

Personal Effectiveness

Prisoner outcomes from the Life Skills program

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Presentation topics

- About the Life Skills program
- Evaluation questions and methods
- Findings from the evaluation
- Implications of the findings and suggestions for the future

The Life Skills program

"[Learning Life Skills] doesn't start with your release, it starts now...I pay it forward instead of being part of the problem. I'm going to speak to the men out there. There's power in words, I see that now...I walk the walk. I stay out of trouble. I respect the guards and the teachers. I have certificates. I have a good work ethic...I have integrity all day long, not just behind closed doors. ... I will use that out there in work and relationships."

- Participant

The Life Skills program

- The goal: successfully prepare participants for reentry and reduce recidivism
- How?
 - Improve participants' life skills for self-development, healthy relationships, conflict management, and other individual-specific areas
 - Increase quantity and quality of community connections for participants, and
 - Improve behavior among participants.

The Life Skills program

- Initially a pilot at Faribault facility
- Funded by the US Department of Education for expansion at four facilities (Faribault, Lino Lakes, Moose Lake and Shakopee)
- Served over 700 participants as of April 2009

The Life Skills program

- All students participate in the power of people/personal effectiveness classes
- An individual assessment helps students and staff select additional training:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Power of People • Empowerment • Financial Management • Job Skills • Parenting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking for a Change • Conflict Management • Relationships • Phillip Roy computer-based Life Skills
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Evaluation questions

- Who participated in the program?
- What were the individual needs and goals of students?
- What did students accomplish?
- How did students change?

Evaluation methods

- Used both qualitative and quantitative data
- Used an innovative retrospective pre/post-test survey design.
- Participants, staff and partners all contributed ideas

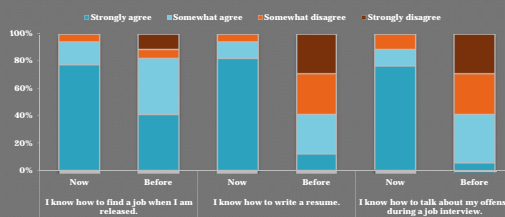
Life Skills impacts

• Participants improved their:

- Understanding of money management skills
- Understanding of healthy relationships
- Understanding of how to make changes in their lives
- Decision-making skills
- Communication skills
- Self-esteem and self-worth
- Conflict resolution skills

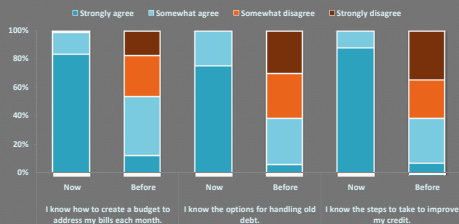
Life Skills impacts

- About 70% more participants "strongly agree" that they know how to write a resume and talk about their offense during a job interview after the program than before.



Life Skills impacts

- 70-80% more participants "strongly agree" that they know how to create a budget, have options to manage old debt and what steps to take to improve their credit after the program than before.



Life Skills impacts

• Participants see improvements in their attitude toward money, budgeting and improving credit:

- "[The Financial Management course] helped teach me that money has value and that working a 40-hour job to pay my bills is a good value to have..."
- "We're all in debt coming out of jail. This class taught me how [to fix it] and why fixing it is so important"
- "Hopefully I will be able to build credit and have financial security. Prior to being here I relied on drug money and I don't have to do that anymore. I want to work and have financial security legally."

Participants

Life Skills impacts

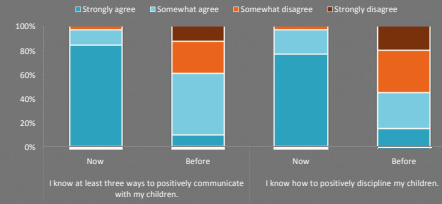
- A Financial Management instructor shared a key outcome she observed in participants' during the class:

- *"I think the number one observation I had during classes is the ability [of participants] to recognize that the approval of something [like] a credit card, or a loan, does not equate to [being able to afford it]. [Being approved is] not a favor. Being able to understand that is important to your release. Being able to spot predatory lending [is important]. Understanding that when you are offered something, you have to assess whether that fits your individual situation and your own paycheck."*

Instructor

Life Skills impacts

- About 60-75% more participants "strongly agree" that they know how to positively communicate with their children, and know how to positively discipline their children after the program than before.



