ADVENTURE-BASED OUTDOOR INTERVENTION FOR HIGH RISK YOUNG OFFENDERS.

Report of a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship to South Africa – 2005

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Ms Mariska Van Zyl NICRO
Ms Thabile Teffo NICRO
Mr Gert DuPlessis Octagon Adventures
Mr Kriek South Africa Correctional Services
Dr Jacobs University of South Africa

CAPE TOWN
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Mrs Celia Dawson NICRO
Mrs Althea Hendricks NICRO
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THE PROFESSIONAL ASPECTS OF THE FELLOWSHIP
Introduction

Detailed Aims and Objectives
Diverting people away from the Criminal Justice System is something that is very important to me. When I read about the National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Reintegration of Offender’s (NICRO) diversion projects I was particularly interested in how they work in a country as diverse as South Africa. A programme called The Journey captured my attention the most. NICRO advertise The Journey as being a “rites of passage, three phase separation, transition and re-integration programme”. Briefly, The Journey is an outwards-bound, experiential learning initiative designed to prevent young offenders from re-offending. The Journey involves taking groups of young people into the wilderness of South Africa allowing them the opportunity to reflect on their past and re-build their lives. Alongside an extensive life-skills programme, activities include team building exercises, orienteering, abseiling and camping alone in the wilderness. Following each activity, the participants are de-briefed on what they have learnt and how this relates to their everyday lives.

Upon discovering this programme I was keen to find out more about it:
- What exactly happens in each of the three phases?
- How do the young people react to this kind of ‘rehabilitation’?
- Does it work in reducing offending?
- What kind of support do the young people get on completion of the outward bounds aspect?
- How are the young people able to relate what they learnt on this programme to real life situations?
- What are the recidivism rates of those who have completed the programme?
- What do the young people really think about The Journey?
- What do the facilitators really think of the programme?
- Is the same programme used for each age group?
- What could be improved in the programme?
- What does the community think of such a programme?
- How much does such a programme cost?
- What life skills are learnt?
- How much involvement is there with the young people’s parents and their community?

My hope was to be able to find out the answers to these questions and many more. The purpose being that if the feedback I got was positive, I would hope to pilot a similar project, although adapted for a UK audience.

Crime in a South African context
The day-to-day perception of living in South Africa is characterised by offending and crime, particularly of a violent or sexual nature. Violent behaviour and aggression may be fuelled by various factors including the biology of the individual, family environment, peers and society. It can be argued that many young people, particularly those growing up in the poorer communities and those who experience failure at school, have a higher propensity to associate with peers who engage in deviant behaviour. They often lack social and community support and are at a higher risk of
becoming involved within the Criminal Justice System. In addition, with few economic opportunities, the youth of South Africa are easily drawn into crime, and street gangsters and car-jackers arguably become the role model for many.

Fine (2001) argues that youngsters in trouble with the law often live within an internalised prison – this being the restrictions of their thinking. This can promote a ‘don’t care attitude’, and the belief that ‘nothing matters’. Institutionalisation, by way of a prison sentence, can aggravate the situation in which the young people are already placed and this can lead to limiting their future choices. When these young people have finally completed their prison sentences and leave their institutions, their attitudes towards life have not been challenged or changed, instead, their negative perception of life has been confirmed. It is for this reason, that there is a great need for young people to transform the way they think about their past, their present and indeed their future.

Previously, a prison sentence has normally been the answer, and in South Africa, once you are involved in the prison system a life of crime is hard to avoid. In recent years however, particularly since 1994 and the end of the apartheid era, there has been a definite shift away from punitive practices and retribution, towards rehabilitation, education and restorative justice. The notion of involving the community and the victim has become a very popular method of rehabilitation. It is within this structure that NICRO works. NICRO seeks to empower the offender and involve the victim and the community within the Criminal Justice System. They believe firmly in restorative justice and as such, diversion is their key aim.

Diversion projects have grown rapidly in many countries over recent years. It is one of the only areas where the Criminal Justice System can be seen as more effective in reducing crime. It also has the added advantage of being more humanitarian than some of the old retributive methods and as such promotes less stigmatising responses to youth offending.

