

Equipping Professionals With Counselling Skills  
Will Help Deter At-Risk Adolescents

A PORTION OF THE STUDY.

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by  
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## Abstract

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This applied dissertation was designed to improve the knowledge levels of individuals working with at-risk youth and their extended family members. The research addressed the plethora of risk factors and issues facing at-risk youth. Using a collaborative and collective approach, this study was instrumental in the development and implementation of a Criminology and Counselling Skills course. Subjects, who participated, work in the gap, where at-risk youth congregate and knowledge levels of interventions need to increase as was revealed in the results of the study.

The design used for this study included both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Prior to the implementation of the intervention, the knowledge levels of the research subjects were measured through the use of a Likert-type scale questionnaire. An identical questionnaire was used at the completion of the intervention. The analysis of the pretest and posttest results was compared and the mean differences were calculated, and then used to generate a paired sample *t*-test to determine significance. The *t*-test calculated the probability value or *p* value, which for each question was ( $p < 0.05$ ). This indicated that the knowledge levels improved in each area and showed remarkable improvement and confirmed statistical significance. Reflective journal entries, participation, and presentations through observations were documented. The qualitative research was equally positive and reiterated a crucial need for the intervention used in this study, specifically to professionals who work in the gaps, where at-risk youth congregate.

The findings in the study revealed that by equipping professionals involved in grassroots initiatives, criminology, the criminal justice system, and those involved in the education system would ensure healthier communities and provide a safety net for at-risk youth.

### *Nature and Etiology of the Problem*

It would appear that most people who work with young offenders are passionate about their jobs; however, many are not equipped to provide any type of counseling. The researcher was compelled to attempt to bridge a gap which existed in the province of New Brunswick at the time of this study. A provincial coordinator has concurred with the researcher's conclusion and has also agreed to participate as a consultant at the community and provincial level (see Appendix C). Equipping correctional officers, probation officers, principals, teachers, and students of the day involved in criminology programs is pertinent for the reduction of recidivism. It stands to reason that the more training in the field of counseling, the more effective the interventions will be. At-risk adolescents fall through the cracks every day even though their workers and professionals have daily contact with them. It is imperative that all professionals working in corrections and with at-risk adolescents have the proper counseling skills that potentially could prevent incarceration and a life involving criminal activity. Many youth could be helped if their issues were recognized and dealt with before they were encapsulated in the CJS. In fact, Doob (2001) reported, "Judges who indicated that large numbers of [youth] cases could be dealt with outside of the court were most critical of the unavailability and/or underuse of alternative measures programs" (p. 9). Equipping professionals with counseling knowledge would enhance alternative measures and prevent many of these youth from criminal behavior and a life of further oppression. Collective initiatives would create programs to avoid the grim future of youth once they are incarcerated. Often, youth are sentenced to short periods of incarceration, which subjects them to the culture of criminality and introduces them to hardened criminals and criminal activity. Once this

occurs, the youth may be more difficult to rehabilitate. Professionals need to be aware of the issues evolving in the youth's life before incarceration is the selected punishment.

### *Incarceration*

An analysis completed at the New Brunswick Training School in 1993 encompassed 548 youth. The New Brunswick Training School analysis reported that, while both male and female young offenders were incarcerated, the average profile focused on males. The average age of the youths incarcerated was 16, and the arrests were mainly linked to property crimes. The majority of the youths had Grade 8 education or less. However, many of the young girls who were abused are now caught up in the CJS. Handerhan (2004) contended that "Any adolescent can be an offender. A suburban White girl is not exempt from committing a delinquent act" (p. 2). Once a young girl becomes entrenched in the CJS, the girl is likely to become a target for future charges which can often result in a downward spiral in an overall lifestyle. In fact, the complex counselling-related issues are addressed in the Elizabeth Fry Society (2004) fact sheet:

Federally sentenced women also have high rates of childhood sexual abuse, commonly incestuous, violent, and extended over a long period of time with multiple perpetrators. They also have extremely high rates of revictimization at the hands of violent men.

Experienced and trained professionals may have prevented this costly cancer. The Elizabeth Fry Society stated that "as of 1997, the average annual cost for incarcerating a woman in a federal institution was \$74,965" (p. 1). Federal and provincial funding must focus on preventive counseling initiatives.

At the time, Canadian judges were to hand down the sentence according to what would be considered to be in the best interest of the child. However, according to Doob (2001), "the rehabilitative and reintegrative function of the sentence is constrained by the

overriding responsibility to hand down a proportionate sentence” (p. 57). According to the fact sheet of the Elizabeth Fry Society (2004), “In 1998, Canada imprisoned its population at a rate of 142 per 100,000; this is second only to the United States when compared internationally. Canada imprisons young people at a very high rate.” It is important for society and parents to ensure young people get the guidance they need. This, in turn, will lead to healthier adolescents and healthy societies. Professionals must be trained to recognize at-risk youth, and we must begin to counsel oppressed youth about what their responsibilities are.

The problems are complex and there are a number of gray areas with numerous relationships and systems to consider. In order to understand the oppression facing at-risk youth, it is imperative that professionals be trained to understand the multitude of barriers and issues involved. Frye (1984) described the structure and socialization of oppressed individuals: “One can study the elements of an oppressive structure with great care and some good will, without seeing the structure as a whole” (p. 5). The concept of looking at the whole picture reiterates the collaborative approach for this research study. Often, youth involved in the CJS are participating in community-based agencies' programs and restorative justice approaches, and are interconnecting to a number of professionals. In an undated fact sheet published by Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick (PLEIS) stated, “During the year, 23,556 hours of community work were completed by young offenders.” Much of this work is completed at the grassroots level, where professionals have daily contact with the clients, present numerous issues to contend with as they attempt to complete their hours. During these placements, the workers often attempt to provide intervention and the need to have the proper information

and counseling skills is crucial. Counseling knowledge is needed and necessary at this level. Recognizing the specific obvious needs is one thing but to unravel the whole individual will take the entire community; training is the key component.

### *Counseling Training and Education*

To become a counselor recognized by the New Brunswick government at the time of this study, one must obtain a master's degree; this is one of the minimal requirements for certified counseling in our province. Having achieved this status, the researcher believed specific broad-based criminology knowledge and counseling training are needed when working with at-risk youth to prevent criminal behavior. Many individuals with social service backgrounds are not required to study sufficient counseling methods and approaches in their degree programs, nor do they receive this in their work placements with young offenders. Some probation officers, who are skilled in their field, are returning to university to obtain a Master's of Education degree in an effort to receive recognition from the province and specific medical plans to be qualified to professionally counsel young offenders.

