

REVIEW OF THE PHOENIX/NEW FREEDOM GANG INTERVENTION CURRICULUM



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Background

The Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) requested the Office of Research (OR) review the Phoenix/New Freedom gang intervention curriculum. Included in the review were:

- A review of literature about the Phoenix/New Freedom curriculum provided by Dr. Paul Alton was conducted.
- A conference call between the Office of Research and Dr. Paul Alton and his associates was conducted on April 15, 2009. Dr. Paul Alton is the Director of Research of A.R. Phoenix Resources, Inc. based in New York. Dr. Alton has been involved in the program design of the curriculum and has contributed to many curriculum elements.
- A telephone survey of six of nine states using the curriculum was completed on April 20, 2009. (Dr. Alton provided a list of program contacts in other states where the curriculum is implemented at their respective juvenile justice long-term programming facilities.)
- Several unsuccessful attempts were made to contact Nancy Lyons, Chief Deputy Director, Governor's Office of Gang and Youth Violence Policy. Consequently, possible funding for an evaluation study of a pilot program using this curriculum at DJJ has not been verified.

General Findings

After a review of materials provided by Dr. Alton, it appears that the strengths of this curriculum are:

- The curriculum is theoretically based. Resource materials are comprehensive, validated, and focused on numerous important issues, such as the core of high risk behavior and mind-set. Materials were found to be need-based and very prescriptive.
- Resources use the evidence-based concepts of the social learning model and key coping and problem solving skills for both positive social development and relapse prevention (self-efficacy).
- There is a wide variety and volume of materials to choose from. There are workbooks that are gender-specific, age-appropriate, and in both Spanish and English. Materials cover such topics as anger management, depression, anxiety, self-harm, substance abuse, trauma, and sleep disorders. A pre-release module is also available.
- There is an emphasis on Cognitive-Behavior Therapy (CBT). Among the CBT elements is the "Functional Thinking" resource, recommended by Dr. Alton as a key building block for the juvenile residential gang intervention program. Cognitive restructuring is also a key element in the Gang Intervention resources.
- There is also an emphasis on Motivational Interviewing (MI). MI tools are integrated into nearly every New Freedom workbook, including all major elements of the residential gang intervention program. These elements include the preparation for treatment (pre-contemplation) resources, the "Self-Discovery" series, the "Functional Thinking (core CBT resource), the Phoenix Curriculum, the "Coping Series," the "Returning Home" series, and the targeted gang intervention-specific resources.

- The curriculum can be tailored to the needs of an individual youth, allowing for greater programming flexibility. Individual programming can be adjusted for dosage, group size, length of program, and/or target population.

As reported from the telephone survey, the strengths of this curriculum are:

- Dr. Alton, Research Director of A.R. Phoenix Resources, is easy to work with and very flexible. Georgia mentioned they like Dr. Alton's approach in providing a more clinical focus to his materials and with adapting the Georgia model to the overall programming needs of youth rather than focusing solely on criminogenic needs.
- Program administrators participating in the telephone survey report that staff easily could be trained to implement the curriculum. Staff attend a three-day CBT group training session. Staff also report that youth enjoy the material.
- Staff report that resource materials are easy to work with since they do not have to follow a script or memorize content. The curriculum resembles a teacher's lesson plan with guidance from workbooks. Staff have the flexibility to substitute trainers (group leaders) without postponing youth lessons. Staff like the curriculum's "user friendliness" for both youth and staff.
- Florida requires that programs be evidence-based and cites this as the program's main strength. The curriculum includes role-playing, an evidence-based strategy.
- Staff report that workbooks are arranged in a fashion that is easy to follow. The materials are written at a fifth/sixth-grade level.
- Active group participation is encouraged. Resources seem to "engage" the youth. Offenders report using the workbooks often and liking the skill-building cards and role-playing aspects of the curriculum.
- Program administrators perceive it to be cost-effective. A set amount is paid to Dr. Alton for statewide licensing and curriculum materials can be downloaded as portable document format (pdf) files. The licensing fee also includes the rights to make unlimited copies for use on site. Thus, users incur no additional costs for hard-copy workbooks as in other program models.

As observed, one potential weakness of the curriculum is:

- Adopting the curriculum will have cost implications to DJJ. Available resource materials are not "one-size fits all." The curriculum, if adopted at DJJ, would encompass numerous areas and would require customization for use with the DJJ gang population. This, along with training DJJ staff to be trainers, may require a substantial investment of DJJ staff time.

