



CTI Canadian Training Institute, Institut Canadien de Formation Inc

REPORT TO

HUMAN RESOURCES SKILLS  
DEVELOPMENT CANADA

ON THE

BREAKING THE CYCLE: YOUTH GANG EXIT  
AND YOUTH AMBASSADOR LEADERSHIP  
EMPLOYMENT PREPARATION PROJECT

July 1, 2003 through to June 30, 2004

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## **A) INTRODUCTION**

This report which describes the activities involved in the Breaking the Cycle Project for the period from July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004 has been prepared in compliance with the contribution agreement entered into between the CTI Canadian Training Institute, Institut Canadien de Formation Inc. and Human Resources Skills Development Canada. This contribution agreement created the capacity for CTI to partner with the Project Advisory Committee (see Appendix I) in delivering a 36 week leadership and employment preparation project for gang involved and/or high risk youth that is known as "Breaking the Cycle: Gang Exit and Youth Ambassador Leadership Employment Preparation Project."

The Breaking the Cycle Project is a comprehensive strategy aimed at females and males, between the ages of 14 to 20 years, who are, have been or are at risk of becoming members of an identified youth gang. The intention of this project is to interrupt this cycle of youth violence and anti-social behaviour by empowering youth through leadership development skills and activities to leave gang membership in returning to school, gaining meaningful employment and/or entering an apprenticeship program.

In launching this program, our curriculum and our process we have integrated our experience in working with street involved youth, our Beyond the Halls project, our extensive literature review on youth violence and our earlier field testing of the intensive 10 Day personal development and case management sessions. This earlier field testing was made possible with financial assistance from the National Crime Prevention Centre and the City of Toronto led to the development of a comprehensive strategy, including a community mobilization component. This report, however, will be limited to the 36 week Youth Ambassador Leadership Employment Preparation component of the Breaking the Cycle Project.

The Breaking the Cycle project which has attempted to address the root causes of aggressive, anti-social and criminal conduct of selected youth due to their lifestyle choices and resulting behaviours, has also attempted to address barriers to employment in promoting positive life style changes. The youth served by this program have not been served by traditional main stream youth employment and/or youth serving agencies.

Our graduation celebration held on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, during which we acknowledged the achievements of 12 Youth Ambassadors<sup>1</sup> suggests we have had an impact. We believe we have made a difference in the lives of the young men and women by offering stability, promoting leadership skills and by achieving the following:

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<sup>1</sup> Note: 1 Youth Ambassador who was returned to custody and consequently did not graduate both attended this ceremony and was honoured for his efforts.

- Enhanced the resiliency of youth selected for the project through an Asset Based, Cognitive Behavioural and conceptual Skills Development component which is aimed at sustaining gains over time, and
- Provided Case Management to support each youth within the project with one to one support, referrals and follow up, crisis and family intervention, and group facilitation, and
- Created a peer support system, including training peer mediators and mentors for participants of the project; and
- Trained youth as Youth Ambassadors/Peer Educators who conducted primary prevention education in schools, conferences, the media and the community at-large; and
- Evaluated the outcomes of this project in terms of milestones, achievements and lessons learned

In the ensuing pages we will describe the program components, the activities and the outcomes achieved in terms of performance indicators established at the outset of the project and attached as Appendix A of the contribution agreement. The report which addresses the achievements described in the preceding paragraph is organized according to the following sub-headings:

- A) Introduction
  - B) Overview of the Program Components and Curriculum Areas
  - C) The Objectives That Were Established For the Program
  - D) Report on Project Results
  - E) Challenges and Recommendations For the Future
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| Appendix I   | Project Advisory Committee Members   |
| Appendix II  | Case Management Profiles             |
| Appendix III | A Listing of Community Presentations |
| Appendix IV  | A Sampling of Newspaper Articles     |
| Appendix V   | Sampling of Letters From Students    |
| Appendix VI  | The Interview Criteria for Bonuses   |

**B) Overview of the Program Components and Curriculum Areas:**

This section of the report describes the Intake and Referral Process, the Core Curriculum utilized to guide our 10 Day intensive personal development and our interactions throughout the life of the project. We will also describe the intention of Personal Development sessions, the Practice, Integration and Presentations and the Case Management process.

**i) Intake and Referral Process:**

The Intake and Referral Process involved outreach conducted by BTC staff and the members of the Project Advisory Committee in alerting others about the program. The referrals to the program were problematic. Initially probation and parole officers, who supported the program concept, were reluctant to identify and refer gang involved youth. By indicating that youth were gang involved, a number of these probation/parole officers indicated they would be breaching the confidentiality provisions within the new Youth Criminal Justice Act. The Project Coordinator met with the local manager of Probation and their staff to address this issue.

The referral sources which included probation/parole, Operation Springboard, Youth Ambassadors etc. are highlighted below:

<u>Referral Source</u>	<u>Number of Youth Referred</u>
Youth Ambassadors	6
Probation Officers	2
Parole Officers – Correctional Service Canada	2
Operation Springboard	2
Aunt/Relatives	1
Dixon Neighbourhood Somali Youth Centre	1
Friends	1
Self Referral	1
Total	<u>16</u>

The Intake process utilized within the program is listed as follows:

- Receive a telephone call from youth and/or referral agent
- Arrange to meet with youth, conduct an initial interview to assess intent, target group eligibility and complete a 5 page pre-application form
  - Meet with youth again; begin extensive social, family, academic, drug and alcohol use and criminal history profile
  - If just starting program, await 10 Day Intensive Personal Development Session. If joining an already intact group, youth invited to join group for three mornings. At this point, a mutual decision on acceptance as a Youth Ambassador occurs.

**ii) Target Group of Youth:**

The original target group identified for the program were females and males between the ages of 14 to 20 years who were gang involved and faced a number of barriers to employment. In mid-July the Program Coordinator in consultation with the Project Advisory Committee approved a change in the target group as follows:

- Males and females between the ages of 15 to 23 years of age who are gang involved and/or are at high risk of gang involvement and who face multiple barriers to employment.
- The preference/priority for selecting youth will be from the Rexdale area.

At the outset, we hoped to recruit 10 males and 4 females. The Breaking the Cycle Project however recruited a total of 16 youth during the program. Fourteen youth were male and two were female. Four young women of Russian descent and who met the criteria were referred to the program. These young women had a court order forbidding association. As a result of this and the decision to support these young women to return to school, none were accepted into the project.

The profile of the youth accepted is summarized below:

**Ages:** The Youth Ambassadors ranged in age from 15 to 23 years. The mean age was 16.25 years. The detailed range is as follows:

<b>15</b>	1	<b>18</b>	2	<b>21</b>	0
<b>16</b>	1	<b>19</b>	6	<b>22</b>	0
<b>17</b>	2	<b>20</b>	3	<b>23</b>	1

**Ethnicity:**

9	Jamaican Canadians – 3 born in Canada
2	Females – mixed ethnicity – Scottish, Irish, Aboriginal
1	Somalia - immigrated
1	Pakistan – born in Canada
1	Trinidad – immigrated
1	Male Italian – born in Canada
1	Philippines - immigrated

**Education – High School:**

The educational level of individuals attending the Youth Ambassador program is listed below:

Grade 9 Not completed, partial credits	3
Grade 10 Not completed	2
Grade 10 Completed, expelled in Grade 11	7
Grade 11 Completed, was in Grade 12	1
Grade 12 Completed	3

Note: All of the Youth Ambassadors were suspended and eventually expelled from their schools.

**Drugs & Alcohol Usage:** All Youth Ambassadors used drugs and alcohol on a regular basis. Drug use ranged from smoking up daily to crack and cocaine.

**Living Situations:**

Living with both parents	4
Living with mother	7
Living with father	2
Living independently and/or needing housing	2
Living with grandparents	1

**Criminal Records:**

Youth Ambassador does not have a record 1  
 Youth Ambassadors have criminal convictions ranging from: 15

- Theft
- Public intoxication
- Drug possession
- Robberies
- Assault with a weapon
- Breach of Probation
- Car theft
- Drug trafficking
- Possession of illegal drugs
- Assault
- Assault Police
- Driving under the influence
- Trespassing
- Breach of recognizance
- Vandalism
- Arson
- Mischief

### **Gang Involvement:**

8 of the 16 youth accepted into the Youth Ambassador Project were identified as being gang involved. A number of the other youth although involved in the periphery were identified as at risk of gang involvement.

### **Barriers to Employment:**

Virtually all of the Youth Ambassadors accepted within this project had to overcome the following barriers to fully participating in the labour market:

- Lack of Basic Life Skills
- Low educational attainment – Note: 3 Youth Ambassadors completed Grade 12. One during incarceration in a federal facility.
- None of the Youth Ambassadors exhibited the skills to maintain steady employment
- Poor social skills and self regulation skills in terms of emotions and anger management
- Absence of peer and adult role models
- Disjointed service delivery plans
- Poor self image
- Lack of belief in self and family support system that youth could realize dreams of returning to school and/or apprenticeship training
- Negative peer influences

### **iii) Ten Day Intensive Personal Development**

Although it was CTI's intention to involve all Youth Ambassadors in a ten day personal development training session as a means of creating structure, enhancing personal awareness, teaching conflict resolution skills and serving as a selection process, the actual training was not delivered as planned.

Six Youth Ambassadors selected for the program completed the formalized 10 Day Intensive program. Due to delays in intake, the remainder of the Youth Ambassadors participated in the personal development curriculum during their 36 week participation in the program.

The curriculum for the 10 Day Intensive is described below:

### **Overview of the Ten Day Intensive Training Curriculum**

The ten day intensive training curriculum is organized into nine areas. The specific content or activities related to each area has varied from group to group, based on learnings from previous groups and the dynamics of a specific group.

