A COGNITIVE-BASED THERAPY PROGRAM FOR
INCARCERATED JUVENILES IN
MERCED COUNTY

A Project Presented to the Faculty of
California State University, Stanislaus

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
of Master of Social Work

By
Torrie Alyn Hughes
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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Date

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Date
DEDICATION

The last two years of Graduate School have been scary, amazing, exciting, and an adventure that I am extremely delighted to have embarked on. There are three people who I have been blessed with who have helped me through this journey, and I am dedicating this Graduate Project to them.

My cousin Tyra, from applications, to interview questions, from resumes to simple words of encouragement I would not have applied to the Masters of Social Work Program if it were not for her. She introduced me to the world of Social Justice, explained how Social Work would allow me to take the world by storm in so many different aspects, and has answered every text, late night email, and given me remarkable advice from start to finish. Thank you so much, I love you.

The next two people I am thanking, words will never be able to describe the appreciation and gratitude I have for them. My parents and two of my best friends, Roger and Marcea. For all of the times I have called my dad in a panic and he has calmed me down and told me how smart I am, and for my mother never letting a conversation end without her telling me how proud she is of me, those words mean so much I thank you both. You have encouraged me, prayed for me, embraced my weirdness, and taught me to stand on my own, knowing that I can always fall back and you’ll be there. I love you both so much.

Without my family I would be nothing. Vincent you understand college and the demands, thank you for taking care of our family, love you. To my siblings, Shari...
I love you, thank you for always being proud of me and sticking up for me. To Terrin and Jordan my little brothers and my heart, I love you and thank you for the laughs and for always understanding me no matter what. I am so proud of you both for all you’ve done.
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This Graduate Project would not have been completed without the patience, guidance, and talented professors that you both are. I am truly grateful for the time and support given, thank you both so much.

Also a special thank you to Total Self Insight and Merced County Probation for working with me in efforts to help reduce rates of recidivism in the juveniles they serve. And to Lauren McFarlin for introducing me to this opportunity, I am truly grateful.
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ABSTRACT

Although not common knowledge, it is not undisclosed that juvenile recidivism rates are in need of reduction. However, not all community partners or service providers are aware of the growing information available to assist with this objective. The following document describes a project designed to be the foundation of an Evidence-Based, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy curriculum. The project was a proposal created on behalf of Total Self Insight, which stemmed from a request made by Merced County Probation. The proposal looked into evidence-based programs and literature already in place to construct a formal presentation that was submitted for approval. The project promoted healthy family dynamics, paid attention to the necessities of high risk incarcerated youth, and worked to lay the groundwork for a curriculum to reduce recidivism rates in juveniles.
OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVE OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this graduate project was to develop a proposal for the creation of a short-term cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) intervention curriculum for juveniles. This graduate project stemmed from a request from the Merced County Probation Department. The Merced County Probation Department requested the assistance of a non-profit organization, Total Self Insight, to help rehabilitate juvenile offenders. The graduate project involved working to create a proposal for a curriculum that will: reduce aggressive behavior; enhance a healthier family dynamic, including better cohesion and family communication; and increase the knowledge of effects, long and short-term, of substance abuse in juvenile offenders. Since the Merced County Juvenile Probation Department and TSI were looking for a new affective way to reach out to their juvenile offenders and help reduce their recidivism rate, this graduate project was the first step to creating the curriculum that would help obtain those goals.

There were two objectives to this graduate project. The first objective was the creation of a written proposal that was created on the behalf of Total Self Insight. Once TSI approved the graduate project proposal, the second objective was to make a formal presentation to the Merced County Juvenile Probation Department and to gain approval for the creation of a cognitive-behavioral therapy intervention curriculum by TSI. The graduate project has proposed a curriculum influenced by the following theoretical models: Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), Relational therapy,
Motivational interviewing, Solution-focused counseling, and the Strengths-based approach.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Exploring related literature was a crucial component in creating this graduate project. Examining different aspects of evidence-based curriculums that were already in place to help rehabilitate juveniles has aided in the creation of a short-term evidence-based therapy intervention proposal and the future creation of the new curriculum by Total Self Insight.

