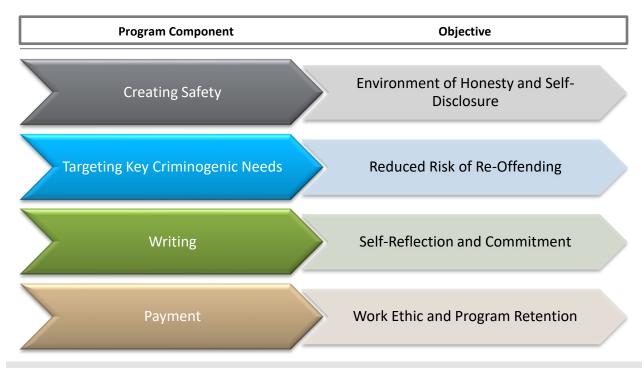# KEVIN GRANT CURRICULUM FOR PROBATIONERS GROUP

PROGRAM APPROACH AND GOALS

Kevin Grant's Probationers Group is designed to help participants develop self-understanding and cultivate tools that will reduce their likelihood of re-offending. Participants meet in regular sessions that cover different themes, including mapping your future, high-risk relationships, costs and benefits of your high-risk choices, wasted time/productive time, and graduation/looking forward. The program is informed by Kevin Grant's professional training in Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions, Rational Behavior Therapy, Framework for Recovery, and coursework in abnormal psychology, group dynamics, family relationships, and being a helping professional. Additionally, Kevin draws upon his own life story, which has included criminal involvement, incarceration, and a pivot toward working with justice system-involved youth. He uses personal narrative to create an environment of honesty, humility, and vulnerability, and to encourage similar sharing by participants. Toward the end of the course, Kevin attempts to connect the participants with mentors who can continue to connect with participants to support them as they pursue personal, educational, and professional aspirations.

The components of the program sessions include creating safety, targeting key criminogenic needs, writing, and payment for participation. Each of these components has a corresponding program objective, as listed in the diagram below.

Program Component	Objective
Creating Safety	Environment of Honesty and Self-Disclosure
Targeting Key Criminogenic Needs	Reduced Risk of Re-Offending
Writing	Self-Reflection and Commitment
Payment	Work Ethic and Program Retention

CREATING SAFETY FOR SELF-DISCLOSURE

Kevin uses his own story to build rapport with the participants. Because his story includes youthful risk-taking, criminal behavior, antisocial peer associations, incarceration, and eventually a turning point toward giving back to

the community, it helps set a tone for open self-disclosure, humility, and courageous honesty. Kevin is very forthright with the mistakes he has made over the course of his life. This approach is known to promote a growth mindset by emphasizing how he has grown, and continues to grow, from those mistakes (Dweck, 2006). This sort of self-disclosure has also been shown to help to participants in therapeutic environments overcome shame (Barrett & Berman, 2001; Safran & Muran, 1996), and is useful in creating trust in therapeutic adult-youth relationships (Diamond, Liddle, et al., 1999; Leichtentritt and Shechtman, 1998; Smith, 2010).

In every session, Kevin uses examples from his own life to illustrate how a given set of circumstances can be challenging, and how challenge can set the stage for personal growth. He uses self-deprecating humor to disarm the participants and to create an atmosphere where they may feel more willing to divulge their own mistakes and their own hopes for personal growth.

TARGETING KEY CRIMINOGENIC RISKS AND NEEDS

The curriculum is designed to target key dynamic criminogenic risks and needs. Specifically, in sessions and writing assignments participants are asked to think about whether or not they have high-risk relationships, and if so, how to change those risks or those relationships (to address the criminogenic risk/need of _antisocial peers_ and to enable reflection on _family relationships_). Sessions and assignments promote self-reflection about past and future choices (to help participants understand and adjust their own _attitudes and values_). The class creates opportunities for participants to identify the benefits and costs of past high-risk behavior, contemplate other means for achieving benefits, and to develop self-talk and self-regulation (to help them develop _problem-solving skills_). And course content focuses participants' attention on their future professional and life goals, and what steps they will need to take to get there (to address criminogenic needs associated with _education and employment_).