- a) **Orientation, Group Norms and Learning Community Building**  
The process of trust building with the leaders, making a commitment to the project and gaining a sense of comfort with new people are the key objectives of the orientation phase. Other group dynamics emerged through the 2 week program. However, the focus of orientation is on establishing the cornerstones of “how we will be together”, and will set the tone for the entire program.
- b) **Unlearning Violence, Sexism, Homophobia and Racism**  
Utilizing the work of Paul Kivel, Allen Creighton and others, we led the group through a series of awareness raising exercise on the roots of sexism, homophobia and racism. Our operational definition of violence is “anything that violates human worth and dignity”. The goal is to provide each youth with the ability to understand not simply what people do to hurt each other, but why, and how we were taught these lies and misinformation. In addition, the group was taught a common language to describe and discuss issues that emerged throughout the 2 week program related to violence and peacemaking.
- c) **Understanding and Managing Personal Anger and Aggression**  
Here we focused on enhancing self-awareness related to personal triggers, managing reactivity and defusing ourselves in conflict situations. We distinguished between anger and aggression and focused on behaviour as much as attitude shifts. Each youth was required to maintain a “Hostility Journal” where they tracked their thoughts, feelings and behaviours related to the situations in their real lives that they struggle to maintain control over. Role-play and guided simulations was used to practise skills and reinforce gains.
- d) **Pro-Social Communication Skills:**  
Listening, Empathy, Assertive Communication and Limit Setting were the focus for this portion of the skill building training. Teaching the youth the ability to communicate their needs and wants clearly and also to perceive and actually be able to understand the needs of others is the goal here.
- e) **Who Am I: Enhanced Self-Awareness and Esteem Building Skills**  
By exploring their personal histories, values and beliefs, by learning about the world from the perspective of peers, and by thinking creatively, we sought to expand what is possible in the lives of the youth engaged in the project. Who am I and how to fit into this world is a fundamental question to be addressed in all our lives. To teens that have rarely had a sense of who they are or even if they matter, the question of who they are is vital to whether or not they believe they can change the future, and have hope in a better one.

Self-esteem is the experience of being capable of managing life's challenges and being worthy of happiness. Through a variety of cognitive-behavioural exercises, we assisted our youth through the gradual exploration of the outer social world, where its many ups and downs are often mirrored in the inner world of self-esteem, self-image and all the twists and turns in an emerging identity. The skill of re-assessing the meaning of outside messages as they impact young people is key to facilitating the belief and ability to manage these outside forces.

The group also had the opportunity to participate in the "True Colours" program. The exercise is similar to Myers-Briggs Type inventories, and helps in understanding, recognizing and working with people who have different personalities, traits or styles.

f) **Building Healthy Relationships**

One of our major aims is teaching and facilitating the development of healthy peer and adult relationships in their lives, and to interrupt the cycle of domestic violence. We fundamentally believe that all teens, regardless of their outward attitude, desire to have happy, healthy and rewarding personal relationships with others. Many have not learned how to make friends and develop trusting relationships. Indeed, they may have learned to fear and mistrust others due to their experiences, lack of attachment within their families, and may have witnessed or been victims of domestic violence.

g) **Setting Goals, Identifying My Strengths, and Planning My Future**

Utilizing a Personal Mission Statement process as a foundation, each youth is encouraged to identify and explore personal strengths, dreams, and plans for their future. This process is further supported by additional tools used to help participants set goals and make plans they can monitor, adjust and evaluate over time.

h) **Making a Difference in My Community: How to Get Involved In Change**

Volunteerism, public speaking, letter writing and other activities was encouraged for all participants. The esteem building values of all these activities are enormous. Our weekly follow-up training meetings and case management meetings also provided a forum to continue to explore these endeavours.

i) **Saying Goodbye and Evaluating My New Learning**

Celebrating the success of the group, their individual contributions and the changes that have taken place is a vital process for the project. A number of exercises that was included such as an auto-bio-poem, thank you/recognition cards, a personal mission statement, group and facilitator feedback and certificates of achievement.

**iv) Case Management:**

The Case Management process implemented within the "Breaking the Cycle: Youth Ambassador Employment Preparation Project" involved assessments of strengths and

needs, translating these into identifiable goals and coaching/mentoring, problem solving towards attainment of these goals.

The process begins with the social, family, school, criminal history and drug/alcohol intake form during which youth identify strengths and an initial set of goals they will work on during their involvement in the program. This process is supplemented with weekly meetings with their case manager during which progress was reviewed. This process also included three distinct formal reviews and interviews with the Youth Ambassador, the Case Manager and the Program Coordinator. These reviews took place in November 2003, February 2004 and May 2004. A summary sheet that was provided during our monthly reports is located within Appendix II.

A number of assessment instruments were utilized in assessing movement through the program. These included:

- Social, Family, School, Criminal History And Alcohol Drug Use Intake Form
- The Youth Level of Supervision Inventory Y-LSI
- The Jesness Behaviour Inventory
- The Life Events Trauma Scale
- The Trauma Symptom Inventory - A
- A number of self awareness inventories were also utilized during the 10 Day Intensives and Personal Development Sessions of the program

The Case Management process also included crisis intervention and problem solving. Many of the youth encountered a number of life crisis including: housing issues, pregnancy, threats of violence, family issues. The staff within the project worked with community resources in addressing these issues.

**v) Personal Development:**

- **Personal Development Training Skills Development.** The Youth Ambassador Program days are generally split into two. Half the time is spent in personal development sessions and the other half on practice, integration and community presentations. Personal Development time involves teaching, training, problem solving and the identification of key components for future weeks. Some of the components that have been addressed include communication skills, computer skills, completion of Myers Briggs Type Inventory and implications on leadership and presentations, First Aid and CPR, anger and emotions management, True Colours, peace making skills, presentation skills, planning and organizing your presentation for effect and a review and practice of the curriculum they are presenting in the community.

This half day personal development time is also the time the group meets to create and review expectations and operating principles, to organize office routines and procedures, to review feedback on presentations, to identify and schedule youth for

upcoming presentations and to address issues related to entering Humber College's academic support program. Because the current program will be winding down in June, we have negotiated with representatives of the Rexdale Youth Resource Centre to be in to review resumes, and alternate employment preparation projects.

- **Practice and Integration.** The afternoons within the Youth Ambassador Project are generally spent doing practice and integration, community presentations, community outreach and one afternoon a week playing basketball. Individual youth work on their personal stories, the curriculum for their presentations and/or in meeting one on one with their case manager on individual plans. All youth prepare a written and narrative presentation on their life stories. Life stories include how they come to be involved with gangs, their contributing histories and why they have chosen to attempt to use this experience in reaching out to others.

Either on Tuesday or Thursday afternoons youth go to the Elmbank Community Centre to play basketball. This provides for exercise and enjoyment of a sport in which everyone can participate.

- **Community Contacts and Outreach.** As part of the leadership development portion of the project, youth are encouraged and supported to visit community centres and youth serving agencies in providing information on *Breaking the Cycle*. Youth present business cards identifying them as youth ambassadors and brochures about the program. These contacts are encouraged to provide opportunities to solicit requests for group presentations.
- **Community Presentations.** The overarching goal of the Youth Ambassador Employment Preparation Program is to create structure, opportunity to acquire skills knowledge and self confidence by providing presentations to youth, adults, parents, students, the general public, youth serving agencies and media in reducing the potential of youth joining gangs. These presentations also were intended to assist young people currently involved in gangs to contemplate leaving and to dispel the "Romance and Myths" of gang membership.

The Youth Ambassadors and staff of the: *Breaking the Cycle* provide presentations on the following topics:

- The impact of socialization on violence, prejudice, racism, sexism and homophobia;
- The romance and myths of gang membership
- Their personal stories
- Responding to bullying

The Youth Ambassadors have provided approximately 114 presentations since July 1, 2003. Presentations have been made to over 3,000 individuals including elementary and secondary schools, parents groups, youth serving agencies, judiciary, the media, to leaders, guidance counsellors and during the Open House to businesses. Interviews and call-in programs have also occurred on City TV, CBC radio morning show, on 94.7 F.M. and in interviews for local media. The feedback on the presentations has been excellent.

Although Youth Ambassadors still do not want their names and pictures to appear on TV or the print media, our hope is to launch a full story on this project in the near future. This type of story could be utilized to launch a “Get Involved” anti gang membership public education approach.

**C) Objectives Established For the Project:**

These defining objectives and operational definitions were imbedded within the design and delivery of the program. They shaped staff selection, youth recruitment, training, activities, partner linkages and future planning with all youth in the project.

**i.) Promote Bonding**

Bonding is the emotional attachment and commitment a youth makes to social relationships in the family, peer group, school, community, or culture. The intensity of the Program combined with the experiential impact of delivering community messages assisted in the creation of meaningful relationships. BTC staff attended all 114 presentations made by the youth as a show of support although at times being very scarce on staff resources. One Case Management goal was to create a comprehensive connection between the Community and the Ambassador. In order to do so, we made sure to attempt to gather as much information from the youth as we could. Our intake instrument gave us a good idea of the social make-up of each ambassador in order to fully support individuals and help them develop and achieve realistic goals.

Through the development and delivery of violence prevention presentations, the youth had the opportunity to develop healthy relationships with peers and adults. This process was very powerful for each youth as for many of them it was the first time that they would be validated for their efforts and congratulated for their courage. Ambassadors also had the opportunity to build special bonds with their audience. Tom Longboat Public School is a great example where students and Ambassadors connected in a very healthy way through an 8 week group process. Every week, Ambassadors and youth would meet for a school period (45 minutes) and engage in conversations and exercises. The curriculum was developed by the involved Ambassadors. The results were outstanding and the testimonial comments by the students on the evaluation sheets spoke for themselves.

**ii.) Fosters Resilience**

Resilience is an individual's capacity for adapting to change, challenge and stressful events in healthy and flexible ways. The Project was successful at supporting and empowering Ambassadors in time of crisis and changes. Many crises impacted BTC through the 36-week process. The incarceration of 6 participants (3 of them resumed with the Program), the change of Case Management staff late in the process, the relocation of the Program, the uncertainty of the funding extension, missing payroll, etc...were all situations the group had to contend with. The most difficult challenge that the Program had to contend with was to resist the urge to suppress the behaviour reflecting the Ambassador's initial maladaptive responses and rather create a supportive platform that would address the causes of the crisis or response.

