HUTCHINSON CORRECTIONAL FACILITY RECORDING PROJECT

In late 1979, Ron Field, director of the Learning Cooperative of North Central Kansas, began to look for unique ways to meet an increasing demand for tape recorded textbook material. After hearing of a project at the Missouri State Penitentiary where inmates work recording textbooks, Mr. Fielder contacted Bernard Smith in the education department that is housed at the Hutchinson Correctional Facility to see if such an interest might exist to begin a similar project. Officials at HCF did express interest and with the combined efforts of LCNCK and the Education Department, the Recording Project commenced operation on June 30, 1980.

Its purpose was, and continues to be, to record public school textbooks and materials, utilized by school aged children identified as needing special education services. These tapes permit non-readers or poor readers, as well as visually impaired students to hear the textbook assignments thus promoting the development of concepts and acquisition of information.

In 1991, the Learning Cooperative of North Central Kansas (LCNCK) took over as the sole coordinator of the project under the supervision of Dr. Lynn Ahrens, who is now the director. LCNCK supplies the recording equipment, recording stations, textbooks, blank cassettes, cassette boxes, labels, and equipment maintenance supplies, along with providing the salary for the Recording Project supervisor. HCF supplies the space and manpower to produce the tapes. A detail of 10-12 inmates work in the Recording Project.

In the past 14 years, approximately 1,800 books have been recorded. These tapes have been utilized by over 100 school districts, covering every region of Kansas.

Currently, several colleges that have visually impaired or other special education need students are contacting LCNCK about the possibility of using the Recording Project services.

Although the children benefit most from the services provided by the Recording Project, the inmates working in the detail also benefit. The Recording Project gives them a chance to feel good about something that they are doing while they are incarcerated. Men in the project have few discipline problems, maintain good work habits, and take pride in their work.

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The HCF J.A.I.L. Program

The acronym J.A.I.L. stands for Juvenile Assistance and Information Liaison, a special program for juvenile offenders. In existence since 1981, this program was developed in close cooperation between the Hutchinson Correctional Facility (HCF) and the juvenile court of Sedgwick County. It is intended primarily for adjudicated males between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. In most instances, teenagers scheduled for participation have been ordered by a court to go through the program as part of meeting the conditions of their probation. In other cases, completing the program is used as a learning experience for teenagers involved in diversion, are status offenders, participating in a day-reporting program or strict-supervision programs. Finally, some of the participants may have been placed in the custody of the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services and live away from their families in youth shelters, boys homes or youth centers where the J.A.I.L. program is also viewed as a teaching and counseling tool.

The program is intended to serve as a dramatic wake-up call for juvenile law breakers, most of whom are at serious risk of actually going to prison unless they make some radical changes in their behavior and outlook on life. For that purpose, it pursues two major goals. Its first objective is to expose the teenagers involved to the harsh reality of life in a maximum-security prison as one of the consequences of criminal conduct. Of at least equal importance is the second objective which is largely based on the educational efforts of a group of inmate volunteers seeking to provide a form of peer counseling. Though obviously not professional, this counseling derives its perspective and power from relying on direct and personal life experience. The inmates volunteering their services use a variety of approaches in order to 'reach' the juvenile participants. They typically share significant aspects of their personal history, family background, involvement in criminal conduct, prison life, and insights gained from all of these.

Now conducted every Thursday throughout the year for roughly six hours, the HCF J.A.I.L. Program takes place at the Central (maximum-security) Unit of the Hutchinson Correctional Facility. Each program typically involves eight juvenile offenders and their escort staff, as well as an equivalent number of inmate volunteers serving as peer counselors. Members of the institutional staff make significant contributions in the areas directly affected by specific components of the program. The HCF administrative counselor coordinates and supervises all J.A.I.L. program activities.

The first major component of each J.A.I.L. Program is direct exposure of the juvenile participants to prison reality in the raw. After checking in at the Control Center at 8:00 a.m., they are escorted to the Admissions and Discharge unit. There the program coordinator briefly explains the purpose and nature of the day's events and lays down the rules of conduct to be followed. He admonishes the juveniles to turn in all non-clothing items to him before they are patted down as part of a preliminary search prior to a full strip search.