Evidence-Based Practice with Adolescence

With more than ten years of solid evidence now available regarding what does and does not work in preventing juvenile delinquency and reducing recidivism, jurisdictions should be adopting an evidence-based approach to implementing new programs (Greenwood, 2008). Cost-benefit studies conducted by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) indicate that many evidence-based programs can produce savings of or around the order of five to ten times their cost. When asked to estimate how a substantial increase in spending on evidence-based programs would affect projected prison bed requirements, the analysis, published in 2006, showed that doubling current investments in high-quality programs could eliminate the need for additional prison capacity (Greenwood, 2008).

By researching pertinent literature on evidence-based programs for juvenile offenders, there were a number of key elements found which included group participation, skilled decision making, and relationship building that were able to provide a proposal that was appropriate and relevant to present an effective and
persuasive approach. By using the gathered literature, which is stated in the following section, the quality of the proposal has been significantly enhanced.

**Evidence-Based Programs**

Before attempting to design the intervention program for use in Merced County, it was imperative to determine whether there were preexisting evidence-based programs that might be applicable. There were three existing programs that have been relevant to this project: Aggression Replacement Training (ART), Student Created Aggression Replacement Education (SCARE), and Building Lives on Cooperation Knowledge Skills (BLOCKS).

ART is a 10-week, 30-session cognitive-behavioral intervention broken into three components: social skills training, anger control training, and training in moral reasoning. Participants attend one 1-hour session in each of the three components per week (Glick, 2007; Glick & Gibbs, 2011). The implementation of social skills training focuses on the behavioral components of ART, while anger control focuses on the affective component and moral reasoning takes a look into the cognitive component (Glick & Gibbs, 2011). Group member motivation and resistance, combined with enhancing generalization of performance, are all applied for program effectiveness (Glick & Gibbs, 2011). The goal of ART is to reduce aggression and violence among youth by providing opportunities for them to learn pro-social skills, how to control their angry impulses, and take perspectives other than their own (Glick & Gibbs, 2011). What also makes ART favorable is that it can be taught to children
and adolescents from all socioeconomic backgrounds in rural, urban, and suburban communities (Glick, 2007).

The ART program was implemented at Uniting Networks for Youth, a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA), funded project administered through Ramsey County Juvenile Probation from in Washington 2001 to 2004; during this time, 283 youth, aged 12 to 18, received ART at one of four different sites: a residential program, a school-based program, and two community-based programs, all youth were on probation (Glick, 2007). Three months after discharged from the program, follow-ups with the youth and their parents indicated that: 80 percent of youth reported no additional arrests, 79 percent of parents and 75 percent of youth reported that the program helped youth improve relationships with teachers, and 80 percent of parents and 92 percent of youth felt that ART helped the youth become more responsible (Glick, 2007). Further research reveals that participation in ART groups reduced the 18-month felony recidivism rate by 16 percent compared to standard juvenile court services for youth assessed to be moderate- to high-risk (Barnoski, 2004; Ross, Antonowicz, & Dhuluval, 1996).

SCARE is a school-based program designed after polling students about what skills would be most important for reducing violence among their peers. The three primary objectives are to: 1) teach young people about emotions, 2) help young people recognize alternatives to violent behavior and aggressive responses, and 3) encourage young people to make good decisions in response to provocative situations. SCARE is broken into the following three components: recognizing anger
and violence in community; managing and reducing self-expression of anger; and defusing anger and violence in others (McWhriter, McWhriter, McWhriter, & McWhriter, 2007). SCARE demonstrates statistically significant decreases in anger and increases in anger control when compared with the control group, suggesting that the SCARE students were able to alter the way they typically handled situations and their own anger responses (OJJDP, 2012; Herrmann & McWhriter, 2001). In terms of aggression, intervention students showed significant reductions in aggressive attitudes at posttest and delayed follow-up (OJJDP, 2012).