**iii.) Promote Competencies**

Competence covers five areas of youth functioning, including social, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and moral competencies. BTC addressed all five areas on a daily basis through interactions, workshops, individual case management sessions and other opportunities that BTC provided including internal programming. The programs provided training in developmentally appropriate interpersonal skills, and rehearsal strategies for practicing these skills. These skills included communication, assertiveness, refusal and resistance, conflict-resolution, and interpersonal negotiation strategies for use with peers and adults.

**Social competence** is the range of interpersonal skills that help youth integrate feelings, thinking, and actions in order to achieve specific social and interpersonal goals. The program developed youth skills for identifying feelings in self or others, skills for managing emotional reactions or impulses, or skills for building the youth's self-management strategies, empathy, self-soothing, or frustration tolerance.

**Cognitive competence** included two overlapping but distinct sub-constructs. The first form of cognitive competence is the "ability to develop and apply the cognitive skills of self-talk, the reading and interpretation of social cues, using steps for problem-solving and decision-making, understanding the perspective of others, understanding behavioural norms, a positive attitude toward life, and self awareness." The second aspect of cognitive competence is related to academic and intellectual achievement. The emphasis here is on the development of core capacities including the ability to use logic, analytic thinking, and abstract reasoning.

BTC promoted cognitive competence by influencing cognitive abilities, processes, or outcomes, including academic performance, logical and analytic thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, planning, goal-setting, and self-talk skills.

There are three distinct dimensions of **behavioural competence**: *Nonverbal communication* (through facial expressions, tone of voice, style of dress, gesture or eye contact), *verbal communication* (making clear requests, responding effectively to criticism, expressing feelings clearly), and *taking action* (helping others, walking away from negative situations, participating in positive activities). BTC promoted behavioural competence by teaching skills and providing reinforcement for effective behaviour choices and action patterns, including nonverbal and verbal strategies.

**Moral competence** is a youth's ability to assess and respond to the ethical, affective, or social justice dimensions of a situation. The program promoted moral competence by fostering empathy, respect for cultural or societal rules and standards, a sense of right and wrong, or a sense of moral or social justice.

**iv.) Foster Self-determination**

Self-determination is the ability to think for oneself, and to take action consistent with that thought. The program promoted self-determination strategies to increase youths' capacity for empowerment, autonomy, independent thinking, or self-advocacy, or their ability to live and grow by self-determined internal standards and values.

**v.) Foster Spirituality**

The program fostered spirituality through the development of beliefs in a higher power, internal reflection or meditation, or support youth in exploring a spiritual belief system, or sense of spiritual identity, meaning, or practice.

**vi.) Foster Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy is the perception that one can achieve desired goals through one's own action. The program fostered self-efficacy through strategies that include personal goal-setting, coping and mastery skills, or techniques to change negative self-efficacy expectancies or self-defeating thoughts (cognitions).

**vii.) Foster Clear and Positive Identity**

Clear and positive identity is the internal organization of a coherent sense of self. The program fostered clear and positive identity by developing healthy identity formation and achievement in youth, including positive identification with a social or cultural sub-group that supported their healthy development of sense of self.

**viii.) Fosters Belief in the Future**

Belief in the future is the internalization of hope and optimism about possible outcomes. The program sought to influence the youth's belief in his or her future potential, goals, options, choices, or long range hopes and plans by promoting belief in the future. Strategies included guaranteed tuition to post-secondary institutions, school-to-work linkages, future employment opportunities, or future financial incentives to encourage continued progress on a pro-social trajectory. BTC was designed to influence youth's optimism about a healthy and productive adult life could also foster belief in the future.

**ix.) Provide Recognition for Positive Behaviour**

Recognition for positive involvement is the positive response of those in the social environment to desired external behaviours by youths; Behaviour is in large part a consequence of the reinforcement or lack of reinforcement that follows action.

The program created a response system for rewarding, recognizing, or reinforcing pro-social behaviours.

**x.) Provided Opportunities for Pro-social Involvement**

Opportunity for pro-social involvement is the presentation of events and activities across different social environments that encourage youths to participate in pro-social actions. The program offered opportunities, activities and events in which youths could actively participate, make a positive contribution, and experience positive social exchanges.

**xi.) Foster Pro-social Norms**

Programs that foster pro-social norms seek to encourage youth to adopt healthy beliefs and clear standards for behaviour through a range of approaches. BTC fostered pro-social norms, employing strategies for encouraging youths to develop clear and explicit standards for behaviour that minimized health risks and supported pro-social involvement.

**D) Report on Project Results:**

The following section will provide commentary, a description of the activities and the results achieved during the delivery of the “**Breaking the Cycle: Gang Exit and Youth Ambassador Employment Preparation Project**”. These results will address the outcome indicators and objectives to be achieved by this project that were attached to the contribution agreement as Appendix A.

- **To provide 14 unemployed at-risk youth with the opportunity to develop and upgrade their employability skills, and gain experience in developing and delivering community dialogue sessions thereby facilitating their transition to the labour force.**

BTC was successful in providing its Ambassadors the opportunity to develop employability skills as well as gaining experience in delivering community presentations. Training sessions were developed and integrated within the BTC Program to address the needs of the youth involved. The intake instrument addressed the goals at the outset, and Case Management was built around the identified goals.

The employment goals were supported by various organizations and individuals invited to assist our Ambassadors in reaching their goals. JVS- Tim Greenwood, The Rexdale Youth Resource Centre, and The Resource Room were amongst the organizations involved in supporting our youth. Employment assessments and other related tools were utilized in assessing their needs and orientations. Although BTC was thoroughly involved with helping youth identify what type of employment would best suit their interests, it made sense to refer the Ambassadors to the Agencies that carried such expertise. Our goal would then be to make sure that a relationship would be created between our youth and the worker.

In terms of presentations and outreach to the community, the Youth Ambassadors and staff of the Breaking the Cycle project exceeded the target number of presentations established for the project. One hundred and fourteen (114) presentations involving 3,404 individuals were provided during the period July 1, 2003 through to June 30, 2004. The audiences were diverse with the majority being elementary schools. The diversity of audiences included Police, Probation and Parole, Community Health Agencies, concerned mothers, Public Health, teachers and guidance counsellors, college and university students and businesses. A full listing of these presentations is attached as Appendix III.

The Youth Ambassadors and staff also appeared on radio, television and the print media. A sampling of articles from newspapers is attached as Appendix IV.

- **To increase the youth’s self esteem and self-empowerment and potential for the future success by increasing opportunities for youth employability and by**

### **contributing positively to the community.**

The entire 'Breaking the Cycle' Program was centered on an 'asset-building' approach. Our goal has always been to empower our participants and making sure that they knew not only the results that they could produce, but also the ways to get there. Creating pathways to self and inter-personal awareness has been BTC's main task from its inception. Once again, many partnerships were developed in making sure that we were aiming in the right direction. Morning presentations (called Personal Development Skills) addressed the same enhancement topics and were presented in group and individual formats. Simulations (role play) were instrumental in making sure that all components of the Program were integrated by our youth. By adhering to these new concepts youth involved in the Program increased their employability and vocational opportunities thus making them positive contributors to their communities by avoiding recidivism and becoming leaders in their own neighbourhoods.

The majority of Youth Ambassadors participated in completing the following skills development programs in contributing to increased self esteem and self efficacy. These included:

- Leadership Skills In Conflict Resolution
- Emotions and Anger Management
- Crisis Intervention
- First Aid and CPR training
- Introduction to Micro Computers and Software Applications

The project has generated many anecdotal stories in demonstrating the impact of the personal development sessions throughout the program. One Youth Ambassador, Jessica, who completed the First Aid/CPR certificate, was instrumental in responding to a medical injury suffered by her father. Within days of completing the program, Jessica's father who worked in the asphalt paving business suffered serious burns to his arms and hands. During dinner, Jessica noticed that infection had set in and was moving up her father's arm. In response she convinced her father to go the hospital for treatment. During the hospital visit her father was informed that if he had not sought treatment when he did there existed the serious possibility of losing his arm. This immediate application of the skills learned by the Youth Ambassadors, and one who previously had not completed any prior courses had a positive impact on Jessica. These situations, supplemented with the sense of personal achievement and self worth occurred many times throughout the life of the program. Many of the youth who did not have strong attachments in their lives formed positive relationships with instructors and volunteers who were involved through the life of the program.

- **To ensure that the participants will either move into employment or return to school**

As previously mentioned, BTC was prudent in making sure that the Intake interview would identify all projected outcomes. In order to better respond to the needs of the involved youth, we developed meaningful relationships with local Educational and Vocational Resources. As you can see in Table 1, of the 11 Ambassadors that graduated on June 23, 2004, all of them were employed or back in school.

**Table 1**

<b>Ambassador</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Employment</b>
<b>Audley</b>	Accepted at Humber - Fall 2004	Actively looking for summer employment Resource Room
<b>David</b>	Assessed by Humber Seeking apprenticeship as auto mechanic	Part time employment in automobile products. Hoping to be full-time by Fall - RYRC
<b>Tevon</b>	Assessed by Humber Registered for Fall (Durham School Board)	Part time (summer) employment
<b>Jessica</b>	Looking at Home Ed for summer	Part time employed in Sports Store RYRC
<b>Loretta</b>	Attending LBS at Humber Hairdressing apprenticeship in Fall 04	Looking for part-time employment JVS/ RYRC
<b>Keon</b>	Assessed and accepted at Humber Plans on attending Centennial Fall 04	Working part-time
<b>Khadian</b>	Assessed and accepted at Humber Seeking plumbing apprenticeship	Looking for part-time employment Resource Room
<b>Dwight</b>	Currently attending day, evening and weekend classes at Humber	Interested in part-time employment RYRC
<b>Junior</b>	Currently attending day classes at Humber	Seeking part-time employment RYRC
<b>Jay</b>	Currently attending day classes at Humber	Completing CSO hours
<b>Jerome</b>	Currently attending day classes at Humber	Seeking part-time employment RYRC

- **To outreach and educate younger youth and the community on the importance of personal skill development and the alternatives to violence.**

BTC delivered 114 presentations to more than 3,404 listeners (not counting the media presentations). The vast majority of our audience were students in elementary or middle schools. Ambassadors were asked to develop presentations that were matched to the age group. Sensationalism and details that might breach confidential or potentially dangerous information was carefully screened out. Our presentations to Grade 6-7-8 were by far our most successful. The audience related very well to the messages delivered (anti-bullying, self-esteem, no violence, stay in school, 'don't do like me') by our youth.