Diversion can be simply defined as “strategies developed in the youth justice system to prevent young people from committing crime or to ensure that they avoid formal court action and custody if arrested and prosecuted” (Muncie, 1999). It is on this basis that NICRO works, promoting community based crime prevention programmes as an alternative to custody.

**Diversion Projects**
There have been many discussions previously on the pros and cons of punishment versus diversion (see Spencer & Deakin, 2004, Raynor, 2002 ) and it is not my intention to reproduce these at this time. However, to fully understand the diversion projects currently running in South Africa, a knowledge of the aims of diversion is important. In short, the main aims of diversion are the following:

- To make offenders responsible and accountable for their actions.
- To provide an opportunity for reparation.
- To identify the underlying problems which motivate people into offending.
- To prevent first time or inexperienced petty offenders from receiving criminal records and thus falling into the problem of labelling and the self-fulfilling prophecy.
• To provide educational and rehabilitative programmes.
  (Muntingh, retrieved 10/08/2004)

In any form of diversion there is a danger of ‘net-widening’. This being “that more offenders get drawn into the system than would otherwise be the case” (Maepa, 2005) NICRO avoids this by careful assessments of each individual brought to their attention by the prosecutors.

NICRO currently run a number of diversion projects for young offenders, one of which is The Journey. The others include the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Victim-Offender Mediation, Community Service and Family Group Conferencing. Young people are recommended for one or more of these projects on a mix and match basis depending on their crime, the level of seriousness and their response to each project. The Journey is seen as one of the higher level diversion projects and young people will only be taken after they have successfully completed the YES programme but are deemed to need a more in-depth type of intervention, which focuses on practical change.

In order to get a better understanding of the diversion projects that NICRO run, and in particular an understanding of The Journey, my research involved attended the YES programme, initially as an observer, however, as I got more involved, I found myself acting more and more as a facilitator, working with the young people and the group leaders.

THE YOUTH EMPOWERMENT SCHEME PROGRAMME

Youth Empowerment Scheme
The YES programme was established in 1993 by NICRO in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General with the aim of diverting young people away from crime. It was initially aimed at young people at risk of offending who had already come to the attention of the Criminal Justice System for less serious offences such as shoplifting, theft or common assault. Stakeholders were of the opinion that it was not in the best interests of the young people or the wider community for these children to be prosecuted and convicted, if an alternative, rehabilitative option was available. This is increasingly a commonly held view by Magistrates in the UK also. The YES programme was originally designed to be used as a pre-trial option in order to avoid the stigma of a criminal record at a young age. A record which would likely jeopardize the future of a young South African, in a country where employment is already scarce. It has now become common place however, for Probation Officers and Youth Workers to refer young people onto the programme as part of their sentence.

The YES programme is designed to provide young people the opportunity to reflect on their behaviour and the consequences of their actions. The young people are encouraged to take responsibility for their own lives and their own actions and learn how to behave within acceptable societal norms.

The YES programme, also known as Mapping the Future, is based on the overall aim of preventing young people from re-offending whilst at the same time teaching them about themselves and the importance of taking responsibility for your own actions.
The official aims of the programme are highlighted as:

1. Providing young people with the skills that will help them to understand themselves, to relate to others and to take responsibility for their actions.
2. Providing young people with an opportunity to express their ideas, opinions and feelings in a constructive way.
3. Providing young people with the skills to cope with the challenges in their environment.
4. Opening up communication between young people and their parents or guardians.
5. Encouraging self-respect, self-worth and respect for others based on a human rights culture.
6. Encouraging and fostering parental responsibility.