BLOCKS, is a program that focuses on increasing skills such as cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control (McWhriter, McWhriter, McWhriter, & McWhriter, 2007). This program works on building and negotiating relationships and is designed to increase students’ ability to negotiate successful interactions with others while promoting interpersonal and friendship skills, leading to better social adjustment (McWhriter, McWhriter, McWhriter, & McWhriter, 2007). Research has shown that the acquisition of social skills can positively affect academic achievement during the time they are taught as well as in the long-term adjustment (McWhriter, McWhriter, McWhriter, & McWhriter, 2007).

According to experts, the adolescent period is characterized by the search for identify and clarification of values. One of the most important needs of youth during this period is experiencing successes that will lead to a sense of individuality and connectedness, which in turn leads to self-confidence and self-respect (Bartollas & Miller, 2011). Additionally, the focus on peer relationships makes group therapy the
ideal choice for adolescents. A study comparing group treatment for aggressive behavior in adjudicated male adolescents established that older youth are more responsive to a program integrating group interaction with cognitive-behavioral training, while younger individuals responded better to a leader-guided, highly structured format (Martsch, 2005).

In thinking about what skills and knowledge might be of most value to adjudicated youth, the creator of this graduate project, in addition to the incorporation of evidence-based programs, has adopted the Five C’s of Competencies of McWhirter et al., which have been determined to capture the difference between low-risk and high-risk youth. These characteristics are as follows: 1) Critical school competencies, 2) Concept of self, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, 3) Connectedness, 4) Coping ability, and 5) Control. The lack of the above skills has been linked to chronic dependency, aggressive behavior, or an inability to cope with life, which propels young people into at-risk categories (i.e., delinquency, substance abuse, etc.). It is in the creator’s contention that creating a foundation and enhancing those areas the Five C’s will promote improved long-term outcomes for youth. Because school competencies (academic skills) are outside the scope of TSI’s practice, the creator will suggest that the proposed curriculum focus on the following four competencies: Concept of self, self-esteem, self-efficacy (strength-based approach, goal setting and self-esteem building activities); Connectedness (relational skills used by facilitator/counselors, providing information and role-playing communication and relationship skills, and empathy training); Coping ability (anger management component); and
Control (delaying gratification activities and decision-making skills) (McWhriter, McWhriter, McWhriter, & McWhriter, 2007). By using different components from successful evidence-based programs that are already in place and partnering them with four of the Five C’s of Competencies a proposal for a new curriculum has been proposed for TSI.

**Application of Evidence-Based Programs**

ART has been placed in the proposed curriculum in terms of how the three components: social skill training, anger control, and moral reasoning are incorporated together in educating the youth. Social skill training uses modeling, role-playing, performance feedback, and transfer training to teach pro-social skills (Glick & Gibbs, 2011). In anger control training, participating youths must bring to each session one or more descriptions of recent anger-arousing experiences (hassles), and over the duration of the program they are trained specific skills to better control their angry impulses (Glick & Gibbs, 2011). Moral reasoning is designed to enhance youths’ sense of fairness and justice in the world and to provide youths with opportunities to discuss their responses to problem situation taking perspectives other than their own that represent a higher level of moral understating (Glick & Gibbs, 2011).

SCARE consists of 15 sessions that can be daily or twice weekly in 45 to 50 minute in length (OJJDP, 2012). Flexibility is important for the creation of the curriculum so that the youth can participate. The SCARE program was developed to exclusively emphasize violence and aggression beginning in early adolescence, that would allow the new proposed curriculum to be implemented to youth as young as
six years of age and it is not gender specific (OJJDP, 2012; Herrmann & McWhriter, 2001). Because negative actions perceived as intentional will elicit anger, and anger in turn motivates hostile behavior, SCARE focuses on the reattribution of perceived offenses and the control and management of resulting anger (McWhriter, McWhriter, McWhriter, & McWhriter, 2007). This would allow the youth to not just focus on anger, but empathy. Finally, the acquisition of social skills is the main contributor BLOCKS has incorporated into the proposed curriculum. TSI will not be focusing on academic skills because it is out of their scope of practice. Therefore, if the juveniles can acquire skills that will help them with school competence in the future it should be explored. Taking this approach will attempt in trying to improve the success rate of rehabilitated juveniles, save taxpayer dollars, and protect communities from unnecessary crime victimization.
METHODOLOGY