The community also benefited from the presentations. For many parents and involved officers and workers, it was a first to be able to ask the hard questions without fear of pushing the individual away or mishandling the delicate balance of trust and respect with the members of their caseloads. It was also a great occasion for them to be exposed to 'cases' that migrate towards positive outcomes rather than constant crisis.

Although we have hundreds of feedback forms and letters written by students, we have only included a sample of these letters in Appendix V.

These presentations appeared to have profound impacts on the audiences as illustrated by the letters we have received. In demonstrating the outreach and type of high touch which occurred throughout this project, I will share the story of a grandfather who attended one such presentation in Scarborough. This particular presentation was organized for the community by the group "Creating awareness of Teenage Suicide." Guidance counsellors, parents and teens attended to learn what you might do to address gang membership/gang violence. Shortly after the presentation, we received a telephone call by this grandfather who attended the session. He provided positive feedback and then shared the concerns he had over their family's inability to reach/communicate with a grandson who was twelve years old. This story and potential request was subsequently shared with the Youth Ambassadors. "J", a Youth Ambassador from Rexdale volunteered to meet with the family and this youth to see whether a peer mentoring relationship might help. He subsequently volunteered his time, met with this boy on a number of occasions and appears to have made a difference through this contact.

This again is one example of the strength of this program in reaching other youth.

On June 23, 2004, we held a graduation ceremony for the 11 Youth Ambassadors who graduated from the project. During this evening of celebration, the Vice Principal of Tom Longboat School spoke at length about the impact and contribution of the Youth Ambassadors at her school. The personal testimony of this Vice Principal from a school in Malvern was both moving and demonstrated the impact these Youth Ambassadors have had in the community. She concluded her remarks by indicating that she would personally provide letters of reference for every Ambassador involved in her school.

- **To increase public awareness of high risk youth issues and equip stakeholders with the tools to support the minimizing of high risk behaviours, thereby helping youth reach their potential.**

The previous sections have clearly demonstrated progress on this goal. The overriding message to Youth Ambassadors brought to the community was that few youth chose a gang lifestyle. Many due to personal circumstances find themselves gravitating to the groups who provide acceptance, friendship and protection. We encouraged the public and stakeholders to get to know these youth and through this contact to encourage youth to dream and become involved within their communities.

The Youth Ambassadors participated in the Common Cause Conference that addressed youth violence, in the Toronto Police Youth Summit, and in the CBC's special on gangs that was held at the North Albion Collegiate Institute. This event organized by the CBC morning host Andy Barry included a panel of leading American and Canadian Criminologists, Chief of Police Julian Fantino and American counterparts along with representation speaking about gangs. The Breaking the Cycle was a central figure in this dialogue that reached a very large audience through this medium. The Youth Ambassadors and staff also appeared on City TV, Global television among others. Again we direct your attention to some of the articles written by the media.

This type of outreach also occurred during the Open House/Press Release held last fall. During this event Woodbine Entertainment, BASF Canada, Labatt's Breweries, an engineering firm, Humber College among others had the opportunity to meet and interact with the Youth Ambassadors. This interaction resulted in both interest and financial support for the Breaking the Cycle project.

- **To outreach to and survey local youth, parents and service providers to access information, resources and activity needs of neighbourhoods where youth are engaged in high risk activity.**

BTC quickly realized that attempting to reach youth and parents residing in 'at-risk' areas, and getting them to engage with us in identifying their needs was simply impossible. We could not do it because the residents of the community did not quite understand what we were trying to achieve. Although we tried many times to meet with the major stakeholders (especially at the initial phases of the Program), we were not considered a viable option to counter the violence in the local or adjacent communities. It took time, resources and an entry into several local networks (see Table 2) to suddenly get some attention our way. Operation Springboard and the Youth Ambassadors were responsible for the majority of referrals to this project.

Some of the issues we had to contend with were the following:

- Confidentiality
- Labelling
- Lack of self disclosure
- Legal ramifications in the CJS related to disclosure

In April and May as part of the transitioning towards independence, we encouraged all of the ambassadors to become more involved in their communities. This involvement ranged from volunteering to conducting outreach within their communities.

## **ACTIVITIES:**

- 1. Hire a project coordinator and youth resource support worker to organize and implement the project and liaise with the community and the project advisor committee. (Week 1-3)**

Graham Vardy who negotiated the contribution agreement for the Breaking the Cycle Project began his duties as the Project Coordinator effective July 1, 2003. Andrea Taylor BSW was subsequently hired in mid July. Andrea however, began as a volunteer on July 1<sup>st</sup> during which CTI supervised her remaining hours as a BSW student.

In August, Graham Vardy indicated he was thinking of leaving the project. He had been involved in a variety of youth violence projects for 4 years and given the part-time nature of this project he was looking for a more permanent position. In response, Steve Hall was invited to be trained in the delivery of the 10 Day Intensive. As Graham's intentions became clear we brought Steve Hall on part-time in September and confirmed his full-time employment on October 1, 2003. Steve Hall worked as full-time Project Coordinator until mid-November during which his

time was reduced to part-time. In light of the demands and the type of supervision required for this project, we subsequently applied to HRDC for funding to increase this position to full-time. On January 5, 2004, Steve Hall assumed a full-time Project Coordinator's role.

**2. To recruit youth and determine eligibility and suitability for the project through detailed interview and assessment (Week 2-4)**

We originally expected a more voluminous flow of referrals than what we were confronted with. By mid August, our Ambassador count still remained at two. We just recently finished a first 10-day Intensive group and were heading towards a second one. Most of our referrals came from Operation Springboard, and a few from the Courts, mostly from 311 Jarvis. Also of significance was the referrals brought in by one of the two Ambassadors.

Most of the individuals we interviewed met the criteria. One of the challenges encountered, especially with young females, was their involvement with school. Another problem as alluded to in the description on Intake and Assessment within this report related to the non-association clauses concerning a number of females referred to the project. Half of the Youth Ambassadors recruited to this project lived in Scarborough.

**3. To provide access and deliver a Youth Service Canada project to 14 youth at risk for 36 weeks.**

BTC provided access to more than 14 youth in this Project. Altogether, we had 16 youth take part in the Ambassadorship component. There was no more than 14 youth involved at any one time at BTC. Two Ambassadors received additional legal charges while being involved in the Program thus not being able to continue their involvement with BTC. One Ambassador's parole officer revoked the Ambassador's order thus returning him to a Federal secure facility.

**Ambassador 36 Week Program**

B., Jerome	B., David
C., Peter	D., Dwight
F., Junior	G., Tevon
H., Jessica	H., Awad*
K. Raza *	M., Audley
O'R., Keon	P., Chris*
R., Jahmiel *	S., Joseph*
W., Loretta	W., Khaidian

One Ambassador had to leave the country quite suddenly. His family decided that it would be of best interest if he moved to his extended family in Wisconsin

USA. One Ambassador was let go simply because he was too young (15), had multiple needs and the program was counterproductive to him. The Youth Facilitation/Case Manager continued to support this youth after they were terminated from the program.

As you can see in Table 2, not all Ambassadors reached the 36-week criteria. The average length of stay in the Program is 35.18 weeks. Four Ambassadors exceeded the criteria while the remaining others did not.

**Table 2**

<b>Ambassador</b>	<b>10 Day- Intensive Start date</b>	<b>*10 Day Intensive End date</b>	<b>**Ambassador Start date</b>	<b>36 weeks</b>	<b># of weeks in Program</b>
<b>Audley</b>	May 03, 03	May 03, 03	July 3, 03	March 10, 04	50
<b>Tevon</b>	Aug. 18, 03	Sept. 3, 03	Nov. 3, 03	*April 26, 04 **July 12, 04	*40 **32
<b>David</b>	Aug. 18, 03	Sept. 3, 03	Sept. 8, 03	May 17, 03	40
<b>Junior</b>	Aug. 18, 03	Sept. 3, 03	Sept. 8, 03	May 17, 03	40
<b>Keon</b>	-----	-----	Oct.16, 03	June 24, 04	35
<b>Khaidian</b>	-----	-----	Oct. 22, 03	June 30, 04	34
<b>Jessica</b>	-----	-----	Oct. 27, 03	July 5, 04	33
<b>Loretta</b>	-----	-----	Dec. 27, 03	Sept. 4, 04	25
<b>Jerome</b>	-----	-----	Nov. 25, 03	Aug. 3, 04	29
<b>Jay</b>	-----	-----	Nov. 25, 03	Aug. 3, 04	29
<b>Dwight</b>	Aug. 18, 03	Sept. 3, 03	Sept. 8, 03	May 17, 03	40

- 4. To provide in-house case management, supervision and support to all participants progress and success in meeting goals, and the satisfaction with the program. The case management process will enhance the participants' employment preparation skills, facilitate and strengthen their commitment to change and enhance their access to services to youth. The life and employability workshop will be a 1 day per week for the duration of the agreement**

An individual Case Management synopsis template was created and completed by Andrea and Julian for the purpose of this report. Please refer to Appendix II to access such templates.

The Case Management process was comprised of several components. The intention of this component included:

- Building relationships with the Ambassadors
- Providing continuous support in all aspects of their lives
- Helping Ambassadors identify personal goals towards education and employment
- Assisting Ambassadors in creating a pathway to success
- Creating awareness, opportunities and connections with Community Agencies
- Transferring Case Management responsibilities to Community Agencies at completion or discharge (if required)

The Case management process was interrupted in March by Andrea's decision to leave the program. Andrea who has remained involved in the Project Advisory Committee left the program in April. This change had a significant impact on the Program and its performance. The departure was partly blamed on the uncertainties surrounding the Program's sustainability and funding messages in negotiations with HRSD. The departure of Andrea and Graham created a sense of uncertainty in the commitment of its creators. Some youth did not adjust well for attachment and commitment reasons. Julian took over Andrea's role in May 04. Julian had been involved with BTC since October 03 as a Student placement from George Brown College. He was a second year student specializing in Substance Use. Also of importance was his past history (survivor) that was perceived as an asset in building relationships with at-risk youth. Julian's role was to engage in linking the Ambassadors to Community Resources based on their exiting plans. Although Julian had built a fairly positive relationship with the BTC participants, the frustrations and anxieties projected by the Ambassadors were at times overwhelming. Ambassadors were reluctant to share certain information based on the fact that they did not know Julian well enough.

