

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ARISE Foundation embarked on an ambitious endeavor at Thompson Academy in Florida. Thompson Academy is a moderate-risk residential commitment program for male juvenile offenders. In 2009, the ARISE Foundation provided staff training and life-skills curricula to juvenile justice staff using the ARISE Life-Management Skills programs to educate incarcerated youth in their charge on life and social skills. The purpose of training staff was to improve their communication and social skills which was intended to lead to a better environment within the facility. The training was also aimed at improving youth behavior and positive outcomes.

The ARISE Foundation trained 85 Thompson Academy staff in CHOICES: Drop it at the Door and 55 staff in ARISE Life Skills. One Thompson staff member received instruction as a Master Trainer. A total of 8,812 hours of ARISE Life Skills instruction was delivered to 302 youths at Thompson Academy between March 2009 and October 2009.

Following delivery of the ARISE training and curricula, a quasi-experimental design evaluation was conducted by an independent evaluator, the Justice Research Center (JRC) based in Tallahassee, Florida. Findings from the study indicated that youth completing services at Thompson had slightly better re-arrest, re-adjudication, and subsequent juvenile commitment outcomes than a matched comparison group of youths completing services in another moderate-risk residential facility.

Thompson staff and youth were pre- and post-tested as to their knowledge, attitudes and communication over the course of the training implementation. Youths completing Thompson Academy demonstrated clear improvement in empathy attitudes, while comparison group youths exhibited a slight decline in empathy between pre- and post-test administration. The treatment group achieved statistically significantly higher scores on an empathy index than those found among the comparison group.



Thompson staff exhibited similar outcomes, with improvement in empathy attitudes between pre- and post-test measurement. Of particular note, were numerous accolades of the ARISE program by staff including the following responses to the question of what was learned:

"It helps me to diffuse disagreements at home and on the job."

"It helps me to understand human nature better and deal with any individual better and shows me how to respect each other in this world."

"It has helped me recognize that I have a choice on how I react, and control my emotions. I feel as though CHOICES has impacted my life by allowing me to better communicate with family and friends. I have used them at home and also while I'm at the shopping center. I also enjoy saying that forgiving is helpful for me."

"I have used the CHOICES information in my personal and work life many ways. One way I've used the CHOICES information in my personal life is the way I communicate with my friends and family. I'm a better listener, and communicator. CHOICES has taught me ways to communicate better. In my work life I use the information before I step foot into the facility. I drop all my problems at the door because I can't work with youth with outside issues affecting my performance."

"I make sure that I treat other with respect, how I would want to be treated."

Impact data illustrated a significant achievement at the Thompson program in terms of Quality Assurance review. Prior to the ARISE Foundation's involvement at the facility the program had historically performed poorly on annual Quality Assurance reviews conducted by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice. In 2008, Thompson Academy scored 71% Acceptable Performance on their annual review. The 2009 Quality Assurance outcomes were quite different. For the first time in its history, Thompson Academy was awarded Deemed Status and a score of 86%, which

was 15 percentage points higher than their previous year's score. Deemed Status is awarded to programs that achieve an overall performance rating of 80% or higher and meet additional criteria as outlined in DJJ policy. This drastic improvement in Quality Assurance is rather unprecedented in delinquency programming and according to Thompson Academy program staff is largely attributable to the involvement of the ARISE Foundation.

The ARISE Foundation has set out to effect change in the juvenile justice system through training and instruction of direct care staff serving delinquent youths. Designed to aid staff in effectively treating youths, ARISE programs represent an important line of defense in reducing juvenile crime and improving the life chances of Florida's youths.