

The Circle of Courage Bike Ride: Community responses to building resilience.

Funded by:

Australasian Research Institute

Research undertaken by:

Department of Psychology- Social Health & Applied
Psychology Programs



Who are we?

Kim Godbout

- Conducted the research as part of her Master Social Health
- Currently working as a child and family counsellor

Michelle Dickson

- Supervisory role in the research project
- Currently Program Director for Postgraduate programs in Social Health & Applied Psychology, Department of Psychology, Macquarie University



The Circle of Courage- the bike ride



- Adventist Health, supported by Australasian Research Institute, is an organisation that aims to improve the health of young people
- In 2005 a team of six cyclists and a support crew cycled 4456 km from Perth to Sydney in 31 days



- Invited residents of 30 towns along the way to learn about the concept of resilience in young people and to take positive steps to reduce at-risk behaviour through social connectedness
- Team was lead by Jonathan Duffy, the director of Adventist Health, and consisted of teachers, health professionals, and youth workers



The team gave a community presentation at each town...



- based on the Circle of Courage model
- founded by Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern in 1990
- Foundation: North American Indian culture, which encouraged the virtues of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity
- Each individual is seen as belonging to a whole, using generosity to contribute their wisdom to their community, drawing on their inherent mastery of life to share ideas and thoughts, and taking the step forward as independent people, able to make wise choices about how to live life



The four core values of the Circle of Courage model encompass universal developmental needs of all children :

1. Belongingness
2. Mastery
3. Independence
4. Generosity



According to the Circle of Courage model...



- behaviours such as alcohol and other drug use, crime, and teenage pregnancy, share as a root cause the loss of belonging to social networks and the resulting loss of opportunities for healthy development
- the absence of social connectedness within strong communities is devastating for young people, BUT positive community contexts can be transformational, and can be an effective form of prevention.



The Circle of Courage Bike Ride project..



- aimed to empower adults to take the leading active role to connect with young adolescents in their community, and consequently strengthen and sustain adolescent resilience
- recognised that the capacity for resilience is not invulnerable, rather it requires nurturance



Kim's role...



- to evaluate the experience of adults who attended the Circle of Courage Bike Ride presentations
- to investigate their perceptions about the role they as adults play in the lives of the young people in their communities.
- joined the team in the NSW towns of Hay and Narrandera in the Riverina district 300 km southwest of Sydney
- was a part of the evening presentation in Narrandera, where she invited the audience to volunteer in the research project.



Surveys and Focus groups



- Audience members at each presentation participated in filling out a survey both before and after the presentation
- There were 197 survey respondents
- In Narrandera they were also invited to participate in future focus groups, one that was held shortly after the presentation, and the other that was held 4 months after



Key Findings



- Participants were overwhelmingly positive in their reaction to the presentation
- A large proportion expressed intentions to act on the challenge to get to know the young people in their community
- Some evidence of a shift from assigning blame to being less judgemental and more empathic of situations young people find themselves in
- Respondents were more hopeful for the future of young people



Focus Group comments, 4 months after the presentation

- Resilience interventions should be context specific and invite community participation
- there was little evidence of change, and much discussion around barriers that prevented them from acting in accordance with their beliefs and intentions



Barriers...



- Community found that they had little opportunity to engage with and help young people- no access to potential social connections, as participant's children were of adult age.

Clare:

I think when you've got kids going to school yourself though you are more aware of when kids aren't supervised or what they're doing. Your kids will come home so you'll be aware of the problems with this one or the problems with that one, you know what I mean, but then after your kids have left school you sort of lose that contact.



Social and political barriers



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Focus group members experienced a lack of perceived power to have influence when others' values are so different:

- diverse approaches to parenting and modelling behaviour
- parents of young people would view assistance as interfering
- schools were seen as ineffective
- laws around children's rights were seen to take power away from individuals
- teachers and youth workers teach children government-enforced rights without expectation of fulfilling responsibilities
- law enforcement agencies do not hold young people accountable for their actions



Issues explored



- Barriers to increased social connectedness
- The larger social system
- Empowerment
- Community capacity building
- Resilient communities



Implications for practice



- Investigate how needs are getting met in the four different core values of the Circle of Courage- belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity
- Do they have meaningful relationships with significant adults who can nurture and develop skills and qualities in the young person, and who can help open up opportunities for the young person to use those skills and qualities to contribute to the well being of other people?
- In what ways can any of these values be developed in the young person?



Implications for practice



- Paying attention to how I can help improve the young person's life is just as important as addressing a problem that the young person or parent presents with.
- Clients with younger children have found the model to be helpful as a guide to areas of their children's life that need attention and effort, and in particular I focus on speaking about the importance of having people in their lives.
- Kids need significant adults in their lives in order to develop a sense that they are valued. They need to have people in whom they can turn, and unless you have a well-established relationship with them, they won't even know they could go to you for assistance.



It is a longstanding finding in research on resilience that one relationship can make an enormous difference in a person's life.

As important as our individual relationships with young people are, they are not enough, especially in the face of barriers to change. While a single relationship is powerful, the power of more than one is exponential (Benard, 2004).



The Circle of Courage model is a holistic model that describes the benefits that are bestowed on a young person through a relationship:

- love
- value and nurturing
- personal responsibility and accountability
- decision making abilities
- the acquisition of skills for the betterment of one's self and for the benefit of others
- opportunities for participation and generosity
- meaning to life



- We need to honour and nurture this innate potential to resilience by providing environments in which relationships can occur, across boundaries and barriers, so that this potential can be realised
- An empowerment approach includes a level of community participation in analysis, planning and implementation, and also an explicit focus on community capacity building
- This approach of building strengths, rather than focussing on risk-prevention, will lead to more resilient communities comprised of resilient individuals