**5. To provide ongoing leadership, peer mediation and provide literacy development skills for peers in the project**

These goals were reached on a day-to-day basis. Ongoing leadership was modelled by staff and expected from Ambassadors. Norms addressing all issues of the Program were discussed on a daily basis through our Check In process. BTC is of the conviction that to produce an effective process, you have to have its participants involved in building the process. A Democratic style and attitude had to be created and adopted by all. This process was a challenge for youth as their past history made them more comfortable dealing with structure than creating one! For Staff, the challenge was to not react to a sudden influx of entitlement and resistance. The process of empowerment opened the flood gates to power struggles and unreasonable expectations. Staff had to be centered to make sure that they would process and validate the information rather than discounting and minimizing the requests. Much of this has been addressed previously within this report.

**6. To deliver orientation, personal skills development, to enhance participants employment readiness and leadership skills and increase their access to and**

**success in entering the labour market.**

BTC's daily programming is centered on leadership skills and employment readiness. Morning presentations centering on active listening, assertive communication, conflict mediation, job interviews, verbal and non-verbal communication and the attribution response were presented by BTC staff and other community partners. Individual mentoring as well as simulation role play was utilized on a daily basis in order to build confidence within the Ambassadors.

Ambassadors were also brought through a management model that not only allowed them to better manage oncoming resistance and hostility, but also provided with the tools to respond effectively to triggering and provocative stimuli.

**7. Develop the ability of 14 youth to deliver 80 information sessions as peer information ambassadors to the community, other 'at-risk' youth and younger youth with the goal of enhancing awareness and utilization of youth employment and vocational youth services in the community. The information topics will include:**

- i. Youth Gangs: Romance, Myths and Realities**
- ii. Real career choices for youth in the community**
- iii. "Man-in-the-Box / Woman-in-the-Flower"**
- iv. "I've had enough"**
- v. Leadership and being a Leader**
- vi. Who can help me, and what do they do and where are they!**

**A stipend will be provided to each of the 14 participants.**

BTC delivered 114 presentations to more than 3,404 participants. The information disseminated centered mostly on motivational speaks and youth violence. We attempted to demystify youth violence by having Ambassadors talk about themselves and what led them to be in contact with gangs. It was very important not to glorify money, status and other derivatives of this anti-social lifestyle, but rather to demonstrate that gang-involved youth were also youth who have a conscience, feelings, and strong ethics (loyalty). Many of the questions posed to our Ambassadors were on the topic of bullying and systemic racism. Ambassadors would often struggle with some of the questions directed to them and that is why a BTC staff would always accompany them at all 114 presentations. By the end of the Program, all Ambassadors felt quite confident opening their presentation to the audience. They also clearly understood the need to 'hang around' after a presentation to field personal questions. All Ambassadors were clear to state that presenting to the public was one of their biggest fears. By the end of the Program, all were quite satisfied with their presentation and moderation skills and identified public speaking as one of the major asset gained while at BTC.

**8. Information seminars will be developed that will address issues from the**

## **surveys**

All speaking engagements were processed and developed according to a Request for Presentation” form that would identify the demographics of the targeted audience as well as the size of the group. On occasions, Ambassadors and/or Staff would make a point of meeting the hosting group in order to be clear on the type of presentation BTC would commit to.

The pre-workshop meeting would also give the Ambassador the opportunity to develop ‘management’ skills in being responsible for the building and delivery of the presentation, as well as having a chance to dialogue with a professional segment that usually would deal with them in an authoritative way. Ambassadors who had the opportunity to present in schools where they had been suspended or expelled proved to be one of the most valorizing components of the BTC program.

### **9. Recommendations to City, Provincial and National stakeholders will be made based on the findings of the local community needs survey.**

Recommendations were made at several government levels and municipal organizations on what works best with marginalized youth. In fact, The Canadian Training Institute has been doing so on a National basis for many years (Beyond the Halls, SWIM Project). BTC carried out this task by joining many community task forces/ councils/ projects in order to share the information and experience cumulated in the Project.

- Rexdale Youth Resource Centre Community Council
- North Etobicoke Revitalization Project
- Mayor Community Safety Project

### **10. The Coordinator and Project Resource Staff will facilitate weekly group meetings, hold weekly one-to-one meetings, making referrals to other agencies for instrumental, personal and other needs. They will provide ongoing leadership, peer mediation and provide literacy development skills for peers in the project.**

Group meetings were scheduled on a daily basis through the format of checking in. They would also occur through the Personal Development seminars. Some group meetings were also called to address urgent needs or sudden changes in the Program that would affect all (news). One-to-one meetings were constructed on the same process. A quick assessment was made by staff during the check-in period, and individual meetings would ensue for the ones who appeared fragile or out-of-their-ordinary presentations. As reflected in Appendix II, Case Management was a significant part of the BTC Program. Often staff not only would have to find out what was happening with the individual in distress, they would also have to apply emotional first aid to that same individual and then engage that same individual in promoting alternative responses to the dilemma/ challenge disclosed. Part of the alternative response would often be to seek support or assistance in the community. BTC staff clearly understood the need to empower and support youth in reaching out to community agencies for support. Table 3 illustrates the various agencies BTC had the opportunity to work with.

**Table 3 - Community Partners**

- Rexdale Community Health Centre
- Operation Springboard
- Tim Greenwood
- THTC
- Humber College
- L.O.V.E.
- TCDSB
- 'It's in Me'
- Jamaican Canadian Association
- Dixon Neighbourhood Youth Centre
- Ministry of Children Services
- Rexdale Youth Resource Centre
- JVS
- Matt McDonald
- Microskills
- The Resource Room
- Toronto Police
- City of Toronto
- TDSB
- YMCA
- Downsview Conflict Mediation

**11. To liaise with agencies and others in co-ordinating a case management function and serve as advocates for youth**

As described through earlier questions, one of BTC's main objectives was to create awareness and support to the youth and their community. By doing so, BTC had to get involved in a variety of community-support groups and networks aimed at reinforcing resilient and well adjusted alternatives to youth crime and violence. Organizations that were part of these councils and committees were identified by their peers as advocates. These same agencies were often consulted and utilized by BTC staff as part of their case management practices.

In terms of case management to support employment, the Rexdale Youth Resource Centre met with Youth Ambassadors on a regular basis beginning in April. This assisted in the transition process in terms of career path and ongoing access to HRDC programs.

**12. To utilize a peer support process, which includes training peer mentors, and to explore the feasibility of utilizing a ropes course in facilitating skills**

BTC developed a peer process and explored the Ropes course located on the city's island. Both processes did not work as well as we expected. The peer process worked fine as long as the perception amongst youth was that everyone was equal. The instant a peer was given some task that was perceived as "extra responsibility", the other Ambassadors would initially disengage and criticize the process. Gradually, this attitude changed in the way that leadership and validation were tolerated and accepted under certain circumstances. To lead a speaking engagement project was acceptable and leading an internal training seminar was not.

The youth were clear in their expectations that internal training had to be done by staff. That way there would be no rank and no status.

The Ropes course on City Island was a great idea! Unfortunately the staff that greeted us did not display great amounts of flexibility with the youth which resulted in a mass exodus at lunch time. The style of the facilitators was too authoritative for youth and BTC staff! A lesson learnt in the process is to have prior communication with the organizations so that they fully understand what we are trying to do and the population we work with. There are no excuses for disruptive behaviour and that should be addressed by all staff, but in order to work on Team and Trust issues with children who have had a lifelong history of mistrust and trauma, you have to have resilient, experienced and empathetic staff enforcing a flexible agenda.

**13. To enhance opportunities within the local community for youth leaders to model pro-social behaviours**

Our presentation format certainly provided Ambassadors the opportunity to model pro-social behaviours in their local community. Youth were included in all decision-making processes and meetings. All Ambassadors would be made aware well in advance of upcoming meetings and events. All Ambassadors would then have the opportunity to be part of the 'building' process or volunteer for the presentation part. For many youth, the idea of community leadership would be quite exciting and at the same time frightening. Exciting that they would now be perceived as positive in their own community; being sought as a resource to counter a community challenge and being offered a platform that is influential and at times powerful (i.e. Provincial and Coroner's inquests). The frightening part for most Ambassadors was the retaliation possibilities attached with having their names or faces recognized in the media. Although many of them wished to seize the opportunity to make a difference in their community, many remained silent when the offer was made. Another piece of importance attached with this process was the inner belief that their actions would not make a difference in the outcome.

**14. To create opportunities amongst the participants for success, recognition and**

## **achievement**

BTC offered its participants opportunities for success, recognition and achievement on a regular basis either through positive feedback processes and debriefs after speaking engagements or other formats generated through public meetings. The Case Management practices also focused on resiliency and asset building which provided further opportunities for validating efforts and achievements. The Graduation Ceremony organized on June 23 where parents and partners were invited to celebrate achievements and completion of the Project was also created with the goal of recognizing all efforts made by Ambassadors.

A Recognition Plaque was given to each participant as well as a financial Bonus incentive. This incentive was based on time spent in the Program as well as achieving personal goals (see Appendix VI).

### **15. To survey the 14 youth at every three month mark and at the completion of the process for satisfaction of content, length and overall quality of the project**

The overall structure and process in working with the Youth Ambassadors was based on continuous feedback and input. Our personal development time began with check-ins on how Ambassadors were doing, what they needed and the planning of events for the next week.

