

Best of the NETWORKER

Feature Articles from Past Issues

The Northwest Youth Networker; newsletter of the [Northwest Network for Youth](#), edited by [Jerry Fest](#) of the [InterNetwork for Youth](#)

August 2009, Issues 65-68

[Subscribe Here](#)

Note: some links from older issues may be expired



Nomination for the Youth Development Worker Hall of Fame the Cheshire Cat??

By Jerry Fest

OK, he's a cat ... a fictional one at that ... but that doesn't mean we can't learn something from him, particularly in the area of youth-adult partnerships. His skills related to this area are some of the best I've ever seen. You see, one of the things that often interferes with our ability to engage with young people as partners is the adult tendency to "take over" situations. Rather than letting young people process and struggle to find their way, we get impatient and are too quick to jump in and solve their problems for them. After all, adults know the answers, right? We know what a young person should do, Right? So we ask for their input; they say "I dunno what do you think I should do?" -- and we see that as permission to tell them. The next thing we know we don't have a partnership; we have adult-directed activity.

Young people are often not used to dealing with adults as equal partners. Their natural tendency is to let us make the decisions and offer direction. Sure, they don't always follow our direction, but it takes some time before they are comfortable with taking responsibility for direction, preferring instead to throw the ball of responsibility into our court. When we are too quick to pick up that ball of responsibility we sabotage partnership. A better skill is to learn how to pass the ball back.

This is where Mr. Cat's skills really shine; and I'll demonstrate that through a case study. One day while working at a center called Down the Rabbit Hole, an adolescent girl dropped in (literally) named Alysha (not her real name, to protect her confidentiality). Alysha needed some direction in her life, so she approached Mr. Cat and asked:

"Would you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here?"

A less skilled worker might have jumped at the opportunity to take control of her life, advising her about education, or employment, or dealing with her issues (there is some evidence that Alysha may have been involved with drugs). But Mr. Cat understood that the best way to help Alysha is to help her with her *development*, and to do that he would need to see her as a partner; with his responsibility being to help her achieve her goals rather than to create them. So what was Mr. Cat's response?

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to!"

Note that he was not refusing to help; he was only identifying the fact that he did not yet know *how* to help her, because she had not yet decided on what was important to her. Alysha, however, is undaunted by his reluctance to take responsibility for her life:

"I don't much care where ..."

Again, a less skilled worker would have demonstrated low expectations by *believing* this statement. High expectations would interpret this statement not as a fact, but a fear ... a fear of taking responsibility, or of believing in oneself. So, instead of buying into this and telling Alysha what to do, Mr. Cat challenges the statement:

“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go!”

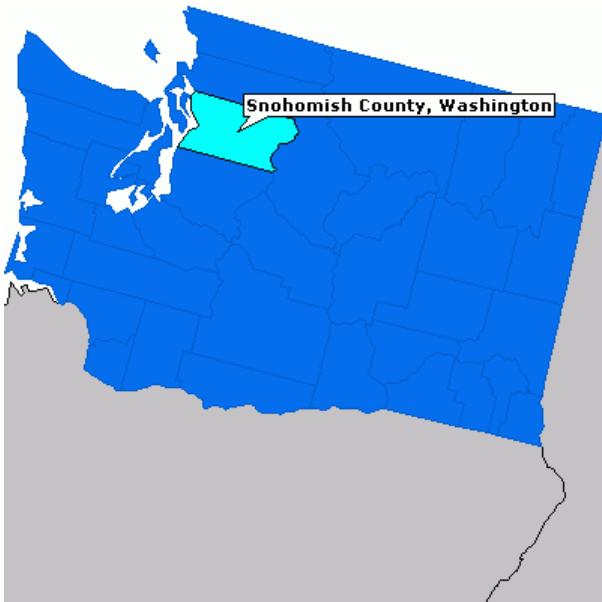
Alysha is forced to confront the fact that she does indeed care where she wants to get to, but ... being the quintessential adolescent ... is still not ready to accept the fact that *she* is the power and authority in her life, and she tries once more to throw the ball of responsibility into Mr. Cat’s court:

“... so long as I get SOMEWHERE!”

But Mr. Cat ... and this is what truly qualifies him for the Youth Development Hall of Fame ... skillfully, and for the *third* time, passes the ball right back to Alysha:

“Oh, you’re sure to do that, if you only walk long enough.”

Please understand, Mr. Cat was not unwilling to help ... he was only unwilling to control Alysha’s choices. It was her responsibility, and *right*, to determine where she wanted to go. Once she made that decision, Mr. Cat would do everything he could to help her get there ... and he’d do it with a huge smile on his face!



Interview with Craig Daly, Snohomish Co. (WA) Juvenile Justice Administrator

By Gary Hammons

Following completion of the three part book review of *Preventing and Reducing Juvenile Delinquency* by James C. Howell (see *Networker* issues LXI, LXII, and LXIII, available at the [InterNetwork for Youth](#)), I had an extended telephone conversation with Craig Daly. He shared a number of developments and measures his agency and the State of Washington have implemented in the past few years. This was particularly interesting as Howell cited Washington State several times in a very positive context.

Among these was implementation of the research based “Targeted Assessment Tool.” Craig noted that when the tool is properly administered very reliable and useful results are obtained. Further, deployment of “Aggression Replacement Therapy” and the “Functional Family Training” model are often used in conjunction with the assessment tool; and this (and other services) has resulted in a more than 50% reduction in long term juvenile detention across the State. His own agency has also used case manager counseling with a decline in their detention population from 90 to 33 young people. Other measures have included drug courts, artist in residence, mandatory after school programs for kids on probation or parole as well as special court provisions with judges conversant with the entire spectrum of progressive juvenile justice.