Developing a proposal for a new curriculum design for juvenile offenders in Merced County consisted of four intertwined components. The first (and potentially the most critical) step to the process involved developing a work plan and establishing a working relationship with the community partner Total Self Insight (TSI). TSI is a non-profit organization that teaches and facilitates constructive and respectful communication skills to reduce violence, promote healthy families interactions, and promote self-sufficiency for families and youth at risk. TSI is also dedicated to the rehabilitation of offenders, which is why the Merced County Probation Department supports TSI’s request for a new curriculum to aid the juveniles it serves. The creator of this graduate project worked closely with the director of TSI in order to ensure that the graduate project met the needs of the agency.

In partnership, the creator of this project and the director has established the roles and responsibilities of the members of the dyad and the scope of the graduate project. As part of this work, the director helped provide oversight and direction regarding the core components of the curriculum proposal, provided critical feedback regarding the work as it progressed, and ultimately was responsible for serving as a conduit to the Merced County Probation Department.
Following the development of the partnership and having agreed upon the roles and responsibilities of the graduate student and the scope of the graduate project, the second step of the graduate project involved obtaining credible information from the current knowledge base that has served as a foundation for the development of the curriculum. A complete literature review has been conducted that has looked into different programs and intervention strategies that could benefit the targeted population in a better form than the one already in place. The creator of this graduate project has consulted academic journals as well as the various websites including the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Model Programs Guide and the National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention. The creator was looking for evidence-based treatment approaches that have demonstrated efficacy in the reduction of juvenile recidivism rates. Additionally, the literature review went beyond an exploration of curriculum content. The review has also examined process issues. Specifically, existing programs were examined regarding how the programs were implemented: length of program, qualification of instructors, number of instructors, support staff, and other costs associated with the curriculum.

After the completion of the literature review, the creator then combined the information gathered from the literature review and recommendations from TSI staff to create the process for which the curriculum should be formed. The process includes the content of the curriculum, a plan on how the curriculum should be implemented, and the best ways it could be executed in terms of cost effectiveness. This also
included, but was not limited to, the number of facilitators needed; how many participants should be in the group per session; when the group will meet; and how the group will be conducted.

Once a draft of the curriculum proposal was complete, the creator of this project made a presentation to the director of TSI so that suggestions and changes could be made. The final step was the creator getting support from TSI to make a formal presentation to the Merced County Probation Department. Once the formal presentation was complete, the project will be complete. It was with hope that the proposal gained approval so that TSI could proceed with the creation and implementation of the curriculum proposed.
DISCUSSION

To create this graduate project, a proposal was produced on behalf of Total Self Insight (TSI) in hopes of obtaining approval from Merced County Probation to change and implement an evidence-based cognitive-behavioral therapy curriculum for juvenile offenders in Merced County. Once pre-existing programs were examined and their current success rates were established, it was possible to move forward in designing a curriculum fit for juvenile offenders of diverse backgrounds and situations.

Once a completed draft of the proposal was accomplished it was presented to the Director of TSI for suggestions and critique. Following the minor changes made to the presentation emails were sent to set up a meeting time with the Assistant Chief Probation Officer of Merced County Probation. In attendance at the final presentation were the Director of TSI and the Assistant Chief of the Merced County Probation. Handouts were provided so that each participant could follow along with the PowerPoint or refer back if needed during the discussion.

At the conclusion of the presentation, time was set aside for questions of which most were about budget and a select few about how the curriculum was structured. It was explained that by creating the curriculum from the proposal and implementing it using the staff currently at TSI, with the assistance from interns, the maximum cost to be acquired would come from printed materials. With only 15 sessions, most consisting of role-playing and modeling, paper usage would be
relatively low. As for curriculum questions, the creator assured Merced County
Probation that by pulling main ideas from pre-existing evidence-based programs the
curriculum would be well rounded. There were concerns that core components of the
intervention would be left out; however, by explaining that certain criteria from the
pre-existing materials were not strong enough and therefore substituted with materials
suited for the reduction of recidivism for the juveniles in Merced County, the
apprehensions were resolved. At the conclusion of the meeting the curriculum
received approval, but was left open to suggestions should Merced County Probation
see a need or concern arise with youth they serve.