On a formalized basis, the Project staff met with Youth Ambassadors in November, February and May to review goals, progress, outstanding issues and their reaction to the program. Although we did not create a quantifiable evaluation form for completion by Youth Ambassadors, we do intend to create one and to administer it during the 3 month post project evaluation phase

As part of the Case Management Process, we also administered a number of instruments both prior to and upon completion of the project. The tests administered during the program were debriefed with Youth Ambassadors and utilized to adjust their individual goals.

Some of the Instruments administered as pre and post tests are listed below:

**Table 4**

<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>When Administered</b>
Y-LS1	Level of Risk	Upon entry to program
Culture Free Self Esteem	Perception About Staff	Upon entry to program
Anger Inventory	Levels of Anger and Learnings	Upon entry to program
Myers Briggs Typeology	Personality/Preference Scale	During program
True Colours	Personality/Preference Scale	During program
Impact of Social Environment	Cohesiveness with Program	During program
Impact of Traumatic Events Scale	Exposure to traumatic events	Upon entry to program
Trauma Symptom Inventory - A	Identification of Traumatic Symptoms Arising from Exposure	Upon entry to program
Jesness Behavioural Inventory	Personality Inventory of Anti-social behaviour	Upon entry to program
Conflict Styles Inventory	Identification of Conflict Style	During the program

The following instruments were utilized at the completion of the program in attempting to create baseline information for future group comparisons and to assess movement through the program.

**Table 5**

Jesness Inventory	Personal Inventory of Anti-Social Behaviours and DSMIV classifications	Upon exit
STAXI-2	Anger and Anger Expression Inventory	Upon exit
Detailed Assessment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder	Both exposure to traumatic events and current distressing symptoms	Upon exit
Behavioural and Emotional Rating Scale	Identifies personal strengths	Upon exit

The results of these scales are currently being interpreted and written up. A number of the Youth Ambassadors have requested meetings over the summer to discuss movement through the program as measured by these instruments.

The interpretive results will be presented as part of the 3 month follow up report to the project.

## **MILESTONES:**

### **1. By July 17, 2003, the project staff will be hired**

This goal was reached by the identified date.

### **2. By July 30, 2003, 14 participants will be recruited**

BTC only had 2 Ambassadors at such point. Lower than expected referrals from the community were partly to blame for not meeting this deadline. We also needed to create a brochure and a community distribution list in order to promote Project Awareness and referrals. We reached this goal at the end of October 2003.

### **3. By October 30, 2003, 30 community presentations will have been delivered**

By October 30, 2003, 6 presentations were delivered by BTC.

### **4. By March 30, 2004, 60 community presentations will have been delivered**

By March 30, 2004, 58 presentations were delivered by BTC

### **5. By June 30, 2004, 80 community presentations will have been delivered**

By June 30, 2004, 114 presentations were delivered by BTC

### **6. By June 30, 2004, 9 youth will have found full time or part time work and 4 youth will return to school.**

By June 30, 2004:

- 6 Ambassadors are attending Literacy and Basic Skills or College Preparation courses on a full time basis at Humber College.
- 3 Ambassadors have been accepted at a college level for Fall semester
- 3 Ambassadors are employed on a part-time basis
- 8 Ambassadors are Case Managed by Community Agencies in order to secure summer/ part time employment
- 1 Ambassador elected to complete his Community Service Order rather than seek part-time employment

## **EXPECTED RESULTS:**

### **1. It is expected that 80% of the participants will complete the intensive personal and leadership development portion**

Statistically, 11 Ambassadors graduating out of 14 is a 78.5% completion rate. One Ambassador who had his Parole Order revoked resumed his Program on June 30! He wished to start earlier but his Parole Officer refused to allow him to travel out of his region to attend the group. This individual stayed in regular contact with BTC and resumed his Program once his Order was fully expired. This individual who did not officially graduate on June 23, 2004, did attend the ceremony and was acknowledged for his efforts.

### **2. It is expected that 80% of the participants will complete the case management process of the program**

All 16 Ambassadors involved in the Program completed their Case Management process. Of the 2 Ambassadors that received new charges while being in the Program, extensive work was done with external agencies to make sure that they would be supported while attending the Criminal Justice Process. For the Ambassador whose parole was revoked, we continued to offer support and guidance as well as canvassing his community for additional support. For the Ambassador who was terminated early due to counterproductive results, the Case Manager worked hard with the individual and the family to make sure that resources were in place to resume the work done at BTC. All 16 Ambassadors remained (and are expected to continue) in touch with BTC for additional support on a needs basis. They can access staff via personal emails and cellular phones or pagers beyond June 30, 2004. They also know that the Canadian Training Institute is a place they can call or drop by at any time should they require any type of assistance or simply just to talk.

### **3. It is expected that 80 workshops will be delivered to 800 youth-at-risk**

As described in Appendix III, BTC delivered 114 presentations to over 3,404 participants. Most of our audience were at-risk youth identified by teachers, case workers or other sources managing the agencies.

### **4. It is expected that by increasing the community's awareness of youth issues and reducing high risk behaviour in younger youth, the youth profile in the community will be improved**

The profile of the youth involved has certainly improved within their community. They are now involved in seeking employment or pursuing an education. Most importantly, they are receiving support from BTC and their local community agencies. Through the process, many were solicited in assisting programs develop options for marginalized youth. Some have done work with the Office of the Family and Child Service Advocacy (Provincial Advocates), the National Youth In Care Network, Operation Springboard, Toronto Police Services, and have taken part in a variety of media initiatives aimed at reducing youth crime throughout Rexdale, the City of Toronto, The Province of Ontario and Canada.

**5. It is expected that 10 of the participants will move into employment and 4 will return to school within 3 months after the project end.**

When this Program was designed, most of us assumed that the youth would be more inclined to joining the work field than they would be around returning to school. The fact that many decided to return to school is in most part explained by the support made available by Humber College and by the impact of their environment and by their presentations.

Humber College really 'bent backwards' to make their education platform attractive to our youth. They created a comprehensive process and timetable for the youth that showed interest. Their availability to respond to queries in a group or individual format worked extremely well. Parental and family influences also had significant impact on their decision making. One final influence was the messages that they kept reinforcing to younger students about the importance of staying in school and finishing their education. For many of them, this message became more and more of a reality as they shared it in their communities. Often students would ask them if they were planning on pursuing their education after the Program and many found themselves answering positively without really having considered it before. As time grew by, the dream slowly became real!

**6. It is expected the outcome of the project will be evaluated and the results will be disseminated to other services and institutions working with youth.**

Once CTI has completed the 3 month post project follow up, we will adjust our final report to reflect both these results and the pre and post test analysis. This information will be disseminated on a national, provincial and local level. Currently an article has been written on the project for the Corrections Today magazine published by the American Correctional Association. This article will appear in the October edition. In September, John Sawdon will be providing a presentation on this project to the Ontario Halfway House's Annual Conference in Kingston, Ontario.

**E) Challenges Encountered, Lessons Learned and Potential Recommendations:**

A number of challenges, and lessons learned have accrued from the delivery of the Youth Ambassador portion of the Breaking the Cycle Project from July 1, 2003 through to June 30, 2004. A summary of some of these may be helpful for Human Resources Skills Development Canada, our Project Advisory Committee and others contemplating a similar project. The following issues identified are intended as lessons learned:

### **Administration of the Agreement and a One Day Information Session Meeting:**

During the launch of this project, CTI was not aware of the degree of administrative accountability, nor the types of administrative processes that might be considered in making our lives and the administrative requirements easier to achieve.

A number of lessons learned occurred for CTI as follows:

- CTI's pay periods are twice a month or 24 times per annum. We have chosen this form of payment to allow for consistency from pay cheque to pay cheque. If a project is a year in length the amount of money paid out is equal to weekly pay periods. However, if it is of shorter durations, the sponsor will have difficulty complying with the cash forecast and the audit requirements of HRSDC.

In future we will pay on a weekly basis.

- The impact of paying 50% G.S.T. could be enormous for a small non-profit charitable organization. In preparing billings, because we are a charity we eventually receive 50% of our G.S.T. payments from the government. This however is only billed once per year. Thus the impact might be a few thousand dollars that an organization is forced to carry.
- During the start up of this financial agreement, we discussed the idea of CTI meeting with a representative of HRSDC for a day to review all of the reporting requirements and guidelines governing spending. This did not occur. Compounding this we found ourselves adjusting to the differing expectations of three project officers. During the past five months, we have received an enormous amount of support in meeting the requirements of HRDC. We recommend that all new projects spend a day with HRSD to review guidelines and administrative requirements. This would prevent delays in billings and the subsequent cash flow crisis we experienced in February and March. CTI put more than \$20,000 into the project to ensure continuity. In March, we were late in payroll for youth and staff. The youth waited four days for partial payment and the staff pay was a week late. This could have seriously jeopardized the continuation of this project.

### **Relationships:**

- During the start up of the project we made an assumption based on the work of Eva Becker and Ricky Greenwald and our previous experience with this youth population

that many youth might be experiencing disturbing intrusive symptoms from exposure to past traumas. Our assumptions as measured by the Impact of Events Scale and the Trauma Symptom Inventory were confirmed. Four of the youth had been exposed to traumatic events which were producing disturbing and intrusive symptoms. Our intention was to offer a voluntary trauma support group in which we might also provide trauma exposure treatment. Due to a lack of resources, time and financing this did not occur. In addressing this we provided referral assistance to two youth. One therapist we contacted was prepared to work for \$160 per hour, a price that we felt we could not afford.

- A second individual disclosed serious sexual assaults with corresponding intrusive symptoms. This Ambassador was linked to a counsellor at the Community Health Centre.

During future projects, we will raise funds to ensure that specific trauma counselling is accessible for youth. We have also initiated contact in the community to recruit professional volunteers for this project. Many of the youth have been exposed to community violence in addition to serious personal assaults.

### **Stipends:**

Most of the Youth Ambassadors attending the project have not been successful in meeting the expectations of a structured environment. For many, school failures, lack of previous employment and lifestyles which are characterized by late nights and daylight sleeping patterns, means adjustments need to be made to be able to return to school and/or employment situations. The Youth Stipends are an enormous motivator and should be maintained. In future, however, our case management process will incrementally be tied to absenteeism and lateness much earlier in our process.