### *Etiology of the Issues*

Unfortunately, our prisons are full of men and women who were once adolescents that received ineffective or inappropriate counseling to deal with the magnitude of problems in their lives. With high dropout rates, these adolescents, whether male or female, often appear in the CJS. Teachers who see these adolescents every day feel unqualified when it comes to counseling. Research also reveals that qualified teachers who work with these young people everyday are not equipped nor do they recognize the issues surrounding the violence that many adolescents live in, while sitting silently and

invisible in their classroom everyday. Taylor and Lloyd (2001) contended that, “the introduction of mandatory reporting and implementation of training programs [is necessary] to assist teachers develop a better knowledge around child abuse issues and reporting the processes” (p. 3).

There is a problem with principals’ reporting protocol also; they must be included in any initiative that focuses on recognizing the ethical issues and their responsibility to take action. It appears that principals are sometimes more concerned with the image of their school than revealing sexual abuse. Payne (1991) contended that principals may screen teacher reports despite their ethical and legal obligation to file them. This type of gatekeeping compounds the oppressive structures within the school system and leads to the increased number of at-risk youth. In fact, Reiniger, Robinson, and McHugh (1995) contended, “as long as the impediments to reporting are grounded in an objective lack of knowledge, our responsibility is to close the gap” (p. 68).

A study completed by Tite (1994) found that

Approximately 75% of the teachers who had reported suspected cases of sexual abuse [and] of those 85% had reported it, usually to their principal . . . . It seems that almost half of the reports never made it beyond this internal investigation stage. (p. 93)

Teachers will tend to get the message that they should not bother the principal if this type of approach is taken. However, if these professionals could see the big picture and the overall cost to the child and to the system, they would welcome the opportunity and the importance of intervention that would be portrayed. According to Wolford (2000), these at-risk adolescents represent 10% to 70% of the juvenile population incarcerated and experienced the highest rates of recidivism. Many youth who have trouble in school tend to get frustrated and angry. This can often lead to criminal activity.

### *Alternative Measures*

At the time of this study, numerous alternative measures programs were being implemented in this province and, therefore, the need for trained professionals at the community level is on the rise. A brochure published by the New Brunswick Department of Public Safety (n.d.) stated that “alternative measures are precourt referral program(s)” based on a police assessment that provides for “alternatives” to court proceedings. Restorative justice initiatives are more popular in the province of New Brunswick. It has been found that the programs are beneficial for the communities, the offender, and the victim. Restorative Justice and Fine Option approaches are being used across the nation; therefore, the concept reiterates the value of collaboration. Obviously, community organizations participating in these programs need to be equipped with proper training. Lab and Whitehead (as cited in Handerhan, 2004) declared, “Adolescents compose approximately 12% of the population and are held accountable for 17.1% of total arrests” (p. 2). This shows the seriousness of the issue and the need for early intervention.

### *Statement of the Problem*

Working with at-risk youth, many professionals detect some type of abuse but are not equipped with counseling skills to deal with the issues. Proper counseling education and training will (a) equip professionals of the day, (b) help motivate and support at-risk youth to excel in the academic field, and (c) ensure support for the youth to reach their full potential. Many professionals, probation officers, and criminology students are striving towards attaining a master’s degree, which authorizes and provides credentials to counsel. Counseling programs need to be made available to professionals working with youth at a street level, in the school, and the CJS, in an effort to prevent recidivism,

school dropout, and, ultimately, improve the overall quality of life for the target group.

### *Purpose of the Research*

The purposes of the research in this study were three-fold:

1. Using a collective and collaborative initiative throughout the research, the researcher will depend on the skills and expertise of all participants to achieve a teaching and learning environment, which will lead to equipping the overall group with counseling skills and enhance their expertise for their field of work.

2. Training professionals further about the risk factors facing at-risk youth is an attempt to bridge the gap between school dropout and criminal activity.

3. Enhancing the initial training that will become more holistic due to the collaboration and diversity of participants who will bring specific skills and experiences to the classes. A course outline is presented in Appendix D. The success of the research will be determined by the impact the program has on equipping the participants with counseling skills and motivating some of the subjects to provide further training to similar target groups, once the course is completed.

Often, community-based workers are the primary contact for at-risk youth. Numerous agencies are interconnected to the court system through the fine option, restorative justice, and the related offender sentencing options. Many at-risk youth find themselves in homeless shelters, group homes, or the John Howard Society, where staff is paid lower wages, and there is minimal funding for their further education and training. Addiction and drug abuse issues are prevalent in this targeted group and, often, are presented as an issue that must be dealt with by community-based staff, who often lack the expertise to counsel. It appears that, while recidivism is an acceptable and costly

concept within the CJS, the issue of qualified counseling personnel needs to take priority. The cost of keeping an offender in a federal institution is phenomenal. According to a fact sheet from the Elizabeth Fry Society (2004), "Current approaches to addressing crime by increasing prohibitions, developing evermore punitive penalties, and increasing the use of mandatory minimum sentences results in longer and more damaging and expensive imprisonment in Canada." Therefore, additional corrections-focused counseling programs that will create a safety net at all levels, and create a more holistic and collaborative effort in solving the problem of recognizing and counseling at-risk adolescents are needed. Handerhan (2004) wrote, "Family, school, and peers are the three main influences on the development of delinquent behaviors in adolescents" (p. 4).

According to Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, and Hawkins (1998), "The adolescent's environment is shaped profoundly by the presence or absence of many different factors, including family resources, community services, and educational and employment opportunities" (p. 10). Recognizing the risk factors by trained professionals and deterring further criminal behavior, once the behavior begins, justifies the value of equipping professionals who have hands-on access to these youth.

Sergiovani (1999) contended that "the connections that emerge among people from family-like feelings and relationships and from sharing a common place contribute to the development of shared values and ideas" (p. 122). However, youth who live in violent environments often internalize and perpetuate these negative perceptions of reality. It is time for professionals in our society to collaborate. We are losing our youth through a system that has become so piecemealed with part-time work and contracted positions, that we have lost sight of what really matters--the dignity and integrity of all

individuals, specifically our children.

## Chapter 2: Preliminary Literature Review

Abuse is a negative problem that crosses cultures and affects our society and young children at a high rate. Physically and sexually abused children have one thing in common: They go to school (Hinson & Fossey, 2000). According to Yanowitz, Monte, and Tribble (2003), “Child abuse is any behavior that poses a substantial risk of causing harm to a child. The impact of abuse is directly related to crime” (p. 3). Prevention is paramount to incarceration; according to the fact sheet of PLEIS (2002), “from prevention to reintegration, all members of the community have something to offer and something to gain . . . . examples of risk factors include boredom, poverty, family violence, substance abuse, and youth unemployment.” Obviously, we have numerous issues to prevent; it will take a collaborative initiative to improve these conditions. As communities combine forces, we can lessen the impact of the risk factors on our youth.