While coming up with the proposal there were not many limitations or barriers
faced. At a few points, while looking for pre-existing programs, some required a fee
or subscription to their website or company for additional details. For this project
materials accessed were deemed public domain. Another potential barrier was
brought up when looking at the location of where the curriculum would be taught.
Transporting the juveniles to TSI would require at least two probation officers, which
could increase costs. So it was decided that the youth would be treated in the
correctional facility with an officer present for safety precautions. Besides setting a
time and date that worked for everyone to come together to evaluate the proposal,
there were very minimal roads blocks.

A subsequent phase beyond the scope of this project would be, the curriculum
proposal be implemented during the following 2013-2014 academic school year. To
do this, class time has been set aside so that the project can be thoroughly explained
to students who will be starting a thesis or graduate project next semester. The Director of TSI has also agreed to work with future interns in hopes that they can help implement and run group sessions using the curriculum created from this graduate project.
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CURRICULUM PROPOSAL

A Graduate Project By: Torrie Hughes

A COGNITIVE-BASED THERAPY PROGRAM FOR INCARCERATED JUVENILES IN MERCEDES COUNTY

Overview and Objective

- This project is proposing a curriculum change in order to reduce aggressive behavior; enhance a healthier family dynamic, including better cohesion and family communication; and increase the knowledge of effects, long and short-term, of substance abuse in juvenile offenders.
- In addition to reduce in recidivism
What’s Already in Place

- Total Self Insight is a non-profit organization that teaches and facilitates constructive and respectful communication skills to reduce violence, promote healthy families interactions, and promote self-sufficiency for families at risk.
- What they currently offer juvenile offenders:
  - One-on-one counseling sessions
  - Covering Anger Management
- TSI had limited information regarding mental health treatment programs already available to juveniles, which is why the following graduate project is being proposed.

The Project

- Creation of a Proposal for a New Curriculum
- Formal Presentation to the director of TSI
- Formal Presentation to the Assistant Chief Probation Officer of Merced County Probation

  “As I listened to your presentation, it was clear you have a passion for helping. Although I might have asked some tough questions, you stood strong in your beliefs and never wavered on what you believed would be successful with the population in question.”

  - Merced County Probation
The Foundation of the Proposal

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

Definition:
- Cognitive- the influence of one's thinking between the occurrence of a stimulus and response
- Behavioral- Three main approaches:
  - Applied Behavior Analysis (consequences of behavior)
  - Stimulus Response Model (focuses on environmental factors that elicit and maintain a behavior)
  - Social Learning Theory

(Walsh, 2010)
Cognitive- Behavioral Therapy Cont’d

- The relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can be illustrated by: An activating event produces a belief or thought that produces an emotion or action.
- Cognitive- Behavioral Therapy Interventions focus on enhancing the rationality of a client’s thinking.

(Walsh, 2010)

Evidence- Based Practice

- Definition:
  - Evidence-Based Practice attests the importance of the exploration - practice connection.
  - The goal of EBP is to identify effective intervention strategies and robust program models.
  - The process for combining: Well researched interventions with practice experience, ethics, clients, and community preferences, and culture, to guide and inform the delivery of treatments and services, that can be applied to the individual, family, group, organization or policy.

(Milley, O’Mella, & DuBois, 2011)
Evidence-Based Programs that the New Curriculum will be Modeled After

Proposed New Curriculum

- Adopted from Aggression Replacement Training (ART)
  - Combining three components:
  - Social Skills training (modeling, role playing, performance feedback, transfer training to teach prosocial skills).
  - Anger Control involves bringing to each class a recent anger arousing experience (hassle) so that over the duration of the program specific skills are learned to better control anger impulses.
  - Moral Reasoning designed to enhance youths' sense of fairness while teaching them to view situations through a perspective other than their own to represent a higher level of understanding.