(taken from Mapping the Future – Empowering the Youth – NICRO, 2000)

My experience of the programme

As part of my Fellowship I attended a YES programme for the 16-18 year old age groups in the Mitchells Plain region of the Western Cape. Within the group there were 12 young people; five females and seven males, and 3 facilitators; two females and one male. Unfortunately, I only joined in the programme at session three, therefore missed the initial induction session. Upon joining the group however, I was struck immediately at how relaxed the young people were, with each other and with the facilitators. The facilitators running the group are all volunteers who have been given intensive training on the programme by NICRO prior to being ‘let loose’ to facilitate the programme on their own. There was immediately a sense of them wanting to be there, which came across in their attitude and rapport with the young people. I am in no doubt that this impacted on the young people in a positive way, indeed, there was frequent incredulousness amongst the young people that the facilitators were there in their own free time and not getting paid! Since the facilitators are not Social Workers or Probation Officers, there is a sense that the young people are more freely able to say what they really feel, as they are not being formally assessed by ‘authority figures’. The young people are aware however, that a progress report is prepared on each individual and passed to their Social Worker at the end of the programme.

Each session within the programme concentrates on a different aspect of life, ranging from assertiveness training, to the norms and laws of society right through to the final session where the young people are encouraged to make goals for themselves and their futures. The sessions encourage communication with the young people’s parents and or guardians, and the first and final session include the parents who are invited to attend the sessions. The idea of this is to forge a bond between the young people and their guardians and ensure that the guardians take an active interest in what the young person is learning throughout the duration of the programme.

As with any group work programme, some people find aspects easier and harder than others. My observation of the group however, was that there was a lot of support amongst each other and there really was a sense that the group had bonded and they were going through the experience together. On more than one occasion, the young
people told incredibly personal stories about themselves. This led to tears, as sharing
the memories was so painful. As an observer and facilitator, I found this particularly
moving and it is testament to the way the programme is run and facilitated, that allows
these young people, many of whom have come from broken and impoverished homes,
to express themselves in such an open and honest way.

Coming from the UK, where there is one official language, it is easy to forget that in
South Africa there are eleven official languages. This made the YES programme
even more fascinating to me. Amongst the group that I was involved with, many of
the young people’s first language was different including Afrikaans, English, Zulu
and Xhosa. Despite this they all managed to communicate with each other in their
own way. The facilitators are normally multi-lingual and as such are able to
communicate with the young people and they encouraged the young people to talk in
the language that they felt most comfortable. In the main, the young people could all
understand English, but often preferred to answer in their own language, the
facilitators encouraged this, but also ensured that the other group members understood
what was being said.

The YES programme is currently being adapted to include other issues that are
increasingly important to young people growing up in South Africa, including HIV
awareness. This highlights that the programme is not static and is keeping up-to-date
with the pertinent issues of the time that are affecting our young people.

THE JOURNEY PROGRAMME

The Aims of the Journey Programme
The Journey is an intensive experiential intervention programme aimed at high-risk
young offenders. The main aim of the programme is to empower young people to
take control of their lives by learning to solve problems experientially, in an outdoor
environment, where the element of risk is controlled. Central to this process is the
teaching of life skills though experiential education. The primary focus of the
programme is on creating an awareness of personal and societal consequences and the
effects of crime, on themselves and the general public. After completing the YES
programme, those young people that are deemed to have progressed sufficiently are
returned to Court for decisions to be made about their sentence. However, if the
Social Workers feel that the young person needs further intervention, they are
included on the Journey. This is a higher intensity programme where the young
people learn experientially by ‘doing’.

The programme is based on experiential education and the psycho-educational model,
as well as the theory that the desire for adventure and danger is a natural part of
adolescent development. The Journey is targeted towards high-risk young offenders
(excluding those who have committed rape or murder), both males and female and
between the ages of 14-18 years old.

Through experiential leaning, the Journey is designed to promote self-expression,
self-esteem, commitment and accountability. Through information giving, group
discussions and adventure therapy, change is encouraged. The participants are
removed from high-risk crime related learning environments, and placed in
environments previously unknown to them. Since the majority of the youth at risk
that are involved within NICRO programmes reside in urban areas, a retreat into nature is an ideal place to being the process of change.