Prevention through education will help professionals recognize pertinent behavior before the youth’s disappearance from the school system into the correction system; bridging this gap is crucial. Donnelly (1992) wrote that 95% of teenage prostitutes have been sexually abused. The prevalence of previous physical and sexual abuse, in childhood and as adults, is high among homeless women (Novac, Brown, & Bourbonnais, 1996). According to Hopper (2003), “Females are more prone to be victims of sexual abuse and research contend that one in four girls is sexually abused before the age of 14” (p. 1). Young girls who are sexually abused are three times more apt to develop psychiatric disorders or alcohol and drug abuse addictions; research contends that 42% of women never disclose the experience to anyone (Finkelhor, 1990). Against

such a background, the task of identifying children at risk of childhood sexual abuse becomes crucial. Increased training and education is imperative.

### *Teachers and Reporting*

There appears to be a knowledge gap amongst professionals surrounding the issue of sexual abuse and whether or not to report the issue. There seems to be a barrier for teachers in reporting practice, just as much as there is for children not to tell. Hinson and Fossey (2000) wrote that, “Some teachers were also fearful of ramifications for reporting, including harassment by the abuser, a lawsuit, or alienation from coworkers or administrators” (p. 251). Professionals need to be able to recognize the symptoms and follow the procedures to report the problem.

Obviously, against such odds, it is no wonder the field of criminology, labeled youth and alternative measures for youth at risk is escalating. Tragically, many teachers and counselors fail to report their suspicions about child abuse to the proper authorities in spite of the laws for reporting child abuse.

Dropout rates and criminal behavior are directly related to this abuse. A standard of ethical procedures and practices needs to be a mandatory component for training teachers and professionals working with youth. This practice will assist professionals in making the appropriate moral and ethical decisions, which are complex, in the practice of working with youth. Reiniger, Robinson, and McHugh (1995) reported that the questions surrounding the issues include “whether failure to report is founded in professionals’ ignorance of the law and procedures involved in reporting or in their ability to recognize indicators of child abuse” (p. 63). Teachers and school professionals are becoming more aware of the problem of sexual abuse; however, public schools, the single greatest source

of reports nationwide to child protective services, still have more cases unreported. Of the 548,100 cases reported to child protective services, 420,000 cases came from all other services combined (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1994). One of the difficulties with reporting is that teachers are the least knowledgeable about the law and the action they are responsible to initiate. Reiniger et al. reported further that “as long as the impediments to reporting are grounded in an objective lack of knowledge, our responsibility is to close this gap” (p. 68).

Compared to men, women are more than three times likely to have been sexually abused as children and adolescents. Taylor and Lloyd (2001) contended that, “. . . mandatory reporting and implementation of training programs to assist teachers develop better knowledge around child abuse issues and reporting processes is a positive” (p. 3). Intervention in high schools and primary grades is obviously needed. Students having trouble in school often are labeled and excluded when they should be counseled and included.

According to a fact sheet of the Elizabeth Fry Society (2004), “. . . 75% of federally sentenced women [in Canada] have basic education--junior high level--or below, 40% have been classified as functionally illiterate.” Increased neurological studies are ongoing and, ultimately, will assist with educating professionals about the barriers that prevent a positive quality of life for many marginalized youth. Numerous studies have addressed the negative impact of poor nutrition, which relates directly to negative emotions and aggression, which can lead to criminal activity. Preventive practices, specifically in educational settings, will have a more positive impact on the lives of youth affected by their socioeconomic background and environments.

One can begin to see the complexity of the risk factors and the importance of early detection and prevention programs on the youth at risk. Communities recognize the value in supporting youth to improve their life chances, particularly for youth living in poverty. The presence of police in schools of the day shows that criminal activity is on the rise with our youth. According to Dembo (2002), “The juvenile population is expected to increase substantially in the next 20 years, which in turns threatens to increase further the burden of the juvenile justice system” (p. 1).

#### *Research on Incarcerated Individuals*

In the New Brunswick Training School [NBTS] (1993) Report, it was stated that, “staff working with young offenders should be fully aware of the legislation governing the programs offered and of adolescent development” (p. 14). Being invisible in the classroom environment leads to further oppression while the behavioral problems are visible, they cause a negative impact in the school environment, and the etiology of the major issues goes undetected.

Intervention for at-risk youth must be individualized to meet the needs of each participant. According to NBTS Report (1993), youth must “fit” existing programs rather than programs being developed to respond to the individual needs of youth (p. 11). Programs that create a healthy environment and ensure that proper techniques are used in collaboration with all professionals will help individualize counseling. Kendall-Tackett, Williams, and Finkelhor (1993) contended, “Although child sexual abuse is associated with a range of emotional, behavioural, and sexual problems, more work on individual differences in adjustment following victimization is needed” (p. 1).

It is important that youth at risk understand that they are responsible for their

actions and are made accountable through approaches, such as restorative justice. Kendall-Tackett et al. stated that, as a society, Canadian public domain demonstrates support for individual responsibility and accountability, and alternative penalties that enforce compensation in action, such as community service. It is obvious that increased counseling programs at the community level, which will individualize the problems and develop positive outcomes for youth, are needed. The fact sheet of the Elizabeth Fry Society (2004) contended that “In fact, only 17% of the Canadian public feels that the prison should be used to punish offenders.” At-risk youth have often been punished and abused before their life becomes affected by crime. The cycle of crime needs to be addressed with long term solutions, which can only be implemented successfully through collective initiatives.

*The New Brunswick Training School: A Place for Youth?*

In the NBTS (1993) study,

. . . 67% of the young offenders at the NBTS had a history of being the victims of child abuse, both physical and sexual . . . young offenders were 2 years behind academically with 17% having been diagnosed as having a learning disability. Over 50% of the population used aggression as a means of expressing anger and 19% had made suicide attempts during the last 10 months. (p. 6)

Training must be provided to ensure that a broader perspective can be encapsulated, which addresses the plethora of issues surrounding abuse. Of the youth incarcerated, 71% come from families with a weak parenting environment. Information indicated that 75% came from families where one parent was an alcoholic. Over 67% of the young offenders had a history of being the victims of child abuse, both physical and sexual. A commission of inquiry found that many of the incarcerated youth at one facility became victims of a pedophile on staff who forced sexual acts of violence upon these oppressed youth.