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The officer in charge of A & D then takes over. He expounds on his duties, on facets of life in prison, and on orders to be obeyed. Having gained the concentrated attention of all juveniles in attendance, he proceeds to conduct a full and thorough strip search of the entire group. Its members then undergo a brief shower before being dressed out in orange or red prison jump suits, identifying them as participants in the J.A.I.L. Program. All these events take place in the presence of at least some of the inmates serving as 'counselors'.

The program coordinator now leads all participants through a regular cell block along a two-tiered run of 25 single-man cells per tier. Their small size and cage-like appearance may perhaps leave a lasting and memorable impression. Each juvenile is placed in a separate cell so that, after another pat search, the experience of being alone, controlled, and unfree can sink in. Since the institution has practically no empty cells, the young offender can also be expected to learn, in a very direct way, just how little an inmate is allowed to have in his cell. Because of obvious time constraints, the experience of being boxed up in a cage can rarely be extended over more than ten minutes or so. When the juveniles are released from their cells, they have to submit to another pat down to drive home the point that stealing from an inmate can have life-threatening consequences.

Another characteristic and graphic aspect of prison reality is demonstrated next by a visit to the segregation unit, where one of the drastic and immediate consequences of misconduct and rule violations in a penitentiary can be experienced in a very direct and dramatic manner. The juveniles are first shown one of the special holding cells reserved for temporary placement of inmates caught in violent acts. They are then led to the recreation area in segregation where the concrete basketball court, the individual exercise units, and the razor wire protected security walkway on the top of the wall speak for themselves. A brief look at the 'quiet cells' in the administrative segregation block concludes the exposure to a unit in which control and punishment are paramount. On occasion, the noise, whistles, catcalls, propositions and foul language coming from cells in the segregation block greatly exceed what can be encountered in the general population were civil discourse is not exactly at a premium either.

Starting at 10:15 a.m., the twenty (20) minutes spent on lunch in the inmate chow hall concludes the juvenile's direct exposure to life in prison. The teenagers learn that the only choice offered in the cafeteria-style service line is saying no to a given food item, that the silverware consists of re-usable plastic forks and spoons, that subdivided plastic trays are used instead of what they are accustomed to at home, that each table and its seats form one fixed unit and that the pervasive prison lingo is less than pleasant to listen to. A brief restroom break follows.

In the second and perhaps most important part of the program, inmate volunteers, serving as peer counselors play a major role in working closely and directly with the juvenile offenders in attendance. Most of these volunteers are self-referred. In some

cases, they come recommended by their Counselor or other staff such as corrections officers and work detail supervisors. Before being admitted to participation in the program, they are screened by the program coordinator who considers criteria such as: disciplinary, academic, and work record; willingness to be open and honest about their family background and criminal history; acceptance of responsibility for their deeds; ability to express themselves; an indication of any insights gained during their incarceration; and approval by their corrections counselors and detail supervisors. Final approval of their participation is granted by the Deputy Warden of Programs.

The counseling phase of the program starts with introductory remarks by the staff coordinator. He emphasizes that anyone expecting to benefit from the J.A.I.L. experience better admit the seriousness of his situation; not shirk responsibility for his conviction of; not use minimizing or other rationalizations for actions which may cost him his freedom; have the courage to be honest about himself and his 'friends'; open up about any problems he senses in his life; and see asking for help not as a sign of weakness, but of intelligence. The coordinator also stresses that problems should not simply be dumped on the person offering help but that a sincere and hard effort on the juvenile's part is needed for him not to lose his freedom. Introducing the inmate volunteers as a group, the coordinator mentions that since practically all of the inmates had juvenile records and have thus walked in the same shoes, they are quite able to identify closely with the teenagers involved; they are more than just familiar with any imaginable con games and therefore experts in detecting any attempts at playing such ultimately self-defeating games; they have learned from their experience and are ready to put it to positive and constructive use; they receive no special rewards for working in the program other than the satisfaction of having volunteered for a good cause and perhaps helping someone not to follow their bad example, which landed them in prison.