Life Skills impacts

- Participants see improvements in their understanding how to be a better parent :

- *"I grew up old school. The belt, the switch....I grew up that way. I was really strict with my kids. The spankings... [The classes] taught me that spankings won't take care of it."*

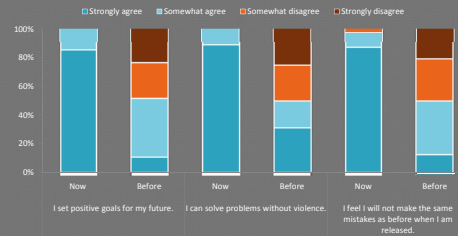
- *"When my daughter talks to me I will look in her eyes. I will be on her level, not domineering. Body posture. It's not just the words...I just want to be a good parent. My being here may have a disastrous effect [on her]...What I did... shapes her beliefs. I know this now. That knowledge, that self-awareness is the biggest thing. Now that you are aware, you can change."*

- *"I want to be there for them. [To be] an example that I wasn't in the past."*

Participants

Life Skills impacts

- About 60-75% more participants "strongly agree" that they set positive goals for their future, can solve problems without violence and feel they will not make the same mistakes after the program than before.



Life Skills impacts

- Participants see improvements in their ability to react to problems without violence and think positively about future goals:

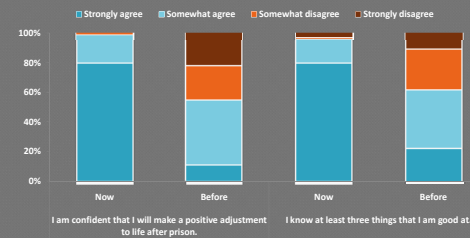
- *"I learned that I can confront and understand problems without getting aggressive; that I can be more assertive about what I want rather than aggressive. I spend more time processing what happened and don't just react. I can learn and make my point without having to fight. I can make myself understood."*

- *"I get in trouble with my feelings. If I feel someone is belittling my feelings I get angry and want to do something to them and that's not good. Now, I just let it go and talk to a friend about it. Tell him what's on my mind. It helps a lot. He can help me find a way to deal with the situation, [to] do something different."*

Participants

Life Skills impacts

- 60-70% more participants "strongly agree" that they are confident they can make a positive adjustment to life after prison, and know at least 3 things they are good at after the program than before.



Life Skills impacts

- About 50-60% more participants "strongly agree" that they know how to control their feelings and understand when it is appropriate to say certain things after the program than before.

Response	Before	Now
Strongly agree	~10%	~65%
Somewhat agree	~40%	~30%
Somewhat disagree	~45%	~5%
Strongly disagree	~5%	~0%

Response	Before	Now
Strongly agree	~10%	~75%
Somewhat agree	~40%	~15%
Somewhat disagree	~45%	~10%
Strongly disagree	~5%	~0%

Life Skills impacts

- Participants see improvements in their self-esteem and self worth:
 - "I used to feel guilty for everything I did and been through. When I realized how lovable, powerful, valuable and important I am I realized I don't have to be in pain. I was given this right at birth to do good. No one ever told me that. I'm grateful to come back to prison and take this class...Everyone is valuable. I will use that out there in work and relationships."
 - "I feel that... my opinion matters more...I feel people are more equal today. I am just as valuable as they are. I'm ready to go out there and succeed. I have goals and plans for when I leave here."

Participants

Life Skills impacts

- Participants see improvements in their attitude toward decision making and the power to change:
 - "When I was out I really didn't have too many goals in life. I really didn't think about changing who I was. Since I've been in here and taking these classes I have more of a power to change... The whole pursuit of change has really opened my eyes...I'm on a mission."
 - "I want to give back because where I came from nobody tried to give back. One of my passions is to work with troubled juveniles. I've been locked up since I was 16. I don't want them to take the same road... You got to believe in yourself before you can help someone."
 - "Sometimes I feel helpless and make excuses ... Who's going to hire me? I think it gives me hope for the future and a little bit more courage or drive to move forward... I have the power within me to do something about it to change the way I think about things. There is someone out there who is willing to help me - willing to give people chances."

Participants

Life Skills impacts

- Power of People instructors shared key outcomes they observed in participants during the class:
 - "We have a covenant...Participants can't have a major write -up, can't participate in any gang or cult type activities: they become hope and change merchants. You have to sign and agree to it in front of the class...the prison contacted me and said that [The Power of People] got gang members who are not cussing or hanging around gangs."
 - "What we see is that they begin to talk differently. Stop swearing. Start talking about themselves and their future. Messages became much more positive. Had to do as much writing as talking. I began to see a transformation in how they worked, their own internal dialogue."

Instructor

Life Skills impacts

- About 45-65% more participants "strongly agree" that they understand how body language can affect a situation, feel they can be a good friend, and have good control over their behavior after the program than before.