Additionally, we will work with all Youth Ambassadors to open bank accounts as a condition of their first pay. Many youth utilized Cash Marts who take a percentage of their pay cheques due to delays in clearing. It may be feasible to negotiate a direct deposit process.

### **Computers/Internet:**

During the delivery of the Youth Ambassador Leadership Project component of the Breaking the Cycle, we encountered numerous problems with the computers for the youth and the Internet connections. In attending to these problems we discovered we did not have the expertise nor the time.

Computers are an absolute necessity in competing many of the required tasks of the Program. Perhaps the usage of software might help decrease certain problems we have had in the past. We also need to have better equipment available and an OS Platform that is friendlier for this population (XP). A suggested way to avoid the amount of cyber circulation on our computers is to have a game console linked to the TV. Access would have to be built in the POC.

During the launch of the next project it is necessary to budget for network expenses and to enlist the aid of computer businesses in donating quality equipment.

### **Volunteers/Students:**

We learned a number of lessons concerning volunteers and students within the project. Some of these include:

- Very difficult to find the right ones
- Not much resource or capacity for training staff
- Many come with no models, no actual plan but the goodness of their heart
- Building a relationship with our youth. Could appear even more challenging if you are a scholar.
- Wanting to do too much too quickly
- Transference/Counter transference
- Boundaries and Disclosures
- End of Semester Evaluative Report

Like computers and money we need volunteers to help us achieve our goals. From mentorship to escort, teaching a skill to accompanying kids on a speaking engagement, volunteers prove to be valuable and objective source of support for BTC staff.

The work done by Melissa, Khaleda, Tom and Federicka has been phenomenal. For the youth, there is a great deal of apprehension attached to a 'free offer' for a relationship...but it is also very difficult to challenge a helping hand.

We need to create a curriculum (self applicable) for our volunteers as well as a Confidentiality Agreement

## **Guest Speakers/ External Agencies:**

### **Issues/Challenges:**

- To attract agencies/organizations to come and talk.
- Some would require an honorarium
- Getting the youth to be attending on time

The Guest speaker format should be continued in the next phase. In order to create this 'High Touch' approach, it is imperative that the Ambassadors have a chance to meet the staff of the agencies involved in a smaller ratio and in a more comfortable setting. The idea of inviting all our potential partners to come and present synopsis of their services and answer questions from the Ambassadors is very helpful. It also works better because of the environment. Our Ambassadors feel more confident and at ease initially when they greet 'strangers' in their 'house' rather than visiting other settings. It is BTC Staff responsibility to facilitate the transfer to the community agency (organization) as the relationship with the staff/agency/organization evolves.

Have capacity to maintain the contacts we have with effective speakers /facilitators to ensure the good ones can continue to work with us. i.e. Ted/Sara

Ask the ambassadors what interests them and let them help decide who should present to the group

## **Check In/ Check out:**

### **Issues/Challenges:**

- Maintaining consistency in the process
- Attendance
- Having people all come at the same time and leave at the same time
- Lateness severely impairs the process

The Check-in/out process worked well during the 10 day Intensive Training Process. The 'Wall' exercise is a great tool to have people reflect what feelings they are experiencing at the time.

The Talking Stick (at the end of the day) was probably the most successful 'feedback' tool introduced to the Ambassadors.

Both processes were welcomed at the beginning because people did not know each other very well and needed information to feel safe and to connect. By writing how I feel on a wall gives immediate notice of what's happening with me to the rest of the group. As relationships grow, Ambassadors also got to know their peers. The 'stick and wall'

was no longer a tool that they would appreciate as they would see it as intrusive, putting them on the spot!

The Check In/Out process should be included in the next Phase. We suggest that staff should brainstorm a variety of arrival exercise that aim at the same goal. Variety and enthusiasm modeled by staff will have an impact on the rest of the group.

Another recommendation is that staff establishes a check in/out time, make it official and then stick with the norms established. One of the reasons why the process did not work as well as we anticipated was partly explained by staff inconsistencies in the process.

### **Speaking Engagements:**

#### **Issues/Challenges:**

- Getting Ambassadors to show up
- Having youth talk about their lives
- Getting youth involved in all levels of setting up and delivering presentations
- Getting the local youth to speak in their communities
- Avoiding sensationalism
- Trusting the process

Definitely one of the turning points of the Program. All youth are clear to say that they are not comfortable at all to speak about themselves to strangers.

The idea of the public speaking process is an excellent one for this type of youth. It provides them with a different platform to communicate with other youth. It is no longer a reflection of negativity but rather a testimony, an admission that positivity is the only way to go.

The importance of having local youth talk within their communities is crucial. By doing so, the creation of a public statement is fundamental in making changes in their lives. By sharing their dreams and hopes, they are asking others to hold them accountable for their behaviour in the community. The more often they share the dreams, the more difficult it becomes to enjoy a negative life.

Speaking engagements worked best with the Grade 3 to Grade 8 groups. The older groups (high school) were too intimidating for our Ambassadors. We received several offers to present in jails and Open Custody facility but none of our Ambassadors volunteered. It became clear to us that safety was a clear issue with presenting to other youth in the system. I also believe that the Ambassadors were worried about being challenged on their gang involvement, ridiculed and threatened for wanting to leave the gangs, and confronted with the 'Breaking of the Code' by talking about gangs and maybe disclosing some information that might be given to authorities.

More exercises that focus on self disclosure in groups and clinically in one on one interviews to make ambassadors feel more comfortable with self-disclosure

### **Community Outings:**

#### **Some Lessons Learned:**

- Finding relevant outings
- More of a field trip with no connection to what we are trying to do
- Some good value with a small group

The Community Outings were successful. The Ambassadors went to the Ontario Science Centre and to the Royal Ontario Museum. The goal set by doing so was to expand their knowledge and interests. Many of them had never gone out of their neighborhood thus it made sense for them to visit other points of interest. Unfortunately, not all of the outings were 'in line' with the daily topics viewed within the program. The outings were more aimed at fulfilling a recreational need than being created as an opportunity to self-development and the continuous building of relationships.

In the next phase, I suggest that they should still be part of the Continuum. I would also add that they be announced well in advanced and be built in with the Curriculum. For example, the visit to the ROM should be part of a topic discussing hobbies and interests.

All outings should be debriefed collectively as well. The debrief would further enhance a link to the BTC material and would also provide BTC with valuable feedback in terms of retention and satisfaction.

### **Space that offers Privacy (Office):**

#### **Lessons Learned/Challenges Encountered:**

- 1620 Albion Road.
- No office for the first 6 months
- 1760 Martingrove

The Albion Road site was not feasible for many reasons. The site was given to the program, rather than having a site that best fits the needs of the program. The reality of finding space in Rexdale is quite challenging; finding space in Rexdale for a youth gang project was even more so. Dr. Mand's office building provided us the opportunity to locate ourselves in Rexdale.

A positive contributing factor during our stay at this site was one of the pharmacy assistants who worked in the pharmacy adjacent to our office. She immediately connected with the youth and created a safe 'platform' for them to negotiate with. She would also hold them accountable for their behaviour in the building. She was also the connection between all tenants and the owners of the facility. Our relationships with all

tenants deteriorated quickly when she left for an undetermined period of time to visit a sick relative.

Suddenly our youth were suspected of doing many wrongdoings in the building. We were suspected of attempting to steal the Nintendo machine out of the dentist office, suspected of breaking in the pharmacy to steal prescription medication, suspected of leaving the doors open so that homeless people might have access to the building, suspected of placing some sort of gas device in the air system, identified as offering to sell drugs to older patients of Dr Mand, and also suspected of stealing a wallet from a community doctor and hiding it in the community washroom. Clearly the other tenants and management were adamant about not wanting the relationship with BTC to continue. Note that all complaints were received and spoken about as a group and that an invitation to tenants was made to come and give us more clarity in what they were seeing, and what could be done so that we meet all expectations. No one accepted, Mintu Mand, refused on many occasions stating that she did not want to make the kids angry with her (fear of retaliation), while the others did not respond to the offer to have open and clear dialogue.

We moved at the beginning of April to 1760 Martingrove and the beneficial differences were immediate. More space, a kitchen, 3 offices and a Board Room! The move was not by choice but by necessity. It would have been great to have launched the program originally from Marian Academy. By the time we moved, there was little need for so much space. Most of the Personal Development pieces had been delivered, all our guest speakers had come and gone, and for the most part, Ambassadors had engaged in a completion process for individual goals.

A place like the Marian Academy is great. It would not work well if the school was occupied. This type of program does not lend itself well to sharing of space; we had plenty of negative experiences at 50 Euston! For our next Phase, we will need a place that is accessible by community transit and is close by to our community partners. Our proximity to the Albion Mall was beneficial in many aspects, most importantly our relationship with the YMCA Rexdale Youth Resource Centre.

## **Food and Refreshments:**

### **Challenges and Lessons Learned:**

- Developing a budget
- Maintaining stock
- Theft
- Lifestyle

Food was a big issue at BTC. Meals were provided during the 10-day intensive period. One of the biggest complaints was that the same practice was not continued beyond the 10 days. Truly one of the first issues to contend with! There was a sense of betrayal and manipulation expressed by some of the youth. 'You lure us with food', 'I knew you guys would do this' and 'why do it at the beginning and not continue' were some of the arguments brought up by youth.

We decided to offer (on a permanent basis) some juice, toast, bagels and fruits (light snacks) shortly after the Holidays. It was an immediate success! What we did not expect is that youth would come in late and make themselves breakfast (or lunch) thus interfering with whatever we were doing at the time. Also unexpected was the theft that started occurring on a regular basis. Frozen juice cans and bagels would disappear regularly. Although theft and vandalism were often topics on the daily agenda, nobody owned up to doing it.

### **Open House (November 12):**

#### **Lessons/Learned:**

- Organizing it
- Anxieties from youth
- So early in the process

Our Open House was a success at all levels. It gave us exposure in Rexdale, provided a live contact with our supporters and the Ambassadors and validated the expectations placed on the youth coming from the community. It also highlighted the importance of their upcoming role and the celebration of good things to come. In terms of connections, the best example of such a process was the immediate impact a young lady of our program had on a community leader. The unfortunate part was that this young lady could not benefit further from possible mentoring opportunities due to her young age (not yet 18 years old).