As reported in the telephone survey, some other weaknesses of the curriculum are:

- Staff can get overwhelmed with learning new materials and do not always do a good job as trainers. Staff need to be reasonably passionate about the materials so they can impart this knowledge to youth.
- Resistance from custody staff in implementing the therapeutic techniques of the curriculum.
- Lack of support for the curriculum at the upper management level trickles down to mid-level management and staff resulting in possible low staff morale. This may be

- counter-productive for training staff that need to be enthusiastic about their new roles as trainers.
- Georgia reported that, in their experience, there was an over-emphasis on substance abuse in the workbooks rather than on mental health. The program administrator mentioned he would have preferred about equal resources devoted to these two major needs. Georgia's experience is indicative of possible implementation problems in customizing the curriculum to the population needs.
 - Georgia reported lack of adequate training for trainers.

It should be noted that, of the six states surveyed, three states used the curriculum for gang treatment and one state used the curriculum for gang prevention. Two states did not use the gang curriculum at all. All six states reported that the gang curriculum was not the focus of the overall institutional programming of youth at their juvenile facilities.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Among the materials provided by Dr. Alton was an *Evaluation of the Phoenix Curriculum in Sussex County, New Jersey*, which studied the effectiveness of the Phoenix curriculum in reducing the disruptive behavior in two Sussex County schools among fourth and sixth grade student volunteers and sixth and eighth grade student volunteers, respectively. In this evaluation, there appeared to be somewhat negative findings with regard to females and younger children. If the Phoenix/New Freedom curriculum is adopted for use at DJJ, the evaluation plan should include an element to ascertain whether there is a similar age and gender effect.

Based on the qualitative information from the review of curriculum materials, discussions with Dr. Alton, and findings from the telephone survey, it appears that the curriculum looks promising. Feedback from surveying other states indicates that Dr. Alton and his associates are very easy to work with so adjusting the Phoenix resource materials to meet DJJ needs may not be a problem. In the event that DJJ adopts this curriculum for its gang intervention programming at institutions and camps, it is recommended that DJJ Juvenile Facilities work with the Juvenile Research Branch, the Governor's Office of Gang and Youth Violence Policy, and the Principal Investigator to assist in the evaluation design and funding for the evaluation.

**Summary of Telephone Survey Findings by State
By Target Population, Curriculum Components Used
As of April 27, 2009 (n=6)**

Curriculum Description	State					
	New Jersey	Wisconsin	Florida	New Mexico	Georgia	Ohio
Overall Target Population						
Juveniles	X		X	X	X	X
Adults		X				
Target Population Served by Gender						
Males	X	X	X	X	X	X
Females	X		X	X	X	X
Focus of Curriculum in State						
General curriculum	X		X	X		X
Adult (Drug, Mental Health)		X				
Substance Abuse/ Mental Health					X	
Is the gang curriculum the main focus of the overall institutional programming?						
Yes						
No	X	X	X	X	X	X
Is the Gang curriculum used?						
Yes (Prevention)	X					
Yes (Treatment)			X	X		X
No		X			X	
Is the Substance Abuse curriculum used?						
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X
No						
Is the Mental Health/ Behavioral Health curriculum used?						
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X
No						
Is the Re-entry/"Returning Home" curriculum used?						
Yes	X		X	X	X	X
No		X				
Length of Time Phoenix Curriculum Has Been In Place In State						
Less than 1 year		X				
2 Years or more	X		X	X	X	X

Summary of Telephone Survey Findings

Using a structured telephone questionnaire, three Adult Research Branch (ARB) staff made phone calls to nine states from April 15-20, 2009. ARB was successful in contacting six states (New Jersey, Wisconsin, Florida, New Mexico, Georgia, and Ohio), but was unsuccessful in contacting the remaining three (Arizona, Virginia, Massachusetts).

The findings for each state, as discussed below, are presented in three sections. The first section describes the state's gang population. The second section discusses the state's reasons for selecting the Phoenix/New Freedom curriculum for institutional programming. The last section describes when the curriculum is offered during a youth's incarceration.

New Jersey

The gang population in larger New Jersey cities consists approximately of 50% black (Crips, Blood) and 50% Hispanic (Latin Kings) youth, with a slightly higher percentage of blacks than Hispanics. There is a small presence of white gangs as well. The overall youth population are committed to the juvenile justice system for serious and/or violent sex offenses, homicides, assault, and drug offenses. Others are committed for property crimes like petty theft and a few have mental health problems. The age range is anywhere between 12 to 21 years. The average length of incarceration varies from 12 to 18 months. Youth are selected for the gang curriculum based on risk levels. Most participants are medium to high risk youth.