Professionalism and ethics must predispose fear of a lawsuit if this moral decay is to be eliminated. Campbell (2000) stated “increased awareness of the ethical dimensions and responsibilities of teaching is essential for both enhanced professionalism and, more significantly, improved practice” (p. 203). Campbell further reiterated, “such principles as trust, integrity, honesty, justice, and care form the values fundamental to professional accountability, and they are firmly rooted in the practice of teaching and counseling” (p. 209).

Ensuring all professionals working in the community address the numerous issues surrounding youth should be mandatory. An article in the Daily Gleaner (2004) stated, “New Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) recruits should get more training about spousal abuse” (p. A10). The cycle of violence perpetuates into the world of children who need a safety net, counseling, and support to deal with issues. Numerous agencies are committed to preventing youth crime. Youth Justice in New Brunswick (2002) reported that, with the number of agencies popping up across the province, it is obvious there is a commitment to reducing youth crime. Professionals need to be trained to educate the public about the risk factors associated with criminal activity, and then they may prevent the likelihood of a criminal offence from occurring.

### *Poverty, Dropout, and Crime*

Many abused children come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Poverty and abuse leads to the use of drugs and alcohol. The cycle of abuse, poverty, and addiction are terms referred to when society sees youth following in the footsteps of a parent. Often, youth reside with parents or adults, who drink excessively or use drugs, perpetuate the act, and have difficulty coping with their feelings of isolation, anger, and frustration.

The effects of addiction and the impact of poverty on learning and emotions should be included in any counseling program.

Poverty, dropout, and crime are triangular problems. Poverty and crime, while a Marxist view, often go hand-in-hand. One study completed by the School Readiness and Support for Children in Poverty (2004) stated that,

Children living in poverty show almost 3.5 times the number of conduct disorders, almost twice the chronic illnesses, and twice the rate of school problems, hyperactivity, and emotional disorders as children who are not poor. Children living in poverty are at great risk of not being able to benefit from formal learning programs in their early years. Children living in poverty have lower IQs, lower math and reading abilities, shorter attention spans, greater speech delays, and vocabulary limitations. (p. 5)

With high dropout rates, these adolescents, whether male or female, often appear in the CJS. According to Wolford (2000), these adolescents represent 10% to 70% of the juvenile population incarcerated and experience the highest rates of recidivism.

### *Behavior Modification*

Obviously, behavior modification programs must be implemented to prevent recidivism. Behavior modification involves the systematic application of learning principles and techniques to assess and improve individuals' covert and overt behaviors in order to help them function more fully in society (Martin & Pear, 2003). To do this, counseling programs for professionals working with the target group are needed. T. Campbell (personal communication, October 22, 2004), who worked with the Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology, agreed to the researcher using that program for educational purposes in the study. When one reviews the psychological profile of young offenders, it is obvious that preventative counseling programs are necessary. The NBTS (1993) report contends that "the youth are at risk and are in need of

psychological and other social interventions” (p. 6).

A study by Kruczek and Vitanza (1999) with abuse survivors demonstrated that

Emphasizing competence and skill development in the treatment of adolescent abuse survivors can aid teens in improving their daily functioning and positive recovery behaviors. In addition, early findings regarding the efficacy of this intervention suggest theory driven research methodology can be applied in a clinical setting with standardized treatment. (p. 1)

Davey and Hill (1999) contended that “Comparative studies into effectiveness of different interview styles are needed” (p. 9). Program development must be a collaborative issue in an effort to be successful in the area of counseling services. Many professionals are striving to enhance their abilities to work with abused individuals caught up in the CJS. Youth addiction is escalating; while drugs like dilaudid are destroying lives with what appears to be a quick fix at the time, and ends up being a lengthy process of healing and counseling. Numerous individuals are attending treatment, counseling, and criminology programs; the availability of affordable and specific counseling programs must increase.

One child left behind is one too many. Improved methods of counseling and increased education will help professionals working in the field; most of all, perhaps these children who are being left behind will grow up to see a world in which positive applications of behavior principles will be second nature to everyone (Martin & Pear, 2003). Collaboration of all professionals participating in proper training programming will enhance relationships and have a positive impact on communities, provinces, and nations.

It is obvious that much excellent research is being done and has been completed in the area of working with children with prior histories of abuse and who reveal the risk

factors related to potential criminal activity. Blending counseling theory with practice to develop a credible and focused program can improve the success rate for all individuals working in this field. It is imperative that early detection of abuse is recognized.

### *The Need for Knowledge*

After reviewing the research, one must ask, is it any wonder at-risk youth find it difficult to trust authority? Campbell (2000) stated, “increased awareness of the ethical dimensions and responsibilities of teaching and parents is essential for both enhanced professionalism and, more significantly, improved practice” (p. 203). Ethical issues are a segment of counseling, which ensures the integrity and credibility of the program.

Permission has been granted to use research from a credible counseling professional.

Campbell reiterated that, “such principles as trust, integrity, honesty, justice, and care form the values fundamental to professional accountability, and they are firmly rooted in the practice of teaching and corrections” (p. 209).

Ensuring all professionals working in the community address the plethora of issues surrounding youth should be mandatory. The cycle of violence perpetuates into the world of children who need to have counseling and support to deal with issues. Sadly, many children were once put in institutions because their parents could not afford to keep them. In its fact sheet, the Elizabeth Fry Society (2004) reported that “The high rates of mental health issues, evidence of self-injury, depression, and suicide in the population of incarcerated women [and men] ethically and legally warrants sufficiency and proper assessment of their treatments needs.” Training professionals to recognize the danger signs in youth is paramount in providing support and further counseling in an effort to prevent the progression of a debilitated lifestyle. One can only envision the pain in

unraveling the past, which many counselors predict paves the road to the future and purpose in one's life. It is imperative to note that crime must be punished and society must be protected. Community counseling can help at-risk youth, and this field is expanding. In the same fact sheet, Elizabeth Fry Society reported, "Canadian public domain demonstrates support for individual responsibility and accountability, and alternative penalties that enforce compensation in action, such as community service."

*Issues of the Day in New Brunswick*

At the time of this study, there are approximately 46,000 caseloads in the Income Assistance Department in New Brunswick. This program is for people who receive money to meet their basic needs from the provincial government. In 1999, there were an estimated 14% of children living in poverty in New Brunswick. Poverty affects learning and is directly related to alcohol and drug abuse in teenagers. Preventing further criminal behavior and the downward spiral of the cycle of crime and recognizing the risk factors is everyone's responsibility.

Adolescent offenders with a substance abuse problem commit a high percentage of violent crimes. Training in addiction and counselling should be an intricate part in any type of counseling program. Handerhan (2004) stated, "Adolescent delinquency is a concept that everyone should know, because it affects the lives of all individuals daily as taxpayers, parents, and/or classmates" (p. 2). In its fact sheet, Center for Research on Youth at Risk [CRYAR] (2002) stated that "Whether young people drink to escape the pain in their lives or because they are bored and want to fit in, their impaired ability to make good decisions puts them at risk".