USING WRITING AS A METHOD FOR SELF-REFLECTION AND SOLIDIFYING COMMITMENT

At every session (except for graduation day) the participants are given a writing assignment in which they are asked to reflect upon the session's theme. Participants read their assignments aloud at the following session. The purpose of the writing assignment is manifold:

- It increases the time the participants spend focused on the subject matter covered in the course;
- It gives them an opportunity to think more deeply and more concretely about the session's theme, which often produces more candid reflection than what might be revealed through spoken participation alone;
- It prompts them to put in writing a vision for change, which in turn solidifies their commitment to that change (Matthews, 2013); and
- At the end of the course, it provides them with a final work-product from the course which helps impart a sense of accomplishment.

PAYMENT TO ENSURE PROGRAM RETENTION AND TEACH WORK ETHIC

Participants are paid for attendance and for the completion of writing assignments. Payments generally fall into $10 disbursals, so a participant will be promised $10 for attending the session, and $10 for submitting a one-page writing assignment. Participants who deliver writing assignments in excess of the page expectation may be given increased sums, based on the length and thoughtfulness of their essays.

The concept of payment for participation was Kevin Grant's, although it does have some basis in research. A study in 2005 found that low-income youth were indeed more motivated toward deeper academic commitment, and, perhaps most importantly, enhanced self-identification as scholars, when their academic work resulted in monetary stipends along with conventional rewards (Spencer, Noll & Cassidy, 2005). Elsewhere, payment for probationers is being implemented as a means to enhance cognitive-behavioral supports and to reinforce positive behaviors and emergent identities (Wolf, et al., 2015).

RESEARCH BASE

CRIMINOGENIC RISKS AND NEEDS

The most promising research in reducing the likelihood of juvenile as well as adult offender recidivism has focused on the principles of risk, need, and responsivity (RNR). According to Andrews and Bonta (2007), "1) the risk principle asserts that criminal behaviour can be reliably predicted and that treatment should focus on the higher risk offenders; 2) the need principle highlights the importance of criminogenic needs in the design and delivery of treatment; and 3) the responsivity principle describes how the treatment should be provided."[1] Research has found repeatedly that the dynamic criminogenic need factors most closely related to recidivism are an _antisocial personality pattern_ (marked by impulsiveness, aggression, stimulation-seeking); _procriminal attitudes/antisocial cognition_ (such as negative attitudes towards the law, values, thinking styles, and general attitudes supportive of crime); and _social supports for crime_ (criminal friends, isolation from prosocial others). Other dynamic criminogenic risks related to recidivism include substance abuse, low educational or employment achievement/stability, family problems, and a lack of involvement in prosocial leisure activities (Andrews & Bonta, 2006; Andrews & Bonta, 2007; Latessa & Lowenkamp, 2005; Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2006; Sullivan & Latessa, 2011). Kevin Grant's program focuses on several of these dynamic criminogenic needs. Discussions and assignments encourage participants to reflect upon risk-taking, impulsiveness, and stimulation-seeking; Kevin uses his own story to prompt honest discussions around criminal thinking and pro-criminal attitudes; and an entire session is devoted to discussing high-risk and antisocial relationships (including family).

COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL

Research shows that interventions based on surveillance, control, deterrence, or discipline are ineffective (Mackenzie & Farrington, 2015). While many traditional programs for probationers use these ineffective approaches, Kevin Grant's program approach is informed by the research on cognitive-behavioral interventions. Cognitive-behavioral interventions have been shown to be an effective way to support youthful offenders and to minimize their risk of future involvement with the juvenile or criminal justice system (Latessa, 2006; Landenberger & Lipsey, 2005; Mackenzie & Farrington, 2015), and are recommended in the RNR literature (Andrews & Bonta, 2006; Andrews & Bonta, 2007; Latessa & Lowenkamp, 2005; Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2006; Sullivan & Latessa, 2011). With a cognitive-behavioral frame, interactions with participants are understood as opportunities to identify helpful and unhelpful behaviors, establish goals, and develop skills to solve problems and implement new

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[1] Please note that the "risk principle" requires assessment that should happen before participants enter into Kevin Grant's program. The research indicates that services should be concentrated on the highest risk offenders, and that intervention directed toward low-risk offenders may actually _increase_ their likelihood of recidivism (Andrews & Bonta). Probation departments partnering with Kevin Grant should ensure that groups comprise only offenders or probationers at higher risk for recidivism – this is ideally ascertained using a validated risk/strength/need instrument/tool (Andrews & Bonta, 2006; Sullivan & Latessa, 2011).

behaviors to facilitate effective coping (Beck, 2011; Benjamin, et al., 2011). There are several discussion topics and written assignments which are specifically designed along these lines. For example, the visioning exercise and map analogy help establish goals, the discussion and assignments that center on high-risk relationships and activities (including substance use) help participants identify helpful and unhelpful behaviors, and the discussions and assignments on wasted versus productive time, and finding substitutes for high-risk behaviors focus participants on safe and effective coping.

