

# Managing Challenging Behavior in Children and Youth

May 20, 2010

9:30am-11:30am

Meeting Minutes

## Introduction

## Announcements

- **The OSTRC** has launched an online document library. The document library contains over 200 reports, articles, studies, and other documents from the fields of out-of-school time, afterschool, school-age care, positive youth development, formal education, staff development, and nonprofit management. The document library can be accessed here: <http://www.sp2.upenn.edu/ostrc/doclibrary/index.html>
- **The ARC of Philadelphia** offers a multi-lingual outreach program that provides free trainings on special education issues for immigrant families with special education needs. For more information, contact Katharina Mach at (215) 229-4550, or by email at [kmach@arcpddc.org](mailto:kmach@arcpddc.org). The ARC's website is [www.arcpddc.org](http://www.arcpddc.org).
- **JEVS Youth Services** has a 17.5 hour / week job opening for an Educational Counselor. A BA is required, Masters degree preferred. Candidate must have education experience, a flexible schedule, and reliable transportation. For more information, contact Matan Barnea at (215) 854-1864, or by email at [matan.barnea@jevs.org](mailto:matan.barnea@jevs.org).
- The **Mazzoni Center** provides free professional development services for staff of OST programs on creating safer, more welcoming, and more inclusive climates for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) youth and families. Contact: Allison Buehler, [abuehler@mazzonicenter.org](mailto:abuehler@mazzonicenter.org), 215-563-0652x251. Website: [www.mazzonicenter.org](http://www.mazzonicenter.org).

## Panelists

### Michael Harris

#### Director of Field Operations

#### Philadelphia Anti-Drug / Anti-Violence Network

[MCHarris01@aol.com](mailto:MCHarris01@aol.com)

Michael C. Harris has worked for the Philadelphia Anti-Drug / Anti-Violence Network, a private, non-profit agency that is one of the major civilian intervention agencies for the City of Philadelphia, since its inception in 1989. PAAN provides direct services to neighborhoods that are plagued by drugs and violence and promotes healthy lifestyles for children and youth through interactive alternative programs. Currently, Michael serves as Director of Field Operations, overseeing their crisis / mobile response services both to the School District and community. Mr. Harris has also worked as an NTA from 1981-1983 at Cooke Middle School in the Philadelphia School District and for Philadelphia Town Watch Integrated Services (TWIS) as a community support specialist. Presently Mr. Harris is attending Ashford University where he is working toward his BA in Social and Criminal Justice.

- PAAN been around since 1989. Works in communities and in schools to reduce violence. Violence is a learned behavior
- Young people learn violence from day 1
- The first day of school parents instruct their children – if someone hits you, hit them back
- Parents encourage children to stick up for themselves, protect themselves
- Then one child hits another, and parents get involved
- All of this is a learned behavior
- This is how our children learn behavior – it is no longer the age of do as I say, not as I do
- Parents gossip and talk in front of their kids, the kids learn the behavior through listening and watching
- Even though homicide rates are dropping slightly, aggravated assault rates are rising

- It's not guns, it's not drugs, but it is peer pressure that is the number one cause of violence among young people
- How do we resolve this?
- Help young people realize that they are special in themselves, they are unique
- Across the city – PAAN is trying out peer conflict mediators and teen courts, where young people can talk to one another
- One thing that our children are doing – they are looking for love in all the wrong places
- What they see on TV, on the streets
- They do whatever they do to grow up and become what they see
- There are six characters that young people portray, members of the “Tater Family:”
  - Instigator – the arsonist – gets things started
  - Agitator – takes the story that the instigator starts and twists it all the way around
  - Dictator – the kid that everyone wants to be their best friend – has charisma – other kids will do what they say
  - Spectator
  - Procrastinator
  - Communicator – can turn everything around
- We have to get young people to communicate properly, to make good choices
- Our young people make poor choices, they are looking for love in all the wrong places
- Get young people to think about making positive and right choices
- Work together collectively to become positive and do great things

**Brandi Jeter**  
**EducationWorks**  
**Arts Specialist**

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Brandi Jeter is the Arts Specialist at EducationWorks where she is responsible for creating arts integrated curriculum for afterschool and summer camp programs. She is also the creator and facilitator of the D.R.A.M.A. Queens program, and a Teaching Artist with Buildabridge International and the Philadelphia Young Playwrights. Last year, Brandi participated as a fellow in the Philadelphia Writing Project's Afterschool Matters Practitioner Fellowship.

