one ought to do, morally. It requires a complex set of psychological processes, including

representations of rules, emotional responses, and assessments of costs and benefits (Nichols & Mallon, 2006).

Kohlberg's (1984) model depicts a progression in moral reasoning from a centredness in the individual (preconventional reasoning = I), to a growing awareness of community norms and expectations (conventional reasoning = We), and then to the development of universal moral principles such as justice (postconventional reasoning = Together, We).

This ties in very neatly with our experiential learning model utilizing the 'I', 'We', 'Together We' concepts. *How?* We may start off with identifying individual strengths, through a game called: 'trust run'. The youths overcome 'kachang puteh' fears of whether their friends would lift their arms in time for them to run through to the next level. The 'trust fall' tests their own personal fear of heights and then placing their fears or trust in the hands of their team mates. This section, moves onto the 'We' phase, in which the team mates work together to ensure that the weight is distributed, in order to catch the falling youth. Finally, in the 'together we' phase, the youths incorporate the past skills that they have learnt about themselves and of others in a higher element activity such as the 'electric fence'. In this activity, 2 groups on either side of the fence (waist high), try to get their members across, to the other side. The challenge is: no jumping or acrobatic/lion dance tricks are allowed. This forces the youths to think of ways of ensuring each other's safety in getting across. Alternatively, as we saw in our groups, the youths used the trust fall, to get their team across. In addition, they may choose to do so competitively, each group caring only for it's group members or they may incorporate the 'together we' concept of helping each other's group members so that both groups cross safely.

In the debriefs, the youths discuss their observations of what occurred and how these observations reflect the way they handle things in life. Leading on to how they can use these ideas or what they have learnt about themselves or what they have learnt about themselves in relation to others, in their daily living. Each one of these youths came into RTC as individuals and they each have a choice of how they want to exit from RTC, they can choose to go it alone, or they can choose to support one another in the process.

The youths have started to think about other phases of our Restorative Care Programme, enquiring about the family bridging sessions and the process in which it will be run. After explaining that the sessions will be conducted in very much the same way as the Community Encouragement sessions, incorporating experiential learning activities and debriefs as a mode to engage and build bonds with families, they then enquired who they could invite and whether the sessions were closed. After explaining that the sessions would be conducted in groups, the youths then started planning, who they could include in their family bridging sessions.

At first, the youths looked apprehensively at one another. They first thought in the 'I' phase: *What's in it for me? Am I comfortable including the rest? Who has scratched my back? Who's back do I want to scratch?* This is very typical of our youths at the pre-conventional level of moral reasoning. At the 'We' stage, the youths begin to see how others may be incorporated into their lives: *Who else would I like to include into my family bridging sessions? Who would fit? Who am I comfortable with? Who do I have good relationships with? Who was supportive? Who do I want to support, in meeting their families after such a long time? My family would be meeting some of my peers, who do I want to show to my family as my friends? I am sure I do not want a chaotic encounter, who do I choose? What are my family's conventions, who among these would fit?* This reflects their conventional level of thinking. Finally, at the 'Together we' stage, where few tend to achieve in one life time, they might think: *These are friends I would like to mingle with when I leave RTC. They have been with me through difficult times, perhaps we could support each other when we are out. The bonds that I have made in RTC supersedes the mistakes they may have made when they came into RTC. Anyway, I am not perfect. How will we fit in with our communities? Will society be able to accept us as we are? What values do we need to fit with societies norms? What values will society need to change to accept us for who we are?* Perhaps, at which point, the youths may have reached the post-conventional level of moral reasoning.

We hope to enhance the RTC youths' sense of fairness and justice regarding the needs and rights of others and to train them to imagine the perspectives of others when they confront various moral problem situations through Moral Reasoning Training. For example, in the experiential learning aspects of our work, when we discussed about what it felt like when the referee was being unfair or biased towards another team. During this process, the referee was grilled by the group, to conform to the level of fairness that was required, during the match. Kohlberg (1969, 1973) showed that exposing youths to moral dilemmas (in a discussion group context in which youths reason at differing levels of morality) arouses an experience of cognitive conflict, the result of which frequently advances a youth's moral reasoning to that of peers in the group who reason at a higher level.