BUILDING ASSETS AND GOAL SETTING

Goal-setting has been shown to be an important method for motivating young people to achieve in their studies and in their emotional development (Schuler, Sheldon & Frohlich, 2010; Sheldon & Cooper, 2008; Smith, 1973; Smith, 1975). Kevin Grant's approach uses goal-setting to help participants recognize their long-term aspirations and connect those aspirations to actions they can take today. The visioning exercise in the first session, the wasted time/productive time discussion and assignment, and the connection with mentors are all program elements that go to this important principle.

GENDER RESPONSIVE

There is a substantial body of research that indicates that models to address criminogenic risk and need should be modified when working with girls and women (Anderson, Barnes, et al., 2016; Anderson, Davidson, et al., 2016; Onifade, Davidson & Campbell, 2009; Smith, Cullen & Latessa, 2009). Specifically, the role of interpersonal relationships stands out as part of women's pathways to involvement in criminal behavior and the juvenile and criminal justice systems (Barry, 2011; Hollin & Palmer, 2006;), including abusive family and interpersonal relationships in childhood, adolescence and adulthood (Hollin & Palmer; Severson, Berry & Postmus, 2011). For this reason, when Kevin's groups are gender-specific, and when he runs a group for female participants, there is an emphasis on interpersonal relationships and high-risk associations, and includes a discussion of domestic violence.

CURRICULUM

Research has shown that improved outcomes are achieved when a therapeutic intervention first transforms adolescents' negative expectations about the treatment, then focuses on the tangible benefit of the experience by emphasizing action- and goal-oriented work (Diamond, Liddle, et al., 1999). During the course, the group moves through a number of themes which gradually become more concrete and goal-oriented. The first session establishes an environment of honest self-disclosure and acknowledges potential resistance, middle sessions address resisting influence and understanding the costs and benefits of high risk relationships and choices, and the final sessions focus on productivity toward future goals. The following description lays out a the general subject-matter and sequencing which is applied to courses of varying length and session number.

SESSION CONTENT

Introductions – All go around and introduce themselves.

Creating Safety and Establishing Expectation for Honesty – Facilitator acknowledges that there may be trust and resistance issues (transforming negative expectations), and uses personal narrative to disarm the group, establish honest space, and model a willingness to talk about weaknesses and mistakes. This narrative includes decisions about education, fear, drug use, incarceration, etc.

Map: You Are Here – Facilitator uses a map metaphor with the "You Are Here" sticker to designate one's starting place in a journey. Participants are asked to honestly assess where they are, to imagine they had a daughter/son and to reflect upon whether this would be what they wanted for her/him (gender-specific, depending on gender of the group). Facilitator explains that if you want to get anywhere you have to know where you are now; next you must set a destination.

Visioning Circle – This is a destination-setting exercise in which all participants contemplate what they are going to be doing in five years. Facilitator prompts participants to explore if this goal is achievable, what direction they would have to move in, and what concrete steps they would have to take to get there.

Resisting Influence – Facilitator asks what influences might pull participants off the path to their destination, and leads a frank discussion of these influences (includes personal narrative). He urges participants to set their goals and hold them as their guideposts. He uses the following adages to illustrate his point:

- "If I don't stand for something I'll fall for anything"
- "If I only do what I always did, I will only get what I always got"

Defining Risk – Facilitator uses metaphor to illustrate high risk versus low risk. He frames risk within participants' goals, five-year plans, and agreements with themselves to have a good week. He asks participants to think honestly about any high-risk relationships they may have. The facilitator uses examples from his own life, including personal risks in youth, drug use, school attendance, false sense of knowledge, defiance, fighting, and building a self-identity as someone who makes "stupid mistakes."