Inmate participants individually introducing themselves, and are given the opportunity to present their views on what it takes to benefit from the program. In this, they are free to choose their own approaches and points of emphasis. Some stress what life in prison is like. Others talk more about their own background and what led them to prison. Many mention peer pressure and poor choices as contributing factors. Practically all emphasize the great need for open communication, particularly as it applies to families. Most express their views in the drastic lingo customary among inmates. Many of these presentations are impassioned and emotional, some are dramatic and confrontational.

A brief one-on-one session follows. Here each of the inmate counselors works individually with the juvenile assigned to him. The assignment is based on the inmate's own record and special aptitudes as those are matched with the information obtained from social background sheets submitted on each juvenile by his respective caseworker. The information includes the juvenile's criminal, educational, and work record, his involvement with alcohol and/or other drugs, his social life and career plans as well as facets of his family background. The one-on-one session is intended to enable the inmate to establish

a measure of rapport with the juvenile, to obtain specifics as to the offenses committed, to identify key problems in the teenager's life, and to present the case to the other peer counselors assembled in two groups of not more than four juvenile offenders and four inmates each, for a group confrontation session in which each juvenile has to spend about half an hour in what approximates a hot seat. This part of the program is generally the most intense and perhaps also the most useful. It often turns out to be emotionally charged and dramatically confrontational.

Individually and as a group, the inmates rely on the information found in the social background forms as presented and interpreted by each juvenile's peer counselor. Taking turns, the inmate counselors ask questions of the teenager upon whom attention is focused. They aim at identifying key problem areas in the juvenile offender's personality and circumstances, and offer specific suggestions on how to address the problems identified. In this, they frequently fall back on their own background and their earlier, admittedly inappropriate responses to personal problems, thus using an approach painful to the inmate himself but often helpful in breaking down the protective wall the juvenile has built around himself. The very fact that each inmate counselor speaks from direct, raw non-professional life experience would seem especially productive. It is rewarding to observe how well this approach often works.

The counseling phase of the program concludes with each juvenile and each inmate filling out separate and different response forms assessing the day's events. Each juvenile is asked to describe his reactions to selected aspects of the program; each inmate seeks to assess the program's impact on the particular teenager he was assigned to work with.

After returning to A & D, the juvenile offenders change from prison jump suits back to their own clothing and are allowed to leave as soon as they are given clearance by the Control Center.

Scheduled according to interest and need, the following counties and their respective agencies such as court services officers, community corrections or status offender programs have been participating in the HCF J.A.I.L. Program, either on a regular basis as part of a firm schedule set in advance for the entire year or on an intermittent basis by special appointment:

Barton	Butler	Cherokee	Cowley	Crawford
Douglas	Finney	Ford	Geary	Lyon
McPherson	Marion	Ness	Reno	Saline
Sedwick	Seward			

In addition, the following youth centers, boys homes, strict supervision or day reporting programs have made regular or intermittent use of the services offered:

Judge James V. Riddel Boys Ranch, Goddard
Youth Center at Larned
Elm Acres Youth Home, Pittsburg
SRS offices, various counties
Youth Center at Topeka
Focus on the Future, Salina
Affiliated YWCA, Kansas City, KS

There are no firm, accurate, and reliable figures available to measure the success of the program in quantitative terms. A relatively comprehensive survey conducted in its early years seemed to indicate that no more than twenty percent (20%) of the juvenile participants had additional new contacts with law enforcement agencies after completing the program. That figure would appear to be unrealistically low, at least under current conditions. The best yardstick we probably have is the heavy demand for its services. The J.A.I.L. Program is now fully booked months in advance

It may not be superfluous to emphasize, that however scary prison reality in its various aspects may strike the participating juvenile offenders as being, the J.A.I.L. Program itself does not believe in, nor does it follow, the scared-straight approach. Those serving in it put their hope in the motto, Cared Straight.

Information on the program as well as conditions and appointments for participation can be obtained by calling (316) 728-3336 or by writing to:

J.A.I.L. Program Coordinator
Hutchinson Correctional Facility
P.O. Box 1568
Hutchinson, KS 67504-1568