Every effort must be made to ensure the safety and support for children living in

silence within our system. All professionals working with the youth must be able to recognize the symptoms and know the procedures to report the problem and communicate appropriately to prevent the nonexistent lifestyle of crime and institutionalization.

### Chapter 3: Methods

In an effort to enhance skills and the facilitation of learning in others, the researcher implemented a comprehensive counseling program to help equip people who are involved with youth at risk. The criminology field; the CJS; and counseling individuals, families, and extended relationships were addressed. The course outlined the risk factors, which are directly related to criminal activity, along with interventions which were appropriate to the issues being addressed. Participants were educated about community access, key professionals working with at-risk youth and their agencies, both at a community and provincial level. Ultimately, the collective initiative would equip professionals who work with at-risk adolescents in the area of counseling. To these ends, this study employed qualitative research methodologies combined with minimal quantitative methodologies.

#### *Research Questions*

Once the data were collected and the course was completed, three research questions were analyzed to evaluate the success of the initiative:

1. Upon the completion of a certificate course in counseling, do participants feel more equipped to counsel?
2. Which areas of counseling training are needed the most?
3. How has the study improved the problem area?

## *Definition of Terms*

*Abuse* is to use badly or wrongly; it is an instance of injustice or corruption.

*Chronic* means to last a long time, habitual, subject to a habit or pattern of behavior for a long time.

*Counseling* is to offer advice; to advise or offer guidance, especially as solicited from a knowledgeable person.

*CJS* refers to the complete institutional process of decision making from the initial investigation or arrest by police to the eventual release of the offenders and their reentry into society; the various sequential criminal justice stages through which the offender passes, such as police, courts, and corrections.

*Criminology* is the scientific study of the nature, extent, cause, and control of criminal behavior.

*Emotional disorders* may be defined as extreme personal suffering caused by the intentional or negligent actions of another.

*Ethics* are the rules or standards governing the conduct of a person or the conduct of the members of a profession.

*Etiology* is the study of causes, especially injury into the origin of disease.

*Incarcerate* is to put someone in jail, to shut in, or to confine.

*Integrity* is honesty, the quality or condition of being whole or undivided; completeness.

*Oppress* is to treat with unjust harshness or to cause one to feel mentally or spiritually burdened or physically as though suffocating.

*Plethora* is to oversupply, a super abundance, or an excess of any of the body

fluids.

*Poverty* is the efficiency in or inadequate supply of something.

*Socioeconomic* involves social as well as economic factors.

## Chapter 4: Results

### *Overview*

In an effort to enhance the skills and to better equip people who are involved with youth at risk, the researcher implemented a comprehensive counseling program. The key components focused on in the program were the field of criminology; the CJS; and the counseling of at-risk individuals, their families, and their extended relationships. The course outlined risk factors directly related to criminal activity, along with interventions, which are appropriate to addressing the issues that attribute to at-risk youth. Professionals working with at-risk youth are educated participants with community resources and their agencies, both at a community level and a provincial level. Ultimately, the collective initiative revealed that, upon completion of the program, professionals who interact with at-risk adolescents were better equipped in the area of counseling.

The design used for this study included a pretest-posttest format (see Appendix A). The rationale for this particular test design was to determine where the participants scored their degree of knowledge prior to the course and again upon completion of the program. The content of the course provided participants with an enhanced ability to counsel or intervene when working with at-risk youth. The data from these tests contained the information necessary for measuring the impact of the course intervention.

Throughout the program, journals were collected to gather information about insights related to course content; thus, the participants helped assess and determine what they learned. The journal entries allowed the researcher to gather information about individual needs and the impact of each session. Their constructive criticism was helpful in formulating the various sessions and in the methods of delivery. The focus group

questionnaire (see Appendix G) substantiated the participants' understanding of the research project and ensured it was in line with the project's methods and goals. Assigned at the beginning of the program, group projects were developed by participants during the course. Projects were presented at the conclusion of the course. Journal entries confirmed that the group projects increased participants' knowledge. This research was collected, analyzed, and would be considered in the final development of a provincial model of the course, which is being recommended by this researcher.

The researcher played various roles, including that of moderator, observer, and, eventually, inductive analyst. Reflective journal entries, participation, and presentations through observations were documented. It was obvious that participants learned by the content of the material and excellent presentations.

Three research questions guided the study:

1. Upon the completion of a certificate course in counseling, do participants feel more equipped to counsel?
2. Which areas of counseling training are needed the most?
3. How has the study improved the problem area?

### *Hypothesis*

The research questions led to one hypothesis in this study. The hypothesis postulated that this program would show knowledge levels of counseling interventions significantly increased. The impact and effect of the Criminology Counseling Skills Level 1 training was analyzed for positive mean change and statistical significance. The knowledge levels of the participants were analyzed, and their personal experiences and aptitudes were compiled through various teaching methodologies and, ultimately,

revealed their empowerment in the field of counseling in their specific area of expertise. One of the participants had become the resource person in a school. Other teachers were coming to this participant for help and referral information when working with at-risk youth. This clearly demonstrates the impact of having one person empowered with knowledge in the area of study. It also reiterates the need for this intervention at the school level. A comparison of knowledge levels for potential counselors working with at-risk youth would indicate that their knowledge levels increased after participation in the course. Participants' knowledge and confidence levels were compared using pretesting and posttesting, which revealed significant statistical difference (see Table).

#### *Method and Research Procedures*

*Measurements and administration.* Initially, a group of professionals and community leaders were asked to be on an IRB, which consisted of a group of individuals who were available for input or consultation as needed. The community advisory board had no impact on the research; its goal was to provide credibility and motivate research participants to partake. At all times, the research documentation was available for input and scrutiny by the gatekeepers. One research assistant reviewed all focus group notes and cross-referenced all segments of the research, which aided the researcher in maintaining objectivity.

*Questionnaire results.* The intention of this study was to increase knowledge levels of individuals involved with at-risk youth and to equip them with the skills necessary to counsel and intervene effectively. This goal was met and the knowledge levels proved to be statistically significant. A pretest was administered to evaluate the knowledge levels of the participants prior to the study. Upon completion, a posttest was

administered to determine whether the course was successful in increasing the knowledge level of the participants. The analysis of the pretest and posttest results was compared and the mean differences were calculated, and then used to generate a paired sample *t*-test to determine significance. The *t*-test calculated the probability value or *p* value, which for each question was less than 0.05. This indicates that the knowledge levels did improve in each area and showed remarkable improvement and confirmed statistical significance.