The Phoenix Curriculum has been in use in high risk schools statewide in New Jersey for several years. The "prevention" curriculum has received dedicated funding authorized by the New Jersey Governor. These resources were provided to every elementary school—more than 100 schools—in Trenton, Camden, and Newark, particularly elementary grades (3-4) and also sixth grade. Eventually, the use of these materials expanded outside the classroom and into correctional settings. The curriculum is predominantly used for gang intervention, substance abuse, behavioral health and gang/violence prevention and is provided to all state Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) programs for youth. More complete models are provided to JJC's four substance abuse treatment programs, which all have behavioral health and gang overlays, the Phoenix Curriculum (high school level), and the new "Functional Thinking" CBT and MI program resources. Their core program is nine months, with a dosage of up to 360 hours, male and female gender-specific.

In New Jersey, a youth receives the gang intervention program immediately following intake. The dosage of the Phoenix/New Freedom curriculum a youth receives is tailored to that individual's risk level, security level, type of facility, and length of incarceration. In other words, the modules are designed according to the youth's needs. The youth receives most gang intervention programming during his period of incarceration. The gang intervention workbooks address high risk behavior that causes return to custody. An assessment tool checklist is used along with the workbooks. Prior to release, the offender receives the "Returning Home" series.

Wisconsin

The Phoenix/New Freedom curriculum started in Wisconsin four months ago. It is used primarily for adults in residential programs in segregated units. Ms. Renee Chyba, Director of Treatment, selected the curriculum because it was easy to use with the client population. She also found Dr. Alton easy to work with. The core program is four months long with a dosage of up to 300 hours during the period and averages around four to six hours of programming a day.

Wisconsin inmates volunteer to participate in the four-month residential program available in their segregated units. The New Freedom curriculum in Wisconsin primarily addresses drug and alcohol abuse, mental health and behavioral problems.

Florida

Among youth identified by law enforcement as gang members, black gang members outnumber gang members of other ethnic groups. Most gang members are committed for aggravated assaults or violent assault offenses. The average length of incarceration ranges from around four to six months, with a maximum of 18 months.

According to Dr. Michael Baglivio, Research Director of Programming and Technical Assistance, Florida oversees approximately 80 residential facilities. Contractors provide services to most facilities. Youth in residential facilities are categorized and separated by gender and risk level. Aftercare may or may not be provided. Florida began planning and developing the Phoenix/New Freedom curriculum for their correctional settings three to four years ago. Problems with grant funding slowed the process. Only a few of the residential facilities are currently using the Phoenix/New Freedom curriculum with their client population, although plans are underway for more facilities to use the program. Dr. Alton is working closely with Florida in developing a more comprehensive model for their long-term residential juvenile correctional settings.

In Florida, two issues impact their method of assigning youth to gang intervention programs. First, although Florida law requires law enforcement to identify gang members among the offender population, many youth enter the juvenile facilities without being identified as gang members. Second, Florida saw no significant differences in the treatment needs' characteristics of gang members and other high-risk youth. Therefore, all high-risk youth receive some type of gang intervention curriculum regardless of whether they are identified as belonging to a gang. Florida's requirement for evidenced-based curriculum contributed to Florida's decision to use Phoenix/New Freedom. Their program model utilizes one-third teaching, one-third demonstration, and one-third role playing techniques that include MI.

Youth identified to receive the Phoenix/New Freedom resources enter the residential facility in groups of 12-15. Due to the need for group formation, some youth begin the curriculum immediately upon incarceration; while others wait until there are enough youth to form a group. All high-risk youth committed to Florida's DJJ attend the program. Usually, correctional staff counselors run groups using the Phoenix model. The core program model consists of 80-100 hours of gang intervention treatment that incorporates elements of substance abuse, "return to home" workbooks leading to aftercare, coping strategies dealing with delinquent peers, and anger management. At the end of the core program, a gang component is added for youth who volunteer, have an appropriate attitude, and are motivated to benefit from program resources. Due to state regulations that

specify only licensed counselors may conduct counseling dealing with mental health issues, the mental health component of the curriculum is not emphasized.

New Mexico

The gang population at the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department reflects the overall population of the state. In this state, 45% of the population is Hispanic. The composition of their youth gang population is 75% Hispanic and 23 % White, with 1% Black and 1% Asian. The overall youth population is committed for serious and/or violent offenses. A large proportion of these offenses are drug-related, including drug distribution and/or drug usage. The average length of incarceration is 18 months. A few are categorized as youthful offenders – those charged as juveniles with adult crimes who are committed to the state youth facilities until age 21.

In New Mexico, the decision to select the Phoenix/New Freedom resources for the gang intervention program came about after a review of various curricula. The review was conducted by a multi-disciplinary team headed by the New Mexico “Drug Czar” associated with the Juvenile Justice Commission. The curriculum was adopted in 2006 and has been in operation for almost three years under the oversight of the state “Gang Czar.” The agency paid for a statewide license for use of the workbooks in 2006, which cost \$200,000. The statewide license includes the initial curriculum with accompanying workbooks, services of two trainers from Dr. Alton’s office to conduct three or four training sessions, and periodic updates to workbooks.

