

## **Finding new ways to reach men that have been in the corrections system**

What is the root cause of crime? Why do people commit crimes? Is the reason because of poverty, drugs, lack of education, drug use, underemployment or poor relationships? What does the criminal justice system, lawyers, judges, jails, prisons, probation officers and police departments do to address these causes?

Bruce Cooper, a new Master's Level Therapist at Turtle Creek Valley MH/MR, Inc.'s Alternatives Chemical Dependency program is working to address these issues.

Bruce's first job at TCV was to facilitate a men's early recovery group. The majority of these men were referred to Alternatives from the Department of Corrections. While he discussed early recovery issues with these men, he soon noticed that they didn't identify themselves as addicts. Although most of them had extensive drug histories, they had little or no understanding of addiction and/or the recovery process. Most of these men had been incarcerated for years and had not used a chemical during those years, therefore, they didn't think that they had a drug or alcohol problem anymore.

The Men's Early Recovery Group was divided between those who admitted that they were addicts and those who didn't have problems with drugs. Bruce noticed that the men who said that they didn't have a problem with drugs, had some thinking patterns that were somewhat irrational.

Bruce had to learn and understand how criminals think. Many criminals have a different view of the world. Criminals cause crime. Crime is not caused by bad neighborhoods, inadequate parents, television, schools, drugs or unemployment. If that were the case, everyone that is unemployed would commit crimes. Everyone that came from a "bad" neighborhoods would commit crimes. Bruce says "I'm not saying these things don't play a part in, but to say these things "cause" crime is erroneous."

People who resort to criminal activity to either support their addiction or make crime a profession have different attitudes towards rules and authority. They also have a strong commitment to continued drug use that is not found in the usual chemically dependent person. One of the goals of Bruce's treatment at TCV MH/MR, Inc. was to prevent the men from re-offending. This usually begins by breaking through denial and finding out what would make each person reoffend.

Most of the men in the early recovery group have a different belief system than normal people in treatment. Bruce began to focus on the thoughts that drove their behavior. The change seen in those in treatment at TCV is through a process of learning to recognize beliefs and patterns of thinking that lead to self-destructive behavior. Once the beliefs and thinking pattern are identified, they are analyzed to learn which thoughts bring positive consequences and which bring negative consequences. In order to be successful in treatment, the thinking errors must be replaced with beliefs and thoughts that bring positive consequences.

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They must begin to get honest with others and then themselves. The person is asked to face things about themselves that they have probably hidden for years.

Each week, the group of offenders have homework and in class assignments. The group members learn how to identify where their thinking comes from, how they use that error to support their behavior and how to challenge the beliefs that drive their thinking.

In the twelve weeks, group members will successfully complete the program where they can admit to various thinking errors, can describe how those errors have led to anger, criminal activities, relapse, insubordination or self defeating behaviors. They will also learn how to have responsible thinking patterns that will lead them to more responsible relationships and lifestyles.

Currently, the group gets referrals from Community Corrections, Renewal, Gateway Braddock, CC 1 in the North Side and CC 2 in Shadyside and from some judges and parole officers. Bruce would like to create a multi level support environment to help these offenders from falling through the cracks