Table

*Pretest to Posttest Mean Change for Questionnaire*

Question	Pretest	Posttest	Change	<i>p</i> -value
My current level of knowledge for counselling at-risk youth allows me to intervene appropriately and professionally.	1.77	4.14	2.37	0.00
If I were counselling an at-risk youth, who displayed aggressive behaviour, I would know the counselling intervention (s) required.	1.77	4.05	2.28	0.00
My current level of knowledge about the ethical responsibilities of a counsellor is sufficient for me to offer professional counselling interventions.	1.50	4.27	2.77	0.00
My current level of knowledge about providing counselling support to parent whose teens are at risk for criminal activity is high.	1.68	4.14	2.46	0.00
If an at-risk youth revealed that they had been sexually abused, I would know how to initiate the legal reporting process.	1.86	4.64	2.78	0.00
My level of knowledge about alternative measures for at-risk youth in the Criminal Justice System is sufficient.	1.77	4.59	2.82	0.00
I have a high level of knowledge about the risk factors at-risk youth face, and why youth become entrenched in the criminal justice system.	1.91	4.50	2.59	0.00
My level of knowledge about the right technique to use when counselling at-risk youths is sufficient.	1.68	4.09	2.41	0.00
My current knowledge about addiction and appropriate interventions and referrals are sufficient to counsel.	1.55	4.27	2.72	0.00
My current level of knowledge about preparing, understanding, and presenting a PowerPoint presentation on a specific				

counselling intervention for at-risk youth is high.	2.09	4.41	2.32	0.00
I am confident and equipped to counsel at-risk youth.	1.27	4.18	2.91	0.00

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*Note.*  $p < .05$ . Response options for Questions 1-11 are based on the Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

The purposes of the research in this study were three-fold. Using a collective and collaborative initiative throughout the research, the researcher identified the then current skills and experience of the participants:

1. To create hands-on examples and add to the practical knowledge level of all participants to create a give-and-take teaching and learning environment. This will lead to equipping the overall group with counseling skills and improving their proficiency for their particular field of work.

2. To bridge the gap between school dropout and criminal activity by educating professionals regarding the risk factors facing at-risk youth.

3. To enhance the initial training that became more holistic due to the collaboration and diversity of participants who brought specific skills and experiences to the classes.

The success of the research was determined by the impact the program had on equipping the participants with counseling skills, and motivating some of the subjects to provide further training to similar target groups upon completion of the course.

With the appropriate intervention, recognizing the risk factors by trained professionals and deterring further criminal behavior justifies the value of equipping professionals who have access to at-risk youth. Equipping all individuals who have any contact with at-risk youth is pertinent for the reduction of recidivism. It stands to reason that the more training in the field of counseling, the more effective the interventions will

be. At-risk adolescents fall through the cracks every day, even though their workers and professionals have daily contact with them. It is imperative that all professionals working with at-risk adolescents have the proper counseling skills that could potentially prevent incarceration and a life-involving criminal activity. Many youth can avoid encapsulation in the CJS if their issues are recognized and dealt with. Proper counseling education and training will (a) build confidence in the then current professionals with the resources to intervene, (b) help motivate and support at-risk youth to excel in the academic field, and (c) ensure support for the youth to reach their full potential.

#### *Methods and Research Procedures*

The commencement of the research analysis began immediately and was ongoing as the study progressed. Meetings to review the input of participants upon completion of each class were carried out with the researcher and the assistant.

with the numbers, allocated to each participant, were not disclosed.

#### *Qualitative Research*

Throughout the research, adult education principles were used to enhance the program and ensure that a broad spectrum of information was distributed throughout participants' group sessions. Each participant was given four questions to complete individually (see Table). Four groups of 4 to 6 people were assigned numbers from 1 to 4. Participants shared their individual perspectives and responded collectively in writing to the four research questions.

#### *Focus Group Responses*

The responses from the focus group discussions were collected and analyzed by this researcher. A compilation of those questions and responses follows.

*In your own words, what is the main goal of the Criminology Counselling Skills Level 1 research project?* Clear evidence of the goals of the research came to light when the focus group participants said that they understood the rationale behind the study, and found the information to be pertinent to their futures in working with at-risk populations. Group 1 indicated that

If we can achieve some formal training and knowledge about appropriate interventions, many more professionals will be equipped to deal with the youth that are falling through the cracks in our system. There is a long waiting list in our province; some are not aware of the free services that are available. Even if they are aware, they may not know how to access them. If all this information is provided through this course, we may be able to get more youth at risk the help they need before it is too late.

The intuition by the researcher was that, if a few people could get training in the research, it would have a far-reaching impact. This was confirmed by Group 2 who stated, “Even if only a handful of people feel more equipped to counsel youth at risk, then we feel the program has been a success because these people can then pass their knowledge on to other professionals.”

*What are the expected outcomes of the counselling course?* Group 3 clarified an important summation: “This course was not designed to teach people to become formal counsellors.” The course was implemented so that people working with at-risk populations could be better equipped to intervene.

All of the groups fully understood the goals of the course, which is reiterated by Group 3 members: “The goal of the research project was to promote awareness of issues that affect the youth of the day and how to help those youth.” Members of Group 4 stated, “We think that we have been taught a lot of diverse things in the course and that everything will be helpful. We think that everyone will be able to provide the at-risk

youth today with the help they deserve.”

While collective statements confirmed that the course was in line with the research goals, individuals continued to confirm this fact. One participant stated,

I think that our group agrees that this course has helped them and would help anyone who may come into contact with children throughout their lives. I think this course can be helpful to one's self as well in everyday activities.

Another participant summed it up by stating that “[this course] provided us with knowledge to be able to get-in-the-front-door with the person in need.”

An important component in criminology is to teach people about the sociological impact on the lives of many who are at risk. It was refreshing to hear this was achieved in class discussions, and also to find comments by one respondent: “[this course] has taught me to be less judgmental and to better accept those around me despite their addictions or their unfortunate circumstances that have caused them such pain in their lives.”

One response that was collected read, “I believe that our counselling skills can only improve and provide stronger guidance and direction for those in need.” Another response read, “I believe that the course was a strong program of study and one that greatly benefited those in attendance. To gain knowledge so that one can better help others is a wonderful thing, and this course certainly accomplished that.”

One group resounded what was being stated vocally by the participants and was reiterated in the qualitative research:

To enter into a program of this nature without the ability to counsel or even recognize youth who are at risk, and then to leave with an increased ability to counsel and know what at-risk youth are, is measuring the success of this program enthusiastically.