According to Mr. Greg Nelson, Program Administrator, the needs of juvenile offenders in New Mexico appear to be inter-related. The Phoenix/New Freedom resources have various workbooks for addressing these different needs. There are workbooks that address such issues as substance abuse and gang intervention, as well as workbooks that are gender-specific, for different age groups, and for those who are developmentally disabled.

The core program model in New Mexico, including the Phoenix Curriculum, is about 200 hours. Longer-term resources are provided for extended incarceration. The program is provided to all state juvenile correctional residential facility programs, male and female. It begins at Intake/Orientation with “What am I doing here?” workbooks. During their stay, youth are exposed to additional workbooks that address substance abuse, gang intervention, and mental health issues. Prior to release, there is a pre-parole/transition to parole phase. A multi-disciplinary team at the Children Youth and Families Department assess program needs, evaluate behavioral health, track progress and determine readiness to parole.

Georgia

Georgia’s gang population is predominantly Hispanic with smaller segments of Caucasian and black youth gangs. Hispanic gangs show the largest growth relative to gangs of other ethnicities.

The focus of the Phoenix/New Freedom resources used in the state of Georgia is on the mental health issues of their youth population, rather than on gang intervention. According to Mr. Miguel Fernandez, Deputy Director, Office of Behavioral Health Programs, curriculum workbooks which emphasize mental health were purchased, which deal with basic change (what is right vs. what is wrong), anger and impulse control management, and self-esteem development. The New Freedom behavioral health program model has been implemented in every long-term state juvenile correctional setting. This model includes enhanced MI

resources and the new CBT “Functional Thinking” curriculum as well as the full behavioral health treatment resource. However, no gang intervention workbooks are used. The agency paid \$80,000 for an unlimited statewide license for pdf files that staff can access through the Internet and use throughout 30 state facilities.

Georgia is now using the New Freedom substance abuse model in their local jails and detention centers. This model combines mental health and substance abuse. A variation of the model is currently used at all levels of their three-tier juvenile justice system: (a) detention centers (quick in/out, usually two to three days), (b) felony-frequent misdemeanor youth (3-21 days) with the “Thinking Errors” workbooks, and (c) SB 440 youth (designated felons with a major crime charged as adults or designated felons with a maximum commitment of five years entering the Department of Corrections at age 17). The last group receive the New Freedom decision making materials. Georgia’s juvenile justice system includes 22 regional youth facilities (with stays from eight months to five years). In addition, Georgia operates six long-term facilities and six short-term facilities.

Georgia uses the Phoenix/New Freedom behavioral health program model in every long-term state juvenile correctional setting. The curriculum is used throughout an offender’s stay. The substance abuse component, which lasts six months, is used at the end of the youth’s programming, just before release. The dosage of the mental health component varies according to the three-tier levels of Georgia’s juvenile justice system. An assessment tool similar to the Minnesota Assessment Inventory is used to track program progress.

Ohio

Ohio has a minimal juvenile gang problem. Offenders committed to Central Ohio Youth Center predominantly come from the state’s rural areas. Around 95% of offenders are white; the remaining 5% are black. The juvenile facility serves both males and females primarily between the ages of 12 and 17. Boys and girls live in separate living units and participate in all programs separately. Offenders are committed for both felonies and misdemeanors. The commitment offenses include substance abuse and domestic violence among family members and cohabitants. The center seldom uses the gang curriculum on their population since they have few gang members. The occasional gang member will receive an individualized version of the New Freedom curriculum.

Ohio first heard about the Phoenix/New Freedom resource materials through sample materials sent by Dr. Alton. The Center’s two therapists were impressed with the sample workbooks, particularly the “Thinking for Change” series. The Central Ohio Youth Center currently uses Phoenix/New Freedom workbooks on problem solving, cognitive behavior, ultimate choice, reality check and personal needs. They have used the Phoenix/New Freedom workbooks for three and a half years. The Center purchased the license to photocopy the workbook pages.

Youth at the Central Ohio Youth Center begin the Phoenix/New Freedom program immediately upon entering the facility. Youth receive 300-340 hours of the program with the overall curriculum lasting 12 weeks. All youth are exposed to the same curriculum. The program begins with a Treatment Readiness workbook at intake. Each workbook takes about one week (12 sessions, CBT 72 hours) to complete. Since most youth at the center are committed for drug offenses, most workbooks deal with substance abuse issues. All groups use the mental health and re-entry workbook series, Going Home/Reality 24 Hours. The gang component is individualized. Staff make copies of the appropriate workbook pages for use by individual gang members needing gang programming.