We suggest a need for increasing the youths' levels of moral reasoning because the majority of the youths do not have actual skills for acting prosocially or for successfully inhibiting antisocial or more aggressive behaviours. This is evident in the RTC youths, who are placed in confinement, weekly, for aggressive behaviours and being disrespectful towards the staff. Even the youths, whom we assessed to be conforming to 'RTC' norms and providing 'textbook' responses, wound up in confinement! We believe that Kohlberg's moral education has marked potential for providing constructive direction toward sociability and away from antisocial behaviour. Research shows that incarcerated youths participating in moral education sessions grew in the moral reasoning stage over the intervention period (Goldstein & Glick, 1994).

*Is it permissible to divert a train so that it will kill one innocent person instead of five? Is it then permissible to push a stranger in front of a train to save five innocents?*

According to Kohlberg, we should be more interested in the youth's reasoning behind the answer and not whether he says "yes" or "no" to any dilemma (Crain, 1985). We want to know why the youth thinks that it is ok to divert a train so that it will kill one innocent person instead of five. We then question further to help us to understand the youth's reasoning. By presenting the youth with more questions or different dilemma's, we get some idea of the youth's moral thinking (Crain, 1985) and at which stage he is at.

### **Kohlberg's six stages of Moral Reasoning**

Kohlberg's six stages serve as a guide to understand where the boys are at and where we need to move them to:

Level 1. Preconventional Morality	Stage 1. Obedience and Punishment Orientation.	Youths at the preconventional level do not speak as members of society. Youths at this stage are concerned with what authorities permit and punish.
	Stage 2. Individualism and Exchange.	Youths at this stage, see that there are many sides to any issue and are concerned with fair exchange: "I'll scratch your back , if you'll scratch mine."
Level 2. Conventional Morality	Stage 3. Good Interpersonal Relationships.	Youths, at the conventional level, believe that they share the views of the entire community, with its values, norms, and expectations. Youths at this stage are concerned with living up to the expectations of the family and community and behave in having good motives and interpersonal feelings such as love, empathy, trust, and concern for others.
	Stage 4. Maintaining the Social Order.	Youths at this stage are concerned with obeying the laws to maintain society as a whole.

Level 3. Postconventional Morality	Stage 5. Social Contract and Individual Rights.	Youths, at the postconventional level, are less concerned with maintaining society for its own sake, but try to determine what a society ought to be like. Youths at this stage emphasize basic rights and the democratic processes that give everyone a say.
	Stage 6. Universal Principles	At this stage, the youths define the principles by which agreement will be most just.

At RTC, as a large majority of our youths are at the stage 1 and 2 level, our work centres around moving them towards stage 3 and 4. To do that, it is important for us to grasp the knowledge of what these stages really mean and to be clear about what we are doing and where we want to go. Often this is not the case, as I have found myself thinking that the youth is at stage 4 (following the rules of the game or discussion process so that there is order to the programme) when the youth might actually be at stage 1 (following the rules of the game or discussion because he wants to avoid punishment)!

The way we learn Moral Reasoning is akin to Mathematics: Practice makes perfect. In all honesty, the only way to know if you are approaching, doing or applying it right, is by following the structure of moral reasoning training very closely. Unless you are following the structure of moral reasoning training to the tee, you are not practicing moral reasoning training. I know this because I have tried using various methods that I have concocted and I was only able to see greater results and make genuine assessments when I followed the structure closely.

There are various formats available, but the one that is currently working very well in RTC is the discussion structure, in which, the youths break into small groups and discuss the dilemma. Their responses to the questions are recorded on a table, for all to see. Each is then asked their reasons for their responses, which are recorded on a separate sheet of paper, again, for all to see. We look again at the table to see where there are differences in opinions and then allow the boys to convince their peers using their reasoning as points of arguments. This may be done in the large group for greater impact.

The idea is to steer the boys towards consensus. However, as we have noted from experience, thus far, in some cases, consensus is not possible and we leave it as that.

The aim is to understand the youth's reasoning behind his statements, rather than obtaining consensus, as that is where the learning or the shift in thinking takes place. At any point, the youths are allowed to change their votes, provided an explanation is given. Moral reasoning uses positive peer influences and group dynamics to raise the youth's levels of reasoning.