Another group wrote, “With the information presented in this course, participants gained a wealth of useful knowledge and, most importantly, awareness so now, upon

completion, they can implement their skills and continue to build upon it throughout their career.” An additional response was, “I believe this course examines addictions, abuse, law enforcement as well as the CJS and the youth that become involved in these issues.”

One member of the focus groups responded, “I believe that the majority of professionals have been more involved with the obvious aspects of their jobs, such as the teaching curriculums and grading assignments than they have been with addressing abuse or potential involvement with the law. This course helps to include issues that may otherwise be avoided or ignored all together.” Additionally, another response was,

I believe the main goal of the Criminology Counselling Course Project is to educate and equip professionals with useful knowledge pertaining to youth. This knowledge should increase professional’s confidence when counselling or working with at-risk youth. This course gives an overview of many concepts and lightly touches on all topics that may apply to at-risk youth.

Finally, the last response reads, “I also now have many more places and people I know that I can refer youth to for guidance and help.”

*What kinds of measurable outcomes will there be at the conclusion of the counselling course?* The majority of the groups reiterated the questions in the pretests and posttests as being variables that could be measured in the conclusion of the research. “We believe the program is deemed successful if even a few participants become better equipped to help at-risk youth. These people can then pass on their knowledge to other professionals.” Individual journals were used to ensure that participants were gaining knowledge after each session; therefore, as one participant stated, “I would have to say that our journal entries would be useful in deciding whether or not learning has occurred.” This was indeed the case, and journals helped as various suggestions and comments helped shape the delivery of the course.

One measurable outcome as stated by one group was that “More communication with various community resources was needed.” This issue will be addressed further in the recommendations. All groups who participated are willing to go the extra mile to educate and implement programs to equip potential counsellors working with at-risk youth. This was obvious by the overwhelming response of individuals and groups to participate. One group stated, “There is definitely an interest by the participants to want to make a difference so that shows that there is a need for the course.” This statement relates to the presenters as well who believed the need for increased awareness about the issues addressed in the course.

*How has your group decided whether or not the program will be deemed successful?* That is, do the participants feel more equipped to counsel at-risk youth? It became clear that participants gained knowledge and insights from this course and were feeling more equipped to intervene in a counselling capacity as was revealed by the posttests. The following comment summed up the general consensus by all groups:

There are many resources to use and to refer to for the participants. Hearing from guest speakers and other professionals that deal with at-risk youth helped make many connections for us. They have shared personal stories and experiences with participants that will always stay with us. We have new tools to use for listening, dealing with stress, and keeping balance in our own lives. Throughout the presentations made, we had to do some research for various topics which made us more aware of what resources are out there and what type of approaches to take when counselling. Most of us are in the service field now and are doing incidental counselling in our positions; the program helped fine-tune some of the skills and provided us with more tools for counselling.

The researcher, having worked at the grass-roots level for 2 decades, had an indication prior to the research that there was a gap. Both the qualitative and quantitative research revealed just how large the gap is. Filling the gap and providing a safety net for at-risk youth and the people who work with the youth would be accomplished as a result

of the individuals and agencies displaying such enthusiasm.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This applied dissertation addressed the importance of equipping individuals who work with at-risk populations with the proper interventions and referrals appropriate to the individual situations. The researcher wanted to measure if the intervention positively affected participants' perceptions of youth at risk. The participants would be better equipped to more appropriately intervene in a plethora of situations and circumstances.

The purpose of the research in this study was three-fold:

1. To equip the overall group with counseling skills and enhancing their expertise for their field of work using a collective and collaborative initiative throughout the research. The researcher depended on the skills and expertise of all participants to achieve a teaching and learning environment.

2. To further train professionals about the risk factors facing at-risk youth in an attempt to bridge the gap between school dropout and criminal activity.

3. To enhance the training that was more holistic due to the collaboration and diversity of participants who brought specific skills and experiences to the classes.

The success of the research was determined by the impact the program had on equipping the participants with counseling skills and motivating them to provide further training to similar target groups.

The research aimed at proving a gap existed in relationship to recognize at risk, know appropriate interventions, and work with professionals in the province to focus on a solution to bridge the gap. The results revealed the success of the course by the increased knowledge and confidence levels of participants.

*Research Questions*

Once the data was collected and the course was completed, the three research questions guiding the research were analyzed to evaluate the success of the initiative.

*Upon the completion of a certificate course in counseling, do participants feel more equipped to counsel?* Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, and 11 were specifically directed to gather information to answer this. All of these questions revealed significant changes with the  $p$  value results being  $< 0.05$ , which confirms that participants had acquired more confidence to intervene. One focus group's response resounded that,

If we can achieve certification in counseling without obtaining a master's degree, many more professionals will be equipped to deal with the youth who are falling through the cracks in our system. There is a long waiting list in our province; some youth were not aware of the free services that are available or they may not know how to access them. If all this information is provided through the training in this course, we may be able to access more help for the youth at risk before it is too late.

Another individual wrote, "I believe the course was a strong course and one that greatly benefited those in attendance. To gain the knowledge to better help others is a wonderful thing, and this course certainly accomplished that."

*Which areas of counseling training are needed the most?* While the course proved to be highly successful, the researcher believed that more sessions focusing on counseling techniques, such as behavior modification, were needed. Participants expressed an interest in attending this type of training session. One focus group stated, "With the information presented in this course, participants gained a wealth of useful knowledge and, most importantly, awareness to be able to implement these skills and to continue to build on them throughout their career."

During the training, the researcher did a PowerPoint presentation on the impact of poverty on the learning ability of children, which is a major risk factor for at-risk youth.

The emotional issues, which are directly related to aggression, can often lead to criminal activity. Understanding why some children are acting the way they do is a result of their socioeconomic status; the lack of proper nutrition was an eye opener for the teachers in attendance. One teacher wrote, “I thought I had a defiant child and never really looked at the root cause of the behavior, although I was aware of the family’s lower socioeconomic status.”

*How has the study improved the problem area?* The research has improved the study area as a result of the literature review which brought to light many issues, which are often deeply embedded and covered with Band-Aid™ solutions. The study impacted participants to see the whole picture and to increase their desire to intervene for a lasting solution, thus reducing the number of at-risk individuals. One participant summed up what appears to be a consensus of the groups, “With the information presented in this course, participants gained a wealth of useful knowledge and increased the level of awareness so that they could implement their skills and continue to build upon them throughout their careers.”

In addition, the researcher anticipated this study would add to the body of knowledge concerning the need for all individuals who come in contact with at-risk youth receive training. The results provided strong evidence for the support for future research, program development, and program delivery.

