



THE JUSTICE RESEARCH CENTER

ARISE Life Skills – Thompson Academy

The ARISE Foundation recently took on a major challenge when it began work with Thompson Academy in Pembroke Pines, Florida. The Academy is a Moderate Risk residential program for youth who are committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice after being adjudicated delinquent. The program has a maximum capacity of 154 male youth. In recent years, the program has faced high staff turnover rates, successive management changes, and issues with staff morale. Despite these obstacles, the ARISE Foundation began working with Thompson Academy in 2009, providing ARISE Drop it at the Door trainings for staff and ARISE Life Skills groups for youths. Approximately 90 staff and 150 youths receiving ARISE programming over the course of the year.

Preliminary outcome measurement indicates that ARISE had a profound effect on Thompson Academy staff and youths. Prior to the ARISE Foundation's involvement at the facility, the program had historically performed poorly on annual quality assurance reviews conducted by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice. This year's quality assurance outcomes were quite different. For the first time in its history, the program was awarded Deemed Status and a score of 86%, which was 15 percentage points higher than their previous year's score. Deemed Status is awarded to programs that achieve an overall performance rating of 80% or higher and meet additional criteria as outlined in DJJ policy. This drastic improvement is rather unprecedented in delinquency programming and is largely attributable to the involvement of the ARISE Foundation.

A comprehensive study of youth and staff outcomes is forthcoming. Initial results from follow-up interviews with youth illustrate the significant effect that ARISE Life Skills groups had upon the youth served at Thompson Academy. Of those interviewed to date:

- 100% are presently enrolled in school.
- The majority indicated that they were satisfied with their experiences in the ARISE Life Skills groups that were run at the program.
- To the question "What did you learn in the ARISE Life Skills groups that is still helpful for you now?" youth responded (selected excerpts):
 1. How to control my anger.
 2. Learned from therapist about life and being responsible and how to treat people.
 3. Taught me how to set boundaries.
 4. Think before you act.
 5. Just taught me to do better and make better choices and to think positive and make positive choices.
 6. Taught me to control anger.
 7. Don't escape from problems, learned a lot.

- To the question "Knowing what you know now, what do you wish you had learned in the ARISE Life Skills groups? Youth responded (selected excerpts):
 1. No, think I learned what I needed.
 2. They pretty much taught what I needed to know.
 3. I think pretty much everything was good. I really can't think of anything.
- 71% of the youth reported that they now have basic social skills and they often use them.
- To the question "How has your behavior changed because of the ARISE Life Skills groups at THOMPSON?" youth responded (selected excerpts):
 1. Changed my way of thinking and look at things and life better.
 2. Behavior is forming into change, attitude is better.
 3. Make me more confident in myself.
 4. When someone aggravates me, I would act; they taught me to think before I act.
 5. Since I went to Thompson I learned my lesson. I make better choices. I'm a lot more positive. I don't hang out with the wrong people. Got my anger problem under control. I get along good with my brother and mom now. I think about getting into trouble and the consequences and I just walk away from the problem.
 6. Realize that I need to spend more time with my family and realize the wrong things that I was doing.
- To the question "What did you think was really good about the ARISE Life Skills groups?" youth responded (selected excerpts):
 1. Therapists
 2. Able to express our feelings.
 3. Short and to the point
 4. It pretty much helped.
 5. They made you respond to what they talked about and helped you make good choices that were positive and made you feel better.
 6. The ARISE Life Skills therapy was the only good part of the entire Thompson Academy program.

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ARISE curricula and Training is based on social and emotional learning. This is all about people becoming better at understanding and managing emotions i.e. anger and learning how emotions impact the choices they make, the relationships they have and their outlook in life.

“Qualities such as patience, calmness, compassion, cooperation and kindness are skills that can be trained, not traits that are either inborn or set for life by early childhood experiences”.

“Just knowing that the brain can be trained is a positive intervention all by itself”

Dr. Richard Davidson, Neuroscientist

Positive Intervention The ARISE Approach

When we treat at risk youth as if they were what they ought to be, we help them grow into what they are capable of becoming. Neuroscientists believe when we act as if the skills are already there—it helps bring them into existence.