- Misbehavior is a learned behavior
- As youth development professionals, our goal is to be informed and educated about why youth and students misbehave
- The 4 mistaken goals, being able to identify these goals is key in helping overcome
  1. Attention – kids are seeking attention
  2. Power
  3. Revenge
  4. Assumed inadequacy
  5. Brandi added environment to this list – I'll never belong because of where I come from
- How to overcome these:
- You can't always adjust the students but you can adjust what you do
- Plan activities that are age appropriate, challenging and relevant for the youth
- Give kids new materials to explore, teach them new ways to be creative, vary activities
- Keep them engaged in a way that is age appropriate and challenging for them
- With older students staff need to be aware of the skills that they can learn that they do not have –
- She gave an example of kids who could not read, doing a play – they don't want anyone to know they can't read, so they misbehave
- Make sure you plan activities, and go back and review what you are doing.
- Get to know your students as individuals – listen to them
- Check yourself – be sure that your behavior is not encouraging misbehavior – if anything is not what she expects it to be she leaves, she has that right. A lot of times students don't have that right – they are stuck where they are

- Give them some leadership roles
- Hold up your end of the bargain
- Be familiar with appropriate and accepted behaviors for various age groups so that you don't overreact and you know when a different type of intervention is needed
- If a child is behaving in a way that is inappropriate – that may be out of your league as an OST professional
- Be aware what is appropriate so that you can make informed correct decisions
- Brandi prepared a handout, contact her if you would like a copy

## **Gregory Morgan**

### **HEALING**

#### **Founder / Executive Director**

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Greg is the founder and Executive Director of HEALING (Health Encouraged Assurance Living), a Prevention Education Agency. HEALING, which was started in 2002, has successfully operated its “Safe Hands School Project” in 21 elementary, middle, and high schools within the Philadelphia School District, touching the lives of over 5000 youth through self-esteem and conflict resolution workshops. The curriculum being used was developed by Greg and is designed to decrease and prevent violence, drug and alcohol traffic, and other negative behaviors within the school system. He is also the founder and Pastor of GOD’S HOUSE / BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY, INC, a church and ministry designed to meet the spiritual, social, and physical needs of the residents of the Wilson Park Housing Development in South Philadelphia.

- HEALING is an agency that works in the community – workshops, presentations for various agencies that are here
- In these presentations and workshops, staff talk about life skills, self esteem, anger management, interpersonal communication, bullies, goal setting
- Greg’s success story: Working at South Philly high – there was a young lady who every time she got in trouble he would see her in the office
- When we look at a situation we are looking at the surface, there are hidden issues going on in children’s lives
- He worked his way into her heart. He showed her he genuinely cared and understood but still was not going to validate her behavior.
- Bring students down so they can talk about their problems
- Peer mediation, conflict resolution
- The art of mediation – maintain a neutral state
- Two people, given the chance, will work it out
- 99 percent of the time it is something very petty
- All they need is a this person so they can talk it out, hear each other out
- Anger starts real small and then it builds
- What we teach is called dealing with anger
- Anger starts because of something that happened that you didn't like
- Anger is not as bad as being mad
- Anger is a right
- Mad is what we don't want – crossing the line into the mad zone – you have lost it, you are acting like a mad dog
- What to do when you are angry to keep it from turning into mad
  - Giving it - tell each other that you are angry in a calm way, use positive words
  - Taking it - when someone is mad at you, how do you take the anger in a positive way
  - Working it out - you and I have a common problem, we have to learn how to compromise, take the situation and work it out- win-win solution
- Interaction, role-playing
- At the end of this, they get it

- Use incentives at the end of sessions
- Ask them questions to see what they have remembered, retained, give them prizes
- Children do understand, they need us to pull that out of them
- The only way for us to pull it out – genuine unconditional love
- They know when you really don't care, when you are there for the money, when you are clueless
- You have to be able to give and take respect
- Communicate
- Show unconditional love
- Children have hard lives – they didn't ask for what they have, where they came from
- Absentee fathers make people very angry
- Kids are angry they need help

## Group Discussion

**Nancy:** Genuine relationships – one of the things that can sour a relationship is when a staff person is punitive – they get mad at a kid, hold on to it and continue to punish them. One of the things kids are looking for is forgiveness – when they do something wrong and they get punished, then they do something right, show them forgiveness and acceptance.