Other forms of moral reasoning training include: A debate fashion, however, that requires greater preparation on the part of the workers as well as the youths (A discussion I will leave for the future); or An interview format, in which the youth is given the paragraph of the dilemma to read and then is quizzed question by question, about the reasons for his choices. Through experience, the latter approach has proved very taxing on the part of the interviewee, even when the interviewee was an adult, what more the youth!

### Level 1. Preconventional Morality

#### Stage 1. Obedience and Punishment Orientation.

The RTC youths who are at this stage, assume that powerful authorities hand down a fixed set of rules which they must unquestioningly obey (Craine, 1985). Referring back to one of our earlier sessions on moral reasoning, where the theme was stealing, a newspaper article discussion on: "Vandalism costs lives of 265 Nigerians", a large majority had said that: *it is wrong to steal the fuel because you might get caught*. It is at the preconventional level as the youths do not speak as members of society. They perceive morality as something the authorities should take charge over (Craine, 1985). Referring to our "Vandalism costs lives of 265 Nigerians", even the youths' questions were centered around: *What were the authorities doing about the stealing? How come the authorities did not ensure that the people did have enough to eat so they would not have to steal?*

#### Stage 2. Individualism and Exchange.

The RTC youths who are at this stage, assume that everyone is entitled to their own opinion and that it is ok to agree to disagree with someone's reasoning behind their opinion. If we refer to the "Vandalism costs lives of 265 Nigerians", the youths have reasoned: depending on who's point of view you are taking, it is ok for the Nigerians to steal because they do not have enough to meet their basic needs; It is not ok for the Nigerians to steal the fuel, as the large companies would be making a loss. The RTC youths at this stage also believe in reciprocity: I'll scratch your back, if you'll scratch mine. This was seen during one of our Crab Football matches, in which the referee, was prepared to overlook a foul, if the team was willing to give him something during lunch time the next day. In reference to the article, the youths would say that it is ok for the Nigerians to steal the fuel because the large companies are stealing the fuel from Nigeria in the first place.

Level 2. Conventional Morality

Stage 3 Good Interpersonal Relationships...

## **Social Capital**

My rather simplistic view of Social Capital is that it looks at what resources the youth possesses (currency) and what we as an agency possess (currency). Social Capital creates avenues for youths to obtain the goals that they would otherwise have difficulty reaching (Flap, 2003). The barter that takes place between the youth and the youth worker or agency is known as social capital (bonding). Both parties are known as social capitalists. Robert Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000; Leigh and Putnam 2002) sees social capital as a public good, found in relationships between people possessing economic benefits, rather than property belonging to human capital. He highlights voluntary welfare organisations help to create and sustain the bridging social capital that gives people that push forward (Edwards, 2006). In social capital bridging the net is cast wider than just the agencies networks and resources to aid families to move on, whereas, in social capital bonding, resources are restricted to those families that are known to our agency and the resources are used to help them get by (Edwards, 2006).

This concept works well in a capitalist society, like Singapore, because money talks. When you are able to explain the work we do in these monetary (currency) or bartering terms, people grasp and are sold on the ideas quickly. Tying this in with Moral Reasoning, you could deduce that most Singaporeans like to function at Stage 2: Fair exchange. This would be a relatively simple concept to 'sell' to the RTC youths (as it is within their moral reasoning stage), in our community involvement component: *I give you something, so you need to give something back to me. Fair?* In the strengths model, this is an opportunity for an equal relationship.

Community Involvement is an opportunity for the youths to give something back to society. Now, you will see these 2 words cropping up pretty often in RTC, however, Community Involvement is part of RTC's after care plan. However, we are looking at it during the in care phase of our RTC work.

We were functioning on the premise that the youths would like to do something for Beyond in the form of a communication exchange between RTC youths and the primary school children of our Kids United programme. The KU children benefit from the cool big brother from RTC concept, while the youths get to do something fruitful that places them in a worthy cause position, a mentor. We could run a verbal postal service, in which the youths could relay messages to our kids through the facilitators. In return, the children will give their responses, through the facilitators. Somewhere along the line, we would like to create strengths profiles (Streetwise Profiles) of our RTC youths, as part of the regular correspondence. The concept is still rather hazy, at the conceptualizing phase, and warrants further thought.