Most interesting was/is Craig’s ability to cite extensive research and data regarding improvements in juvenile justice services. He noted that he and others from Washington (State) have made presentations and contributions in many other states. There has been continuing discourse with leading researchers and policy

makers. Demonstrating the commitment of the State, two quality assurance staff members interact with all juvenile justice programs to verify proper implementation of the assessment tool and prescribed interventions.

Even with these efforts, Craig noted that there remain some unresolved concerns such as how to deal with juveniles as they turn 18. In addition, issues such as prosecuting juveniles as adults for serious crimes too often leads to lifelong criminal behavior; and some aspects of juvenile detention policy remain very political and not based on research. Even with these, it was encouraging to encounter Craig's professionalism, expertise and commitment to make life better for young people in trouble with the law.



Evaluation Feedback: Cultural Superiority?

By Jerry Fest

A valuable aspect of the presentations I do often comes in the evaluations that attendees return. I thought this week I'd respond to one such piece of feedback that I received after a recent presentation on the culture of the streets. This feedback said, in part, "There are many moral questions raised by the concept of cross-cultural interaction, i.e., the implicit moral judgment that "our" culture is superior (e.g., safer, healthier, more ideal) to "theirs." Feedback like that gets me thinking and, in reflecting on this comment, I came up with a trio of thoughts.

My first thought is that "implicit moral judgments" are in no way the point of defining the differences between street culture and mainstream or dominant culture. The point is simply to stress the fact that there are distinct cultural differences and working with street youth is by definition cross-cultural work. Difficulties that services encounter when offering assistance can often be less the result of difficulties with the young person, and more the result of inadequately considering cultural influences. I am not trying to build a case that one culture is morally superior to the other, only that the two cultures have different values and perspectives. If these differences are not recognized and addressed, conflict can result.

That said; my second thought is that "moral judgments" are not in and of themselves necessarily bad. In some cases, in fact, failure to make moral judgments may be viewed as condoning that which should not be condoned, and in the end may be a disservice to the young people we serve. For example, I may recognize the cultural aspects of survival sex on the streets, but I am not going to be morally neutral about a culture that condones minors surviving by prostituting themselves. Note that in many cases this is not pitting one culture's moral compass against the other, as in the case of survival sex it is more often than not an inter-cultural interaction -- so deciding which culture has the moral high ground becomes a little fuzzy. But to set a goal of moral neutrality in all cases when confronting the culture of the streets strikes me as neither realistic nor a laudable goal.

And finally I started thinking that the entire debate is a digression from the real issue. It doesn't matter whether one culture is or isn't morally superior to the other. The point is whether or not an individual's cultural influences are helping or hurting them. If an individual is being nurtured and their development as a human being is enhanced by the culture of the streets, more power to them. In that case, they're unlikely to be approaching service providers and we're not going to have to worry about the moral implications of our judgments. However, the youth that we are likely to be interacting with in a professional relationship are those for whom the culture of the streets is succeeding in helping them to survive, but failing in helping them to thrive. In these cases we present other options not as morally superior choices, but as alternatives to choices that are not working for them.

Warning: Controversy Ahead ...

By Jerry Fest



It's always risky to take a controversial stand. The unintended consequence of that risk is that we often avoid discussions of controversial issues, which only ensures that they remain un-discussed and controversial. So, when I came across an article about a bill being considered in the Philippines that would criminalize a wide range of corporal punishments for children (see "Beyond the Region" below), I decided to throw caution to the wind and present my views on the subject.

I should point out that this controversy is not limited to the United States. The bill in the Philippines is only one example of a global effort to end corporal punishment (click on the logo above to visit the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children). But the discussion in the States usually revolves around a few key questions:

1. Should legal guardians be permitted to use corporal punishment, including spanking, with their own children?
2. Should corporal punishment be allowed with other people's children, such as in schools, for example? School-based corporal punishment is still legal in 21 states.
3. Should the use of corporal punishment against children be criminalized (as is being proposed in the Philippines)?
4. Does the use of corporal punishment work; that is, does it improve discipline or correct behaviors?

I recognize that people I respect may have differing views on the topic, particularly when we speak of spanking for discipline. Even those who may agree that corporal punishment should not be permitted in settings such as schools often condone a swat on the butt to get a kid's attention. But for me it's an issue of basic human rights. I personally feel that all people have the right to be free from violence, and I make no exceptions for unruly children. The fact is that this wouldn't even be a question if we were talking about any adult population, including criminals. It is only where children are concerned that we as a society condone using violence as a behavior management technique. So, for questions 1 & 2, you can pretty much guess my personal answer would be "no."

However, I would also answer "no" to question 3, and I oppose special legislation regarding spanking and other forms of corporal punishment. For me, the solution does not lie in more laws protecting children; it lies in considering children to be *protected by the law*. It is already illegal for me to hit another human being. If I ever tried to spank an unruly employee to correct their behavior I'd end up unemployed and in jail. Yet when I do the same thing to a human being too vulnerable to protect themselves due to their age and legal status it is considered acceptable, even responsible, behavior.

As for question 4, my answer is "it doesn't matter." I am not an end-justifies-the-means kind of guy. Whether or not something works is not a measurement of whether we should have a right to do it. There is evidence that we can reduce crime rates by profiling ... does that justify profiling? You could prove to me beyond any reasonable doubt that corporal punishment achieves laudable ends and it would not change my answers to the first 3 questions.

As always, the Networker acknowledges and invites different opinions on this topic.