The primary goal of the Journey programme is to develop and extend fundamental skills through experienced based learning. The goals of the programme being that the young people learn:

1. An understanding of self – the young person acquires a greater sense of self-understanding and beings to recognise their own role in the community social setting as well as the family social environment.
2. An understanding of others – the young person develops an understanding and appreciation of others who may belong to any social, cultural or ethnic group.
3. To become a responsible citizen – the young person learns the habits and attitudes associated with responsible citizenship and focuses on societal and personal values and rules.
4. Positive self-image – the young person gains a positive approach to life and an appreciation of their worth as an individual.
5. Self-help skills – the young person develops skills to plan, activate and evaluate their life.
6. Family relationship – greater, positive inter-communication skills are learnt.
7. Basic education skills – the young people develop basic cognitive skills related to general living skills such as general hygiene, time management etc.

The Journey is seen as a three-phase programme which starts with the YES programme. Upon completion of this phase, the young people advance to the outdoor adventure camp, attending either a 3-day (Eduventure) or 5-day (Higher Ground) camp, depending on the nature of the behaviour that is to be addressed. The third and final phase of the Journey commences upon return from the camps and the young people are required to attend follow-up sessions, where progress can be monitored and further work 'resettling' the young people back into their communities can be done. Upon full completion of the programme, evaluation reports are prepared on each young person which are then sent to Court. The Magistrate then has the power to withdraw that conviction from the young person’s record, based on the progress made.

**Higher Ground**

The Higher Ground camp is aimed at young people who display destructive behaviour who are deemed to be at a particularly high risk of re-offending and who have committed more than one previous offence. For inclusion on this programme they must display oppositional and defiant behaviour, be severely under-achieving at school and appear to be emotionally troubled.

The five-day Higher Ground camp uses intensive obstacle courses, extreme activities and includes a solitary experience that focuses on action-consequences, discipline and self-management skills in order to address the risk factors contributing to the re-offending behaviours of the young people.
**Eduventure**

The Eduventure camp is aimed at first time offenders who display poor coping, assertiveness and decision-making skills. The youths must present as having low self-esteem and also be under-achieving at school.

The three-day camp makes use of much less intensive obstacle courses, with a solitary experience that addresses environmental and personal risk factors that contribute to the behavioural problems of that young person. There is much more emphasis on group work and team building.

**The Outward Bounds Element**

The outwards bounds elements of the Journey are co-ordinated and managed by service providers separate from NICRO. The service providers are all fully trained in providing experiential learning initiatives and they work hand in hand with NICRO.

In the Gauteng province the service provider is Octogan Adventures. The Journey’s in Gauteng province are conducted at Goodland, Cullinan, an area of bush land specifically designed for this type of experiential learning. During the time on their Journey, the young people participate in outdoor activities such as abseiling, river rafting, rock-climbing, hiking, orienteering and team building exercises, culminating at a final solo experience where the young people spend a night alone in the bushveld.

These experiences are more often than not an ordeal for the participants. Many of the young people have never experienced anything like this before and as such they are tested to their limits. Indeed, this is echoed by the comments that the young people I met made:

“I was terrified before I went abseiling, I thought I was going to die, but when I got to the bottom I was so happy that I had achieved something.”

Male, 18 years old

“I was not happy risking my life in the water, but I am glad I finished”

Female, 17 years old

“I didn’t want to go because all my friends were at home going to parties, but I’m really glad I went because now I’ve learnt discipline, communication and making goals.”

Male, 18 years old

The aims of the outward bound camps are to challenge and encourage the young people to confront their fears - their fears of the unknown, their fears of failure, their fears that they will embarrass themselves in front of their friends, and their fears that they will hurt themselves - physically and emotionally. Although some of the young people find some exercises easier than others, when they have completed it they all have a sense of pride and achievement.

“I like the obstacle course best. It taught me patience and the importance of communicating with people. It was really challenging and we couldn’t have completed it without communication skills. I couldn’t have completed it before.”

Male, 18 years old
A main theme of the Journey sessions, are about encouraging the young people to think about their past, present and their future. The young people I met were able to tell me what they wanted to do in the future; their dreams and aspirations, and whether it be being successful in employment or starting a family, they were also able to identify what they needed to do in order to achieve their goals. Something that many of the young people expressed they would not have been able to do previously.