Researchers suggest that the key to addressing the needs of RTC youths is to involve parents in their lives. However, it is not simply involvement that matters for the improved functioning of these youths but the production of the three dimensions of social capital (bonding, bridging, and linking) through human interaction with in care and after care staff and within the community that reduces risk factors in RTC youths. The major function of Community stakeholders such as RTC, Families and the community is the production of social capital in all three of its dimensions. Social capital is an important factor in building stronger and more resilient families (Terrion, 2006). An important tool to facilitate this process is the Family Group Conference. The questions we need to ask as Youth Workers is: *What currency are the youths using? What currency are we using? What currency is RTC using? Who are our stakeholders? Who are our partners?*

A family group conference (FGC) is a formal meeting for members of the family group to discuss with social workers what needs to be done to make sure the RTC youth's reintegration into society is successful.

The tools used in identifying social capital are ecomaps and genogrammes. Ecomaps and genogrammes constantly change and grow, as they function as resource finders, with each new information that the youth provides, or when some individual within the youth's network, makes a connection. Now, the role of the worker is complex, we need to: Find replacements for the family members who have difficulty fulfilling their roles; Encourage the good relationships that the youth already has; Mend broken relationships; Gain access to new relationships; Discuss whether to change relationships; and Strengthen poor relationships;

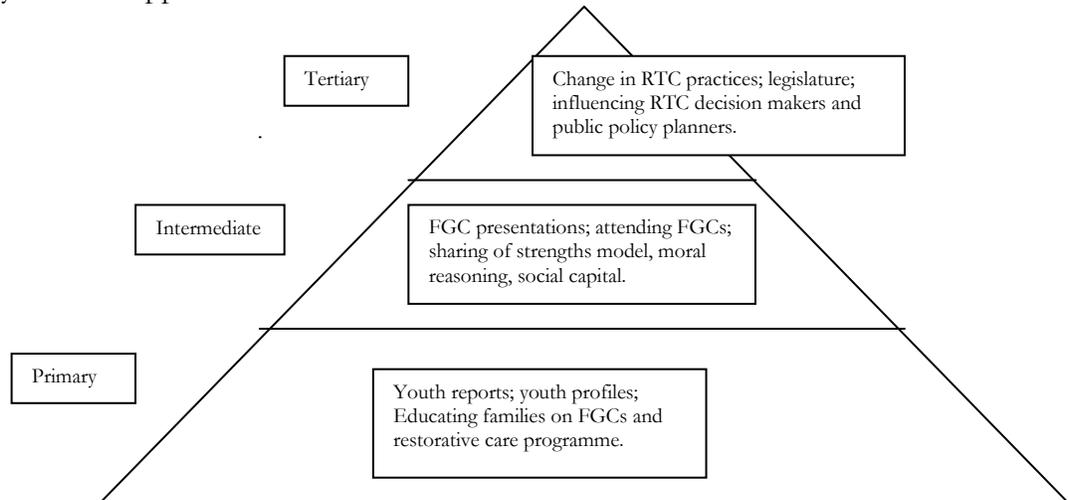
### **Stakeholder 1: RTC**

We recognise that there are many stakeholders in a youth's life, but for the purpose of this thesis, we choose to focus on 3. Perhaps, one way of identifying some of the above mentioned questions, is through continued dialogue with the guardians of RTC. At this stage, after one such encounter with them, I am only able to say that RTC is working on a framework modelled after systemic ideology. However, their stand point still predominantly adopts the 'old school' medical model of the problem lies in the youth. Therefore, let's figure out ways to fix the youth, together. We appreciate them for their honesty, noble altruistic attributes and the doors they have opened for us to work in prisons, but as far as educating RTC on our work goes: we are at ground zero.

Our first milestone has only managed to touch base on our Juvenile Justice model of introducing basic concepts of the Family Group Conference to RTC and Kaki Bukit. Our plan, thus far, is to formalize the presentation of the Restorative Care proposal and to conduct presentations on the FGC at the programme planning level.

However, this informal meeting has opened the doors for a platform to discuss practice issues with the, grass root level, counselling staff of RTC.