  (Glick & Glibo, 2011)
Proposed New Curriculum

- Adopted from Student Created Aggression Replacement Education (SCARE)
  - Fifteen sessions twice weekly in a 45 to 50 minute duration or once a week at 1 hour and 40 minutes. Flexibility is imperative so that youth can participate (OJJDP, 2012).
  - This program is not gender specific and can be implemented in youth as young as six (OJJDP, 2012).
  - Focus on the reattribution of perceived offenses and the control and management of resulting anger (McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 2007).

Proposed New Curriculum

- Adopted from Building Lives on Cooperation Knowledge Skills (BLOCKS)
  - The acquisition of social skills focusing on increasing skills such as cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.
  - Adopted from four of the Five C's
    - Concept of self, self-esteem, self-efficacy, connectedness, coping ability, and control.
Facilitation and Cost-Effectiveness

- Facilitation: Co-leader facilitation. An MSW or Counseling intern, BA: Psychology, Sociology, or related fields.
- Facilitation will take place in the correctional facility with 6-10 participants at a time.
- A study published in 2006, showed that doubling current investments in high-quality programs could eliminate the need for additional prison capacity (Greenwood, 2006).
- By creating a curriculum from the presented proposal, the most acquired cost would come from time spent creating the curriculum, printing materials and the time spent by the facilitators.

Additional Therapies to be Incorporated into the New Curriculum
Relational Therapy

- Our problems are caused by our perception of life situations and thoughts, not by the situations themselves, others, or past events (Corey, Corey & Corey, 2014).
- Teaches members to avoid rating and condemning themselves (Corey, Corey & Corey, 2014).
- Blends techniques to change the members’ patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting (Corey, Corey & Corey, 2014).
- Designed to induce client to critically examine their past beliefs and behaviors (Corey, Corey & Corey, 2014).
- Coping Self-Statements: teaching members how faulty beliefs can be countered by rational, coping self-statements (Corey, Corey & Corey, 2014).
- Effective for working with diverse population due to the treatment being able to be tailored to an individual, focuses on the present and the brevity of the approach (Corey, Corey & Corey, 2014).

Motivational Interviewing

- Central goal of Motivational Interviewing is to increase internal motivation to change based on the personal goals and values of the client (as cited in Corey, Corey & Corey, 2014 & Walsh 2010).
- Two major concepts: Motivation and Ambivalence (Walsh, 2010).
- Four intervention principles underlie motivational interviewing: expressing empathy, developing a discrepancy between goals and behaviors, rolling with resistance, and supporting self-efficacy (Walsh, 2010).
- Social workers Must:
  - Start where the client is - do not assume clients are ready to change, but don’t assume total resistance
  - Be empathetic - explore the clients problem behaviors and reflect clients perception
  - Reinforce clients statements of wanting to change, but point out discrepancies
  - Affirm clients statements about wanting to change (Walsh, 2010).
Solution- Focused Counseling

- A short-term approach to interventions that focus on solutions or exceptions to the problems rather than problems themselves (Walsh, 2010, Green & Lee, 2011).
- Emphasizes the role of participants establishing their own goals and preferences.
- Important that leaders concentrate on clear, specific, observable, small, realistic, achievable changes that may lead to additional positive outcomes (Corey, Corey & Corey, 2014).

Solution- Focused Counseling
Continued

- Questioning is the main intervention:
  - Exception, Miracle, Scaling Questions (Walsh, 2010 & Corey, Corey & Corey, 2014)
- Therapist may provide Summary Feedback in the form of genuine affirmation or pointing out particular strengths the clients demonstrate (Corey, Corey & Corey, 2014).
- Supports culturally competent services to individuals regardless of ethnicity and cultural background (Corey, Corey & Corey, 2014).
**Strength-Based Approach**

- This approach implies that social workers should assess all clients in the light of their capacities, talents, competencies, possibilities, visions, values, and hopes (Walsh, 2010).
- Strengths involve the capacity to cope with difficulties, to maintain functioning in the face of stress, to bounce back in the face of significant trauma, to use external challenges as a stimulus for growth and to use social supports as a resource of resilience (Green & Lee, 2011).
- There should be greater collaboration between practitioners and clients to replace the traditional worker/client hierarchy (Walsh, 2010).