**Gregory Morgan (GM):** It is totally okay to get angry when a child crosses boundaries or lines – get angry, then get over it. Let them know you are disappointed, but reinforce positive things that they do – let it go, forgive them.

**Brandi Jeter (BJ):** Until you express that to them, they are expecting you to hold a grudge – they will still be angry because they think you are mad. Be expressive about your forgiveness – get them to let go of anger over the situation as well.

**Michael Harris (MH):** Develop good listening skills. As we get older, we forget what it is like to be using slang – listen, pick up the slang, hear what they are trying to say. A lot of times young people feel that there is nobody that wants to listen to them. There is deep seated anger there. Once kids know that you are listening to them, they will open up. You have to be real – a young person will size you up from the very beginning. The first couple of sentences that you say, a young person can tell if you are real or not. They want to know if you will be around for the duration. Once you do those two things, then you are in – once you betray trust you are out altogether.

**Q:** Are there volunteer programs if caregivers want to collaborate or participate in what you do?

**GM:** We deal with behaviors all the time. Anyone who wants to come along on a weekend is welcome to. I do pro bono work all the time, could use help, anything I do I could use volunteers.

**BJ:** I have opportunities for volunteers and service opportunities (more intense volunteer commitment).

**MH:** We are always looking for mentors and volunteers to work with young ladies.

**Q:** When you discussed the cafeteria – if it is okay to stamp on the milk at school, how does that translate into the outside world? How does it work when that is okay at school but not in outside society?

**MH:** We come from a generation where we were taught to think about the future and planning for tomorrow. Our young people today are only thinking about today – they don't understand consequences. Think about the culture and the communities where the kids are from – getting locked up can be a sign of honor – they don't understand the real world, the real consequences. All young people have a time in their life when they have to learn some things. Young people think that the milk cartons are fun – today – but don't understand the consequences – this is what we have to know and understand when we work with young people in these communities.

**BJ:** Appropriate misbehaviors for these age groups – not saying it is okay – but these are small incidents and should be reacted to appropriately. Don't overreact, just talk to them about it – we don't need to punish kids for everything. Don't take every incident of childhood behavior and label it as misbehavior.

**Audience comment:** I think that it's very important, especially in today's microwave society, that we develop a cultural sensitivity – being appalled at this or at that is fine, but what have you done to learn about where they come from, the cultural issues? This is something that we should do as human service professionals. Also, make partnerships with parents, if a child can't read, their parents probably can't read. We have to know why things happen, why we are doing what we do, and what we can do to help. Where

does the generational curse stop? It could stop with the child, but go to the root of the problem – the parents, the households, etc. We can't just give up on our kids like this. We're competing with a lot of things – we live in the microwave age where kids want things now, they don't know what it is to work for things. Be culturally sensitive in what we are dealing with with these children. Understand the language. If we are going to be advocates for our kids we have to go in knowing that we have a lot of obstacles to deal with media, home life etc.

**Audience comment:** We have to be respectful to everyone, listen to everyone. The key to the future of our children – we have to respect our children, they have to respect us – across the board regardless. The only way to teach respect, is to act respectful – communicate – use words that can be taken anywhere you go in the world – hello, how are you, etc. communicate to children – the only skill that we all have in common

**Q:** When do you involve the parents in a challenging situation with a student related to their behavior?

**BJ:** Step one – they should be involved from the beginning – orientation etc. Unless there is someone there that can sign off on expected behaviors the child cannot participate. It is virtually impossible to make an impact without continuation and support at home. Physical violence – that's when I involve the parents. You don't need to call the