When we talk about education, I usually think in terms of primary, intermediate and tertiary levels of approach:



The above illustration depicts the partnership that we hope to develop with RTC. At the primary level, we hope to do a clean sweep, i.e., information such as: the youth weekly reports, youth profiles, FGC brochures, Restorative Care Programme, will be made available and known to all staff of RTC, including the youths and their families.

At the intermediate level, FGC presentations, workshops and opportunities to attend FGCs, the strengths model, moral reasoning and social capital, would be accessible to RTC counsellors and decision makers, upon request.

At the tertiary level, and this, I'm not too sure whether I'm dreaming or not, but the day will come when we will be able to influence RTC decision makers on their decisions about policies pertaining to the RTC youth, as well as, if I might be so bold as to add, make an impact on government legislature and public policy regarding the incarceration of youths.

## **Stakeholder 2: The community**

Social Capital in youths refers to his connections with networks of people. It refers to the structure of their networks, the way they communicate, socioeconomic benefits in the areas of education and learning, employment and the quality of working life, and access to goods and services. Both bonding and bridging social capital play an important role in successfully re-integrating the youths back into the community. One way of building social capital is through sports (Tonts, 2005).

Currently, with our RTC youths, this means, trying to understand: *Who is involved in Sepak Takraw? Who is studying? What are they studying? Who is planning to go for National Service? Who plans to work? What do they plan to work as? What connections do they have to gain access to their jobs?* Perhaps, the youths can use their connections on the inside, i.e., someone's father may have connections to the shipping industry and can be matched with one of the youth who is interested in working on a ship.

A tool for identifying social capital within the community is a community map, i.e., a map of detailing: where schools are, where community centres are, where the youths frequent, where possible work buildings are, where goods and services may be found, where the youths live, what types of neighbourhoods do they live in.

### **Stakeholder 3: The family**

To gain an understanding of the youth's family, we need to ask: *Who is close to whom within the family? Today, I learnt that those families who have a computer with a camera, can have a teleconference with their youth, based on a schedule. So, the resources a family possesses is also important.* However, as the youths pointed out, only those who have a computer with a camera can have access to such services, it indicated to me their yearning for such a service and the importance of social capital. Research has shown that the bonds between family members and between parents and others in the community are important in shaping a young person's development ([http://www.actforyouth.net/documents/social\\_capital.pdf](http://www.actforyouth.net/documents/social_capital.pdf)).

In RTC, we plan to promote family bonding through our family bridging sessions, in which, experiential learning activities are used to: encourage bonding and discover the dynamics between family members and to highlight this to them during debriefs.

# Preparing youths for Moral Reasoning

## *Session Report Summary*

### 1. Sharing of World, Local and Sports News

*The purpose of sharing the news was as a mode of connecting (rapport building) with the youths. Our understanding is that the youths are cut off from what is happening in Singapore and the World (Annex A). The articles were drawn from the Straits Times, but more so from, the Newspaper as it appeals to the youths. It is written in a simple and eye catching manner. Moreover, it features the latest and hottest gossips. This window allows them to be in touch. In addition, it is a basis to get the youths to give something back to society. The Sports News (Annex A) was added as we found the youths to be very interested in sports.*

This section continued to play an important role in warming up the youths enabling them to move on to more serious issues and discussion seamlessly.

### 2. Discussion and Debate on World News

*We are highlighting our Planning Process as a way of providing deeper insights into the thought processes necessary for reaping the intended effect of the Moral Reasoning Exercise. We used a newspaper article to highlight the plight of people living in abject poverty and with it create the opportunity to reflect on whether stealing is ever justifiable?*

#### **Our Plan**

##### **a. Using the newspaper article as a stimulus for discussion**

The article entitled **Vandalism costs lives of 265 Nigerians** was obtained from the Straits Times, the following information was extracted for the purpose of retelling the story (Annex A):

*“A crowd of Nigerians scrounged for fuel from a ruptured gasoline pipeline. The fuel was then resold to support the people who live in poverty. A majority of the country’s 130 million people live in poverty despite their country’s role as Africa’s leading crude producer.”*

These other details were omitted for the purpose of discussion:

*“The death toll of 265 people and injuries caused by the ruptured gasoline pipeline; the fact that Lagos was an impoverished neighbourhood, the rescue efforts made by the Red Cross; the families of possible victims rushing to the scene to try to find missing family members being carried away by rescue workers; A single pilfered jerry can of gasoline, sold on the black market, can equal 2 weeks of wages for a poor Nigerian.”*

The omission was intended to help the youths to focus on the issue of ‘stealing’ as we felt that the other issues such as the politics of the country and the socio-economic structure were inappropriate for the purpose of the exercise. We wanted the youths to seriously think if there were really any justifiable reasons for stealing and in the process come to the conclusion that it is very difficult to justify stealing in almost all circumstances.

## **b. Exercise Goals**

- **Evoke Empathy**

For the purpose of engaging the youths deeper into the discussion, we wanted to evoke *feelings of sadness and empathy for the victims and their families who experienced the loss; to generate thoughts about whether stealing is right or wrong, to get the youths thinking about the scene in which it is set: the environment, the country Nigeria, the conditions in which the people live and the fact that Africa is a leading crude producer.*

- **To clarify through reasoning why stealing is unjustifiable**

At the end of the day, the goal was to get the youths to think of reasons for their choice of ‘to steal or not to steal’. The process by which we hoped to achieve that was in discussing ‘stealing’ per se: *Why is ‘stealing condemned by society? Why do societies punish for stealing? What is the situation like in Singapore compared to Nigeria?*

*What are the grey areas? The areas in which there are no right or wrong answers for ‘stealing’. Why were some cases in court rescinded? Why do the police take action on some cases and not on others? What are some situations in which ‘stealing’ is allowed? Is poverty a good enough reason to steal?*

*Was the robin hood phenomenon justifiable?*

*Have you ever stolen? Why are you in the Reformatory Training Centre?* Again, the value is not so much in arriving at the answers but in the reasoning behind the answers.

### **c. Method**

A debate. We presented the article (Annex A) as a stimulus. The youths were asked to divide themselves into 2 groups i.e. FOR or AGAINST 'stealing'. The youths were then prepared for the discussion/debate in each group, through discussing the above mentioned questions where appropriate. We also used a flip chart and marker to indicate what was discussed to help the youths' focus. It was also helpful for youths who received information better through visuals.

### **The Outcome**

#### **a. Group Dynamics**

After reading the article (Annex A), we found some youths' to be indifferent to the article, some youths' felt sad for the victims and their families, while others were outraged at the chaotic facts that were presented. They had many questions about Africa, the country, the people, the government, the laws and the environment, mainly, being preoccupied with the country's law and governance.

Through peer pressure, trying to be the 'hero' / 'Indian chief', attempting to impress the facilitators and for the right or wrong reasons, the youths' chose their topic. The fact that there were 2 unequal sized groups, spoke volumes: one group choosing to empathize with the thieves whilst the other, the people.

A spokesperson was chosen via group voting. From our previous observations, the youths' usually chose someone who could speak well and was able to express their views clearly. The task as it turned out, was far more difficult than the spokesperson had anticipated. Having been placed in a leadership position, he had to cover up for the weak points of his team. He had the additional role of being a defender and to think up reasons on the spot, if the group had failed to discuss the fact.

The larger group, due to its size, had difficulty focusing. As it turned out, with the boys' natural competitive nature, the debate became a sort of competition of 1 team against another. The youths' were more interested in winning than in thinking about how their arguments were flawed with the lack of discussion of the reasoning behind their arguments.

There were 2 phases to the debate: In the first instance, 2 boys from 1 team were appointed as judge. The major difficulty we had with this was the fact that the judges had already formed an alliance with the team, and so during the actual

debate, the judges were biased. We eventually had to do away with the judges realizing that more preparation was needed in setting the role of the judge.

Also, the larger group required more time for discussion, thus, they soon found that they were not sufficiently prepared and remained stuck on their initial points, whilst the other group presented new points. As far as dynamics went, this group seemed to be in the lead, due to sheer numbers and possibly hierarchy (positions of power, i.e. the louder voice, the bigger size, etc.) within the Reformative Training Centre.