Supportive Relationships – Facilitator provides examples of supportive and unsupportive relationships (in girls group, there is a particular focus on romantic partner relationships, which research shows is often a pathway into offending for young women (Barry, 2011)). Domestic violence and patterns of unhealthy or high-risk relationships are also discussed (also a common experience among female offenders (Severson, et al, 2011)).

Social Justice Context – Facilitator frames individual choices within an understanding of social justice, mass incarceration, and criminal justice spending, and asks participants to reflect upon their role in that system. He asks them to think about whom/what they are helping and harming when they engage in high-risk choices (drugs, peers who pull them off their path) versus productive choices (peers who are moving in a positive direction).

Time as an Asset – Facilitator defines _assets_ for participants and frames the most valuable asset we have as _time_. He asks participants to revisit their goals, short-term and long-term, and to identify some specific goals they would like to achieve. He emphasizes that the things we want in life have to match up with the things we are working on in life, and provides examples from his own life. He encourages participants to conceptualize 86,400 seconds in a day in a monetary metaphor and encourages researching career paths.

To Change or Not to Change – Facilitator emphasizes that the point is to learn and grown from our mistakes. He talks about the distinction between changing some of your choices, and changing who you are. The facilitator uses the historical belief that the world was flat to illustrate the need for the courageous sort of risk-taking associated with growth mindset – transferring skills to productive ends, and doing so with a mentor.

Cycle of Anger – Facilitator illustrates the cycle of anger with a diagram showing various phases and where the cycle can be interrupted. The concept of self-talk is discussed, and examples are provided for how self-talk can escalate or de-escalate an emotional response. Self-regulation is emphasized.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Who Am I? – Facilitator introduces the assignment by telling his own story of the first time he was incarcerated – how resolve melted away with peer influence, pride in delinquency, and _underlying fear_. This sets the expectation for candid self-disclosure in the written assignment. This concludes with the facilitator prompting participants to commit in advance to completing the assignment. Finally, the facilitator tells them that next week he's going to ask them if there were a video tape filming them from today to next week, would that be a tape that could be shown without exposing them to the risk of going back to jail? Proactive expectation-setting has been shown to improve youth responsiveness (Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998).

What Are Your High Risk Relationships? – Facilitator acknowledges that it may be scary, stating that some of our highest-risk relationships may also be our closest relationships in our lives.

What were the gifts and what were the problems that your high-risk behavior brought you? – Facilitator provides examples from his own life (weed and boxing), and provides examples of other ways that he could get these gifts without the risks and problems (replacement behaviors).

How much time have you wasted in the past, and how much more time do you want to waste? – Facilitator explains the assignment as a way for participants to reflect upon their own agency in their lives. Participants identify concrete goals, and discuss in writing how past actions have or have not advanced them toward these goals, then identify steps they will take from this point forward to get them closer to these goals, and what strategies they will use to keep themselves from being derailed off the path.

Pre and Post – Participants are asked to write about how they felt when they were first told that they had to come to this class, and now that they've completed it how do they feel? This final assignment allows participants to reflect upon the value of the course and to mark their progress. It also serves as a qualitative program evaluation tool.

EXERCISES FOR EVERY SESSION

Reading of Written Assignments – During every session that involves turning in a writing assignment, participants are asked to read their written assignments aloud one at a time. Readings are met with applause, praise of effort, and recognition of courage and candor.

Discussion of Themes – Readings are followed by a reflection on themes brought up in the personal narratives, including the facilitator relating his own narrative to aspects of the story. Themes raised often include self-esteem, difficult peer relationships, challenging family relationships, self-talk, resisting risk, personal goals, the value of mentorships, and the long-term influence of and slow turnaround from negative input.

Accountability from Previous Commitment – Facilitator asks participants if their behavior in the past week is consistent with the statement that they didn't want to go back to jail? Progress is acknowledged.

GUEST SPEAKERS – LINKAGES

Life Stories – Guest speakers are invited to recount their stories of risk, high-risk relationships, the influences that pulled them off their paths, and, for some, resulting incarceration. Participants are asked to reflect upon these story, and identify any parallels to their own stories.

Potential Mentors – Late in the course, potential mentors from the community come to sessions to join the discussion, share their stories, discuss the impact of trauma, domestic violence, antisocial peer relationships, reaching personal goals, and the value of mentorship.

Linkages – The Facilitator follows up with participants and connects them with the mentor to whom they are most well suited.

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