Response	Before	Now
Strongly agree	~10%	~75%
Somewhat agree	~40%	~15%
Somewhat disagree	~45%	~10%
Strongly disagree	~5%	~0%

Response	Before	Now
Strongly agree	~10%	~75%
Somewhat agree	~40%	~15%
Somewhat disagree	~45%	~10%
Strongly disagree	~5%	~0%

Response	Before	Now
Strongly agree	~10%	~60%
Somewhat agree	~40%	~20%
Somewhat disagree	~45%	~15%
Strongly disagree	~5%	~0%

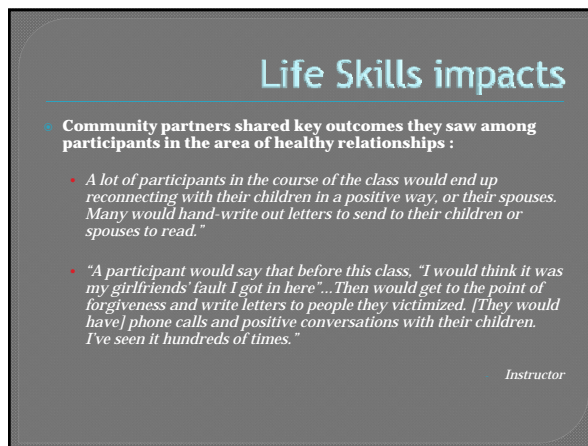
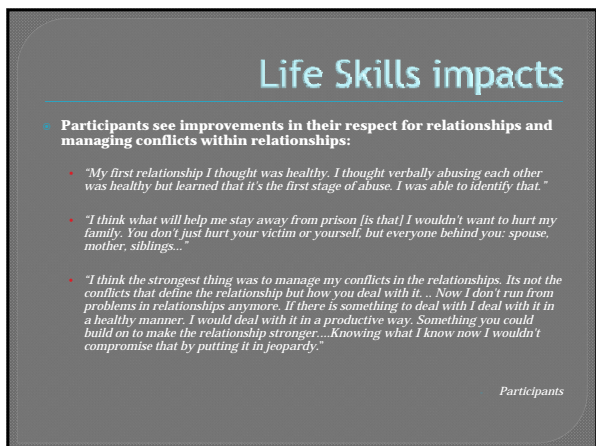
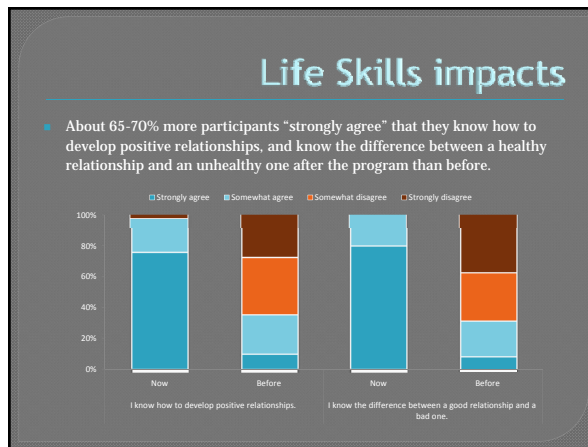
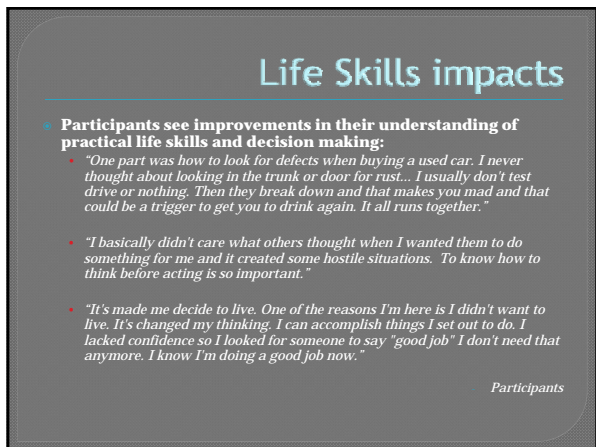
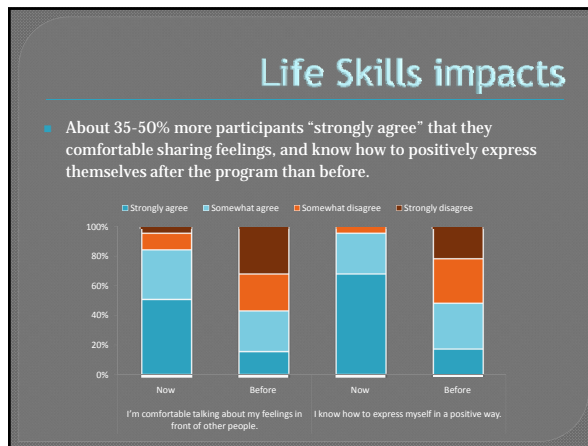
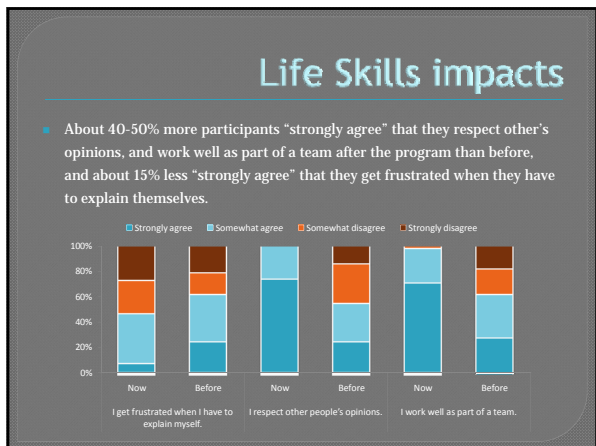
Life Skills impacts