**The Activities**

As part of my research I was taken to Goodland, the bushvelt where the Journey’s are conducted, it was here that I was shown a number of the exercises and the objectives and learning outcomes of each activity. I was also able to meet with some of the young people who had completed the Journey and talked to them about their feelings about the activities. An example of the types of activities included in the programme are as follows:

**Raft Building**

This exercise involves the young people making a raft using only the given materials. The raft must be capable of carrying the team from one side of the dam to the other. The aim of this exercise is to allow the young people to understand the importance of planning, team-work and the best use of resources.

“I enjoyed the raft building exercise. I thought it would be easy but it was hard. We fell in lots before we got it right, but I’m glad we did, it made us think more”.

*Male, 16 years old*

**Orienteering**

This exercise involves finding points sequentially in the bush area, making use of a compass and necessary information. The aim of this exercise is to understand the concepts of strategy, strategic planning and short and long term planning.

“We couldn’t agree which direction to go on the orienteering exercise, we kept arguing, but eventually we realised that we had to work as a team and listen to each other, otherwise we would never have made it back. It was scary though, I kept thinking the snakes would bite me!”

*Female, 16 years old*

**Rock climbing**

This exercise involves climbing a relatively easy rock-face whilst being belayed by a facilitator and/or team member on a rope secured at the top. When the young person reaches the top they ring a bell to show that they have completed the task. The aims of this exercise are about learning to trust, the importance of setting goals, communicating with others and most importantly self-belief.

“When I got to the top and rang the bell I was so happy. Standing at the bottom I didn’t think I’d ever get up to the top, but I did. Now I know that anything is possible.”

*Female, 17 years old*
**Low and High Ropes**
This exercise involves participants getting from point A to point B using the equipment available, but not touching the ground or receiving any help from the ground. The lessons learnt are decision making, problems solving, managing conflict, planning, using skills and above all courage. This exercise is also repeated on a high ropes course where the ropes are 15-20 metres in the air.

“You must take your heart and put it up there when you do the high ropes.”
Male, 18 years old

**Abseiling**
This exercise involves abseiling down a rock face being belayed by a facilitator. The aims of this exercise are to teach the young people about making choices in life, trust, managing internal conflict and the notion that the first step is always the hardest.

“Ooh, the abseiling was scary. It took me ages to pluck up the courage to go down, but everyone else did it so I had to as well. They were all waiting for me when I got to the bottom and gave me a round of applause. I was very happy that I made it. I didn’t think I had the courage but I’ve proved to everyone that I have. They all believed I could do it.”
Male, 17 years old

**Solo night**
The exercise involves the young people spending a night alone in the wilderness, with only their own shelter and water. The aim of the exercise is to allow the young people time to reflect on the past, present and future, without any other distractions.

“I didn’t like the night alone. I kept hearing noises and didn’t sleep at all. It gave me time to think about things though and when I got home I talked to my family about all the things I used to do and apologised to them. I wouldn’t have done that before.”
Male, 17 years old

**After the Journey**
One of the things that interested me most when I first discovered The Journey programme was the emphasis they had on follow up work. Following the outward bounds camp, the ideal is that the young people are then mentored afterwards to ensure that once they have returned to their ‘old lives’ they are able to maintain and put into practice what they learnt on the adventure camps. Unfortunately, due to tight resources, in the main this is not happening. In the Worcester area of the Western Cape, the staff are making every effort to ensure that the follow up work continues. During my Fellowship I met a group of six young men who had completed their Journey in April, but were still having regular sessions together with their facilitator. The young men reported to find this incredibly useful and one young man described the group as his “family”. Follow up activities included going to community events together, growing vegetables and selling them and carrying a flag in a Church Service together. One of the comments made from other young people was the wish that they could still get advice and help from the people that they were on the Journey with, and so it would appear that the follow-up process should be an integral part of the programme. Indeed, the young people I spoke to stated that they enjoyed the
continued sessions as it gave the more opportunity to reflect on who they were and who they have become.