Team A discussed the issue of poor governance and the state of poverty within a country that justified 'stealing'. Whilst the group B brought up points about the chaos that 'stealing' would cause, i.e., there would be unemployment if everyone stole, as no business would be able to operate and thus, leading to economic downfall. Team B also argued that stealing is wrong as there would be a victim who suffers in the end. In addition, team B presented that stealing is wrong as the one who stole would get caught.

The facilitators decided during the debate that the youths' needed to focus on the reasoning behind the arguments rather than just arguing for the sake of arguing. The youths were informed of the participation that was required, vis a vis, the terms of beefing up their reasons for their arguments. We then observed 1 of the spokesperson taking out a piece of paper and preparing his points for further discussion.

In the second instance, both groups seemed to function better as the groups were able to deliberate, after discovering their flaws and coming up with new reasons for their arguments. We also noticed that when the youths' had better understood the crux of the matter several boys from team A and 1 from team B wished to switch places, but when given the option, they decided against it.

### **b. Output from the boys**

Both leaders did a decent job of leading their teams in the argument as spokespeople. Two members contributed useful arguments to their teams.

There were some who personally disclosed about their own stealing experiences as a way of strengthening their argument that stealing is wrong. We commended them for their courage to disclose such information in front of the group.

### **c. Summary**

At the end of the exercise, both teams had a chance to see that it was not so much the fact of losing or winning the debate that mattered most, but the thinking

behind the arguments. To some extent they were able to empathize with the Nigerians' reasons for stealing. It was easy choosing the teams, but when they tried to find the reasons to support their claims, they learnt that it was, in fact, tough. They chose to stick to the rules as it was easier. We did not get to the point that there are very few reasons for justifying stealing, but at least we got the youths to start thinking. We were impressed with the results, judging from the intellectual and language abilities of the boys, we knew that they had tried their best. In addition, the article, itself, posed quite difficult and complex issues.

As in the past, we found that the regular thinkers and contributors had very good ideas and reasons for their ideas and were better able to present their ideas in smaller groups. The one's with the louder voices would always ensure that they get heard. His learning points would be that he had to deal with the pressure of the group. He realized that he had to write his points down, and finally, that justifying was not an easy task. As a group, the smaller group seemed to function better than the larger one, for a number of reasons, amongst them being: the size of the group, some have the opportunity to sit back and do nothing, while the others did all the work, there is less time for argument, the floor tends to be held by a select few as others might be afraid to speak up even though their points might have been relevant.

The issue of stealing needs to be further dealt on. The stimulus was too complex and we will be using a highly validated moral reasoning tool for the following session to reflect on the issue of stealing once again.

### 3. Game session-From Crab football to soccer

*For all intent and purposes, the games session, was meant to build character, leadership skills, conflict management skills and team work in the youths through as experiential learning process. Through engaging the youths in a game of soccer, we hoped to be able to identify and observe the group dynamics and interactions between the youths. The game could be stopped at various points, for example, during conflict or leadership difficulties or lack of team coordination, to debrief on the following: What? So what? Now what?*

#### **a. Input and goals**

We switched to soccer as a positive reinforcement for the youths' cooperation over the past 3 weeks (Annex A). Also, as soccer is less restrictive on the youths, it was a good opportunity for us to assess their ability to play by the rules after 3 earlier weeks of crab football. We also wanted to provide the opportunity for someone to assume the role of the referee.

#### **b. Outcome**

One youth was voted as the referee and he had no problems rising to the challenge. At one point, he moved the lines of the field so that the pillars of the Multi Purpose Hall did not endanger the player. We thought that was good initiative and caring on his part.

The game was problem free and smooth flowing as all the youths abided by the rules and there were hardly any fouls. The game was played in the spirit of fair play. During the debrief we applauded the youths for their ability to stay focused and to make the best use of the opportunity given them.

#### **4. Conclusion**

It was an important session as it enabled us to examine the issue of stealing at a deeper level. As many of these youths have found themselves in situations where peer pressure puts forth the idea to steal, it is important for them to develop their moral reasoning on this issue. Today's session needs to be developed further and we recognise that the choice of the stimulus may have been too complex. We will use a validated tool for the next session.

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[http://www.actforyouth.net/documents/social\\_capital.pdf](http://www.actforyouth.net/documents/social_capital.pdf)