### *Recommendations*

While society may feel that prevention measures for at-risk youth are too costly, Ryan (2001) stated that “the cost to society is far higher when schools and communities fail to improve the adaptive behaviour of this growing population.” One adult committed

a crime in order to be incarcerated to receive proper programming. Judge Nichols (Judge: Addiction, 2005) stated, “It’s a shocking and pitiful state when someone has to commit a crime in order to get help” (p. A1). The same article in the Daily Gleaner indicates the cost to house one inmate with an addiction problem in prison is \$80,000 to \$100,000 annually. Judge Nichols (Judge: Addiction) reiterated the need for preventive programs: “It’s a very unfortunate situation in the province [New Brunswick], given the millions of dollars from Ottawa that (are) supposed to be for health purposes” (p. A2). Specific funding for educational prevention programs, which offer long term solutions, needed to be funnelled into the province.

How many more youth have to fall between the cracks and end up in prison before we get a safety net into place? Providing a safety net that is appropriate and meets individual needs will help youth develop into healthy adults. A Project Safety Net (Alabama Center for Law and Civic Education, 2005) report stated, “Our children need effective programs, need to be approached across the board with communitywide programs, need to coordinate the efforts of our schools and the community at large, and need programs that make effective use of limited resources available” (p. 3). It is imperative that we reach overall communities with specific training to ensure that all youth are recognized and appropriate interventions are available.

By working collaboratively and collectively, participating professionals would gain a stronger voice and raise awareness of the issues of youth at risk and help equip more professionals with intervention strategies. Project Safety Net (Alabama Center for Law and Civic Education, 2005) contended, “A collective initiative will be cost effective, and when the resources available to address the needs of at-risk youth are limited, the

need to focus these resources on programs that work is greatly increased” (p. 1). A mechanism needs to be established to enable all providers to work cooperatively and collaboratively to improve the programs available to professionals working with at-risk youth in every area and, specifically, at the grassroots level. Therefore, delivering educational information, which will enhance the opportunity to intervene with at-risk youth, will help to connect the youth to the agencies who can help them the most.

By working collaboratively with the numerous agencies, which include members from the police, RCMP, government, community-based groups, and teaching professionals, we can collectively bring the individual expertise to the development of the course to ensure that all pertinent areas are addressed. The collaboration of the various issues into a manageable program needs to be developed. A U.S. Department of Health (2002) stated, “No one sector, acting alone, can ensure that all people acquire the competencies, character, and protection they need to seize the opportunities that lie ahead. The time is right to make youth development a national [and provincial] priority” (p. 2).

### *Grass Roots*

Reliance on grassroots organizations, individuals, and leadership is a necessity as many of the youth at risk have ties to these groups, specifically through the CJS Alternative Methods, Restorative Justice, and Fine Option programs. Many people at the grass roots who come into contact with the youth are volunteers or work for minimum wage. In fact, on the W. K Kellogg Foundation Web site (1998), it is recorded that

People at the grass roots often feel unconnected to their communities and distance. A large part of the challenge of leadership development is connecting with people at the grass roots. People who get involved at this level are responding to a sense of higher purpose that goes beyond individual interests.

(p. 1)

Many grassroots leaders were there because they relate to the people they work with and would benefit greatly from educational opportunities that will give them more confidence in their positions. It appears that communities are getting to the heart of the problems when we work collectively and include the grassroots organizations in the development and the delivery of essential programs. According to the Washington State Youth Suicide Prevention Program (1997), when citizens take action, they are offering “an invitation to hope and to life” (p. 11). Reaching out to a troubled young adult is not an easy prospect. It requires courage and compassion in collaboration with the right training.

It is pertinent that we include all sectors of society, especially Aboriginal communities, where the risk factors are prevalent to the creation of putting these youth at a greater risk. Reports show that Canada’s high school dropout rate is considerably higher compared to other countries. The Canadian Public Health Association (2003) reported, “Aboriginals are twice as likely to drop out of high school or not have postsecondary diploma compared to non-Aboriginals, . . . and, in 1996, 45% of Aboriginals aged 20 to 29 years had less than high school” (p. 29). A disproportionate number of Aboriginals are incarcerated annually. NASP (2001) stated that the sad thing is that “their [at-risk students’] alienation from society and school has often been blamed for recent random acts of violence in our nation’s schools” (p. 1).

#### *Program Development and Delivery*

The Washington State Youth Suicide Prevention Program (1997) was formed when a group of concerned individuals banded together to form a grassroots movement. Thousands of people continue to receive this program. One gatekeeper trainer in the

Washington State Youth Suicide Prevention Program stated, “We all need suicide prevention training--just like CPR” (p. 1). The program argued strongly for a 2-day workshop.

This researcher echoed this approach regarding the Criminology Counselling Skills course. The researcher believed that one of the most important issues was “the development of a grassroots network of crisis workers and gatekeepers representing lay people, parents, and professionals” (p. 9). As a cardiology technologist, the researcher was very involved with training of medical professionals in hospital settings; therefore, the researcher would recommend that mass training be implemented with the concepts addressed within this study and the course intervention. Mass training will include all sectors of society to ensure a strong safety net is put in place.

### *Recommendations*

There are nine recommendations provided as a result of this research project:

1. It is recommended that an ad hoc committee consisting of the various partners and, specifically an Aboriginal leader, be formed.
2. It is recommended that a collective and collaborative initiative and development of a proposal be used, which would focus on the refinement of the Criminology Counselling and Skills course.
3. It is recommended that funding at the local, provincial, and federal government levels to assist with the initial course development and delivery be pursued.
4. It is recommended that a course be created that consists of instructor’s and student’s manuals, PowerPoint presentations, student assignments, tests, course evaluation forms, and instructor evaluation forms.

5. It is recommended that the sustainability of the course will result as participant completion cards expiring every 2 years.

6. It is recommended that participants will work on updating the program and be paid from revenue generated from the sale of the course material and participant fees.

7. It is recommended that there be mass training of lead instructors who, in turn, will teach ongoing classes and community courses. Lead instructors will include individuals working with at-risk youth, the at-risk youths, and their extended family members.

8. It is recommended that partnerships with colleges across the province be pursued to encourage their becoming leaders in the delivery of the program.

9. It is recommended that there be a mass media campaign to promote the course and the benefits. Mass media would include brochures, public service announcements, and newspaper ads.

### *Summary*

In an effort to enhance skills and the facilitation of learning for people who are involved with youth at risk, the researcher implemented a comprehensive counselling program to help better equip participants as they work with youth at risk. The results in this study were a strong indicator that many agencies, organizations, and individuals are eager to provide a safety net for our youth who may become involved in criminal activity. Mass training about the issues facing our youth, who may become entrenched in the CJS, would ensure that better opportunities and interventions are recognized as preventive measures and improve the quality of life of many youth and the providers who are concerned about their future.

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