**My feelings towards the Journey**
Although I was not able to go on a camp with the young people, I was taken to the location that the camps are being run, I was shown the different activities that they do and I met many people who have been on the Journey as participants and facilitators. Talking to so many of the young people that have completed the Journey and hearing the passion and excitement that they had when they talked about what they did and what they learnt was so refreshing. I have been a Probation Officer for two and a half years, during which time I have myself facilitated a number of group work programmes and case-managed many, many people who have themselves completed group-work programmes, but I have never heard such passion as I heard during my time in South Africa. The passion from the facilitators and the passion from the young people who have completed the programmes is something that I will carry with me always. After each meeting with the young people I came away utterly convinced that the Journey works. If anyone is in any doubt as to the success of such programmes, I would urge them to go out and see for yourself.

Unfortunately, there are no up-to-date figures that reflect how many young people who have completed the Journey go on to re-offend. Self-report figures from 2002 (Muntingh, 2001) indicate that 12 months after completing any of the NICRO diversion projects only 17% of the participants re-offended. 24 months after completing any of the NICRO diversion projects only 28% of the participants had re-offended. Despite the fact that these figures are based on self-report questionnaires only, and are unlikely to be an accurate reflection of the recidivism rates of programme completers, they do offer some indication that the diversion projects are successful. When you couple these statistics with what the young people and facilitators say about the programme, I found it difficult not to be convinced that the project is a success. Each and everyone of the facilitators I spoke to told me that if you were to compare the young people at the beginning of the programme to how they were at the end, then a definite change took place. I also believe, from talking to the young people, that this is the case. The challenge, I believe, is about how you go about maintaining this change.

**What the young people said**

“My life is like a stick with a bend in it. My parents taught me right from wrong and that’s how I lived, but then something went wrong and my path turned and I committed crimes. After this Journey I’ve turned again and now I’m living how my parents wanted me to live.”

Male, 17 years old

“I learnt communication and setting goals, now I have lots of goals. I think before I act now.”

Male, 17 years old

“It’s not nice being labelled and now I feel like I’ve got away from my label”
Male, 18 years old

“I’ve changed as a person now, this experienced has opened doors with my family, and now we can talk about things.”

Male, 18 years old

“I wanted to quit, and say ‘no, I’m not doing it’, but I had said I would so I had to, now I know I am a man, I have stayed in a forest alone and walked on top of mountains”

Male, 18 years old

“We don’t all have people who can teach us right from wrong so it would be good if we were still able to contact the Social Workers after we’ve completed the Journey, so we can ask them questions and advice.”

Male, 17 years old

“I didn’t want to go because all my friends were at home going to parties, but I’m really glad I went because now I’ve learnt discipline, communication and making goals.”

Male, 18 years old

“They were strict, but not too strict, we made the rules like when to go to bed and when to eat, we had that responsibility, they treated us like adults and they actually listened to us when we talked.”

Female, 17 years old

DISSEMINATION PLANS
I have been so convinced by what I have seen and heard in South Africa, that I am keen to try and pilot a similar study in the UK. I am acutely aware however, that the difference in culture and environment between the UK and South Africa is so fundamentally different, that such a project would need to drastically adapted if it were to succeed in the UK. It is not my intention at this point to go into a discussion around the difference between South Africa and the UK, but an acknowledgement of the differences will be crucial when it comes to piloting a similar study.

Briefly, the following points will need to be acknowledge when it comes to piloting a UK version of the project;

• When participating in the outwards bounds camp, they young people had an added fear of jackals, snakes, scorpions etc biting them. This added to the fear, heightening their experience, something that cannot be recreated in the UK - given the lack of dangerous and poisonous animals we have roaming the countryside.
• Young people in the UK seem ‘older’ than the young people in South Africa and generally the attitude of an 18 year old in the UK is wholly different to the attitude of an 18 year old in South Africa. As such, I have serious concerns as to the effectiveness of a similar programme if it were piloted with the same age group in the UK. I feel the success rate would be better, if the UK version were aimed at younger children -13-14 year olds.