## **Graduation:**

### **Lessons Learned:**

- Organization
- Location
- Getting families to participate

When working with high-risk youth, special attention must be placed on the termination phase. Finishing the program was perceived by many as a mourning process as well as a re-enactment of earlier experiences of loss. Many experienced feelings of sadness, anger, rejection and abandonment. We spent a considerable amount of time normalizing and validating their feelings about the end of the Program. We also announced well in advance the termination date as well as providing as much clarity on the process of ending. Although telling them in advance might have appeared as the wisest strategy at the time, I now have some doubts on its effectiveness. The fact that there was a Bonus Incentive based on performance that would also be factored in created more anxieties than expected. The goal of recognizing progress and achievements was overshadowed by the performance evaluation until the Youth were actually celebrated at the Graduation Ceremony.

The Certificates were an instant success. Many realized then that they had been successful and would be recognized officially for their efforts by the Government. For many of them it was the first time they were seeing their names on a certificate containing the word Congratulations.

## **Sports (Basketball, baseball, Leafs, Jays, Raptors, Argonauts, Rocks, U of T Blues):**

### **What We Might Consider:**

- Coordinating outings
- Financial Resources

This is an area that should definitely be further developed this Fall. We never really had the opportunity to make these types of outing feasible. CAA had mentioned the possibility of accessing their leased facility at the ACC to view basketball or hockey games but that commitment never materialized itself. Budget cuts were at the source of this sudden unavailability. Basketball would have been the best outing to match their interest.

## **Team Building Exercises:**

### **What We Encountered and Learned:**

- Ropes Course at Centre Island
- Too early in the Process
- Facilitators that can negotiate with our Youth
- Organization and Travel arrangements

The Ropes Course at the Centre Island was an excellent initiative from BTC; unfortunately the results differed quite significantly from the expectations. A lack of clarity in what we were going to do mixed with facilitators that were too authoritative turned a day filled with potentially great experiences into a short day filled with disappointments. The Ropes Course is an excellent process in trust building that should be done twice: Once shortly after the group has been formed (all 14 if that is the number agreed upon) and a second time close to the end of the Program. Each time the process is engaged in a debriefing should take place.

BTC should meet the facilitators well in advance and identify how to deal with apprehension, resistance and non-compliance. The Ropes facilitators were clearly triggered by our youth and responded in a passive-aggressive way. In that pre-workshop meeting, a distribution of responsibilities and expectations should be shared as well as options being created that address the causes of the behaviour rather than the behaviour itself.

## **Contact with Families:**

### **Our Challenges:**

- No capacity
- Some cultural issues
- Lack of Trust and support from parents
- Lack of adequate staffing to facilitate a mandatory engagement process with families

BTC was not very successful in involving all families in the process. Partially due to a combination of in-depth vocational management and a lack of resources to contact family members. Although some families came to the Graduation, many families from the East part of Toronto chose to not attend the celebrations.

For the next intake of ambassadors we should stipulate that bi-weekly meetings with at least one family member/guardian is a mandatory part of the process.

Stated at the outset, this could be a useful tool to start a discussion on family matters. Though this might not be practical for all ambassadors, it could be quite beneficial for the ones who can participate

### **Maintaining Contact After Grad:**

#### **Overcoming Obstacles:**

- No resources
- Part time employment
- High availability

Make the resources available at CTI to pay someone to take on this task.

Designate a caseworker to do a brief check in with ambassadors either over the phone or by internet (in person if convenient) to maintain contact with the program.

The challenges that were posed by this process were not clarified at graduation.

Some ambassadors don't have phones.

Some ambassadors don't have e-mail addresses.

Some e-mail addresses need to be clarified.

Some ambassadors no longer live within the GTA

### **Intensive 10 Days:**

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- Funding
- Space
- Lining up Guest Speakers
- Extensive Prep Time

Youth that participated in the 2 week intensive part of the program are clear in stating that it was the part of the program that impacted them the most. The pace was rapid and people had little choice but to participate.

There is a definite need to recreate this process at a larger and more frequent scale. The process needs full funding and should be involve two staff on a full time basis. The process would allow a greater number of youth to benefit from the skills taught in the process as well as creating a larger pool of potential Ambassadors.

### **Offering Support After Grad:**

#### **Challenges We Are Encountering:**

- The difficulties of regular contact with ambassadors.
- Money available to pay someone to take this task on.

Make some resources and funding available for a caseworker to facilitate referrals to community agencies as needed.

The Program fails to offer reasonable support at the end of a very structured program. The analogy of releasing an offender in the community without support is very applicable in this case.

Although all efforts were made to transfer all responsibilities towards long term goals to community agencies; and achieving and collecting all tools related to short term goals, some youth will be requiring support beyond the 36 week program. Constant and uninterrupted funding could address these issues.

#### **Visiting The Youth's Home And Community:**

- The amount of time this takes makes it difficult
- Getting the family and youth on board for this can take considerable work

Have the ambassador do a "community introduction day". Take one of the BTC staff into his community to show where they live/play.

Make it clear at the start this is an integral part of the process.

#### **Funding Restrictions For Unforeseen And Essential Items:**

- Unclear directions from funders
- Lack of flexibility in meeting financial needs
- Pilot project
- Unforeseen expenses and needs

Planning such a process is never easy and some items were miscalculated or omitted. A considerable amount of discussion and energy were required at times to meet the needs of the Program. Provisions should be made and access to an almost immediate and official resolution mechanism should be in place to address the issues brought up by case management or management.

### **Referral Process And Out Of Region Representation:**

- Low referrals
- Distance to travel
- Absenteeism and lateness
- Gap funding
- Creating a newsletter

We need to continue developing the many relationships we have made in the Rexdale community. We have to continue attending the different meetings in the community and continue staying in touch with our Program Advisory Committee.

### **Getting Referrals From PH2/ Adult Courts:**

#### **Challenges:**

- Confidentiality
- Lack of Awareness

A meeting took place with Rexdale's Probation and Parole Services (Mary-Lou Ingratta) where most of the problems were ironed out in regards to confidentiality. This process was reviewed by the President of the Probation Officers Association of Ontario (POAO).

We also need to lobby Phase One Officers and BTC's name placed on the list of Facilitators at the next POAO Annual Conference in Early Fall 2004

### **Support From Humber:**

#### **Finding a Valuable Resource:**

- Getting ambassadors to commit to the engagement process
- Overcoming fears and anxieties about returning to a formal schooling process

Pam and Rob have been excellent in meeting all our needs.

Night and week end courses were made available to all Ambassadors free of charge.

The Literacy Basic Skills Program has accommodated 2/3 of our Ambassadors in June 2004.

Humber has planned on contacting Centennial to reciprocate the same quality of service to our 'eastern' Ambassadors.

## **Females in the Program**

### **Challenges:**

- Referrals
- No contacts with Vanier DC
- Most referred were still in school

It took a few months to receive and accept our first female Ambassador. She was alone for a few weeks before a second female was introduced as a temporary placement due to the secondment of another Ambassador to a Governmental agency.

A conscious effort has to be made to recruit more females to the Program. Another idea is to run a 10 day-intensive for females alternative to every 2-3 male programs.

### **Case Management And Staff Training:**

A number of lessons learned emerged in terms of case management and the need for continual staff development. In launching this project, we researched and designed a comprehensive intake form, a series of assessment tools and a process for carrying out case management.

We learned that without adequate staffing and without ongoing supervision and training, staff may complete forms and administer instruments without full regard to following a systematic process. The lack of understanding and training can lead to inconsistency in administering these tools. This raises questions of validity and reliability. An example, the Y-LS1 was completed on all youth entering the program. However, it was never administered properly and thus the results are inconsistent and unreliable. The Y-LS1 assesses the risk of engaging in criminal conduct. Our intention was to assess quantitatively whether participation in the program reduces risk. We can probably extrapolate, however, training in administering this process is.

We discovered inconsistencies in case management. This was seen as a lack of training and supervision. In future projects we recommend that an orientation period occur and that within this period, staff receive training in assessment and intake, Creating Rapport through a Comprehensive Family, Social and Criminal History Profile, Completion of Y-LS1 and other assessment instruments utilized within the project.

### **Consistency Of Funding:**

The nature of this project and the impact of short term funding negatively affects both the retention of staff and the energy/flow and rhythm of the project. During the first three months we lost Graham Vardy due to the insecurity of funding and the part-time status of the Program Coordinator's position.

We also lost Andrea Taylor BSW due to the original completion date of April. Even though the funding for the project was extended until June, we did not receive confirmation until late March. Andrea in the interim began to search for other employment and terminated her full-time position in April.

Short term funding means the 4 ½ years of investment in a person like Graham Vardy disappears. It also means staff hired will begin searching for new jobs prior to the completion of the project.

We have requested a three year commitment of funds to truly demonstrate our approach with this population of gang involved youth. The short term nature of approvals, stops and negotiations impacts efficiency, effectiveness and the rhythm of work.

We encourage you to approve longer term funding agreements with built in external evaluation. This creates consistency and accountability.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The past twelve months has been both incredibly challenging and rewarding. We have made a number of assumptions about the youth who were target for this program. Many of these have been verified. The original proposal put forward and agreed upon at the onset of the project was insufficient in terms of the number of the full time staff required to supervise, to coach/mentor and to attend community presentations with youth. We have made adjustments to this within our current proposal to continue the Youth Ambassador portion of the project.

We have also learned that the Project Sponsor's time commitment in supervising the project and engaging in community development with the Rexdale community is very time consuming. In launching the second phase of the Youth Ambassador Project, the Project Sponsor will spend considerably more time training new staff. Our challenge will continue to be with attracting and maintaining qualified staff given the short term nature of project funding.

We wish to thank our Project Advisory Committee and the staff of Human Resources Skills Development Canada for their support in touching the lives of gang involved youth.

We believe we have made a difference in their lives. This could not have been realized without your support, your patience and your willingness to risk. Thank you.

We trust this report answers the many questions which have emerged on this project.