- About 40-60% more participants "strongly agree" that they can stop and think before making decision, know when it is okay to take a good risk, and know nice ways to get cooperation after the program than before.

Response	Before	Now
Strongly agree	~10%	~70%
Somewhat agree	~40%	~15%
Somewhat disagree	~45%	~10%
Strongly disagree	~5%	~0%

Response	Before	Now
Strongly agree	~10%	~55%
Somewhat agree	~40%	~20%
Somewhat disagree	~45%	~15%
Strongly disagree	~5%	~0%

Response	Before	Now
Strongly agree	~10%	~65%
Somewhat agree	~40%	~15%
Somewhat disagree	~45%	~10%
Strongly disagree	~5%	~0%



Life Skills impacts

- At all sites there were marked decreases in disciplinary events among Life Skills participants after beginning the program.

Site	# of Disciplinary events before Life Skills	# of Disciplinary events after Life Skills
Faribault	285	84
Lino Lakes	76	54
Shakopee	183	66
Moose Lake	89	21
TOTAL	633	225

Life Skills post-release impacts

- Community partners work with Life Skills participants after release in a variety of capacities, such as:**
 - Counseling participants on financial issues such as budgeting, establishing credit, debt management and setting financial priorities.
 - Providing group and individual counseling and a social network for Life Skills graduates through the Power of People Leadership Institute.
 - Linking participants with resources such as health (insurance, medical, dental and optical care) and social supports (employment counseling, family reunification, parenting support)

Life Skills post-release impacts

- At time of interviews, partners had worked with just 40 participants post-release.**
- Partners observed that participants face unexpected hurdles post-release and use life skills to address them:**

"[I had one participant who is out now]. He was married and they got back together when he got out, but they couldn't hold on. He works hard in construction and makes good money. He works hard on spending quality time with his daughter and not getting into the drama with his wife. [which is difficult for him] because he had this vision of being with her forever. But she met someone else. He is using good conflict management skills to deal with the hurt. But he understands that right now his daughter is job one."

- Life Skills partner responses

Life Skills post-release impacts

"One of [our graduates] wanted to get out of prison and wanted to be a good father. Immediately [upon release] he said, 'I need a job and I need housing.' He got a job. But then he wanted a better job, but he didn't have the skills. Ordinarily, he would have just quit then and wouldn't have had a job, and wouldn't have been able to see his son, and would have gone back to prison. But now, after being in the program, he stuck with the job and decided to grow with that job and be patient and be in his son's life. For him, he decided to take a moment and think who he is: to stay with the job, be reconnected with this son and get his life in balance again. He is doing well."

- Life Skills partner responses

Life Skills participant thoughts

- "This program gives inmates hope of leading a normal life after their release."*
- "I think it's exceptional. I think it should be mandated to each person that comes through these doors. At the end of the day then the one thing they can't claim is ignorance."*
- "I think all the volunteers who came in...it didn't seem like just a paycheck or a job to them. They seemed truly concerned with equipping us with the tools we need because it not only affects us but affects all of society when we are ill-equipped."*
- "It showed me a lot. I grew up on the street. It showed me where to get help and how to do things. I always wanted to do things my own way and not listen to anybody else. Now I listen to other people and that's how I learn. And nobody has gave up on me. They always help me here."*

Participants

Implications

- The program model that combined a basic, personal effectiveness program with individualized lessons was a good fit for participants
- Participants and partners attributed the success of the program to the fact that it was holistic and individualized
- There were stronger short-term outcomes than expected (in-facility discipline)

Implications

- Participants with a longer time to release could benefit from advanced modules
- Building the leadership skills of participants who completed modules, such as engaging them as student teachers, gives them an opportunity to practice life skills while still incarcerated
- Because offenders face so many barriers (employment, strained relationships, financial) post-release, partnerships with community organizations can be beneficial

Questions/contact

- Any questions?
- For more information about the evaluation, contact:
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- An electronic version of this presentation can be found at:
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