• An effective mentoring support structure needs to be established from the very beginning of the programme and support needs to be maintained for a significant period after the end of the outward bounds element.

• Young people who are at different degrees of risk should be kept separately in order to maintain focus on similar goals and intensity of programmes.

Taking it forward
My next step is to try and promote an interest in piloting a similar project. Through talking about this project with Probation colleagues, I have already conjured up some interest in piloting a similar project. With a team of willing volunteers, we have the man-power to be able to pilot the project, finding the funds is another matter. In addition, Arina Smit from NICRO has expressed an interest in coming to the UK to help set-up a similar project. With the benefit of her knowledge and experience, a UK Journey would surely be a success.

My first step on the road to piloting this project is to foster some interest with companies or trusts who may be willing to fund this project. Initially I intend to contact the Princes Trust who offer grants to people between the ages of 14-30 years to promote group projects. And then, as the saying goes…

WATCH THIS SPACE…
### Annex 1

#### TIMETABLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 30th June</td>
<td>Leave Heathrow Airport.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday 1st July</td>
<td>Arrive Johannesburg International Airport.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday 4th July</td>
<td>Meeting at NICRO Johannesburg – Mariska Van Zyl.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday 5th July</td>
<td>Meeting with Gert Du Plessis – Octagon Adventures – Pretoria.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday 6th July</td>
<td>Meeting with Mr Kriek – South Africa Correctional Services and tour of Youth Prison – Pretoria.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday 8th July</td>
<td>Meeting with Gert Du Plessis – Goodland – Pretoria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday 11th July</td>
<td>Meeting with Mariska Van Zyl – NICRO Johannesburg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday 13th July</td>
<td>Meeting with Thabile Teffo – NICRO Johannesburg.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday 15th July</td>
<td>Meeting at NICRO Pretoria – Focus group with young people who have completed ‘The Journey’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday 19th July</td>
<td>Meeting with Piet Burger – Outward Bound Adventures – Waterfall Boven.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday 20th July</td>
<td>Piet Burger – Waterfall Boven – focus group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday 22nd July</td>
<td>Meeting with Elise Eihbers – Long Crested Eagle (Adventures) Hazyview – Mpumalanga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday 25th July</td>
<td>Fly to Cape Town</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday 27th July</td>
<td>Meeting with Hannes Britz – Social Worker – Worcester – Western Cape</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday 28th July</td>
<td>Meeting with Jacobus Pansegrow – Group of Hope – Brandvlei Maximum Security Prison – Western Cape</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday 29th July</td>
<td>Focus group with Journey completers – Worcester – Western Cape</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday 2nd August</td>
<td>Meeting with Arina Smit – NICRO – Cape Town (YES programme)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday 3rd August</td>
<td>NICRO – Cape Town (YES programme)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday 4th August</td>
<td>NICRO – Cape Town</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday 8th August</td>
<td>Meeting with Celia Dawson and Althea Hendricks – NICRO – Cape Town</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday 9th August</td>
<td>NICRO – Cape Town (YES programme)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday 10th August</td>
<td>NICRO – Cape Town (YES programme)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday 12th August</td>
<td>NICRO – Worcester – Western Cape – Focus group with Journey completers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday 15th August</td>
<td>Fly to Johannesburg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday 16th August</td>
<td>Fly to Heathrow</td>
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As an extension of my research I attended Brandvlei Maximum Security Prison in Worcester, Western Cape province. Within the prison they have an inmate led initiative called the Group of Hope (GOH). The project originated after a group of the inmates attended an HIV Awareness Workshop. They were so moved by what they had heard and the help needed by others that they approached Mr Pansegrow (Head Social Worker). Their idea was vague at first, they simply wanted to educate the other inmates about the dangers and risk of the HIV epidemic and help sufferers as far as they could. This quickly grew into what is now a hugely successful aid project called the Group of Hope.

The Group of Hope comprises of a core group of twenty inmates whose role is to manage the work done within the initiative. This is overseen by two prison officers whose role is to co-ordinate outside the prison walls.

The initiative:
There are seven individual projects organised within the GOH. Each project has a manager and a deputy. There is also a chairman of the ‘board’ to oversee them all. These are all inmates, giving them a sense of responsibility and purpose.

The projects are as follows;
- GOH Information
- Social Events
- GOH Finance
- Art and Crafts
- Adoption projects
- Sewing Initiatives
- Vegetable growing project

**GOH Information**
This part of the initiative is simply about informing inmates, other institutions and the community about the work of the GOH. They have a website (www.goupofhope.co.za) which they update regularly with information about the work that they do. They also give presentations and talks to visitors who come into the prison. They are even allowed supervised visits out of the prison to give talks within the community and in other institutions about the work that they do, a sign that they are very well respected within the prison, by inmates and staff alike.

**Social Events**
The role of the project manager in the Social Events project is to organise events for group members as well as the wider inmate population. These have included HIV Awareness seminars and football matches. The Social Events team also organise events outside the prison and organise parties for the ‘adopted children’ who come into the institution.
**GOH Finance**
The GOH is entirely managed through donations from the community – they receive no other funds from the prison governors. The finance team are in charge of managing their finances, keeping a record of the money that is coming in and the money that is going out. If one of the projects needs money to buy extra equipment, for example, a sewing machine, the finance team budget how much they can spend.

**Arts and Crafts**
This project was set up to make cards gifts to say thank you to the donators and to send Birthday cards to the other group members and other inmates. These cards are all hand painted and hand drawn. The creativity and skill of the inmates is developed and promoted.

**Adoption Project**
Possibly one of the most remarkable of all the projects, the adoption project ‘adopts’ young children who are suffering from HIV and more recently children with physical and learning difficulties. The GOH members become like fathers and brothers to these children, they have Birthday parties for them and care for them as if they were their own. Bringing in children who cannot care for themselves brings out the vulnerable side of the GOH members, many of whom have committed very serious offences. Many of the inmates have been incarcerated for lengthy periods of time and have missed the opportunity to see their children grow up. By ‘adopting’ children who are in need the GOH members are given the opportunity to act as parents once again, and give support and love to those in need.

Unfortunately, given that many of the ‘adopted’ children are HIV positive the mortality rates are quite high. A number of the GOH ‘adopted’ children have passed away and not being able to attend the children’s funeral had a deep impact on the group. As such a memorial wall was built within the prison grounds and the GOH conduct memorial services for the children.

**Sewing Initiatives**
With the help of donations from the community, material and fabric has been given to the GOH. With this material they make clothes and blankets for the local orphanage. This gives the inmates a sense of helping the community.

Within institutions there are inevitably times when clothes get ripped and need to be repaired. This leads to occasions where inmates bargain with each other, by means of sex or violence, to get new clothes or for their clothes to be repaired. To avoid this happening, every Friday any inmate from the wider population are given the opportunity to bring their torn clothes to the GOH who then mend it free of charge, thus taking away the power of bargaining from the other inmates who may abuse it.

**Vegetable Growing Project**
Within the prison grounds the GOH have a vegetable plot where the project manager has organised fresh vegetables to be grown. These vegetables are then used within the prison kitchens to promote healthy eating, or sent to the local orphanage.
Although a core group of twenty people, the work of the group spreads throughout the prison and into the community. The group members describe their involvement within the group as ‘empowering’ and that it ‘gives a sense of purpose’. The group members have shown to staff that they are in a position where they want to change and move on with their life. They are at a point in their lives where they have realised that what they did in the past was wrong and they want to make amends with themselves and the local community. The GOH members get nothing out of their work other than self-satisfaction. They do not get early release, nor is it mentioned within their parole report. As such, their involvement is surely because they want to be involved.

The GOH started in Brandvlei Maximum Security Prison three years ago, since then it has spread to seven other institutions within the Western Cape of South Africa. Three other prisons are also in the process of launching the group, including a female institution.

Although currently an initiative for the adult prison population, with a few amendments this could also be piloted within the youth prisons. The lessons that the GOH members learn, e.g. empowerment, a sense of purpose, a sense of community etc etc, are all lessons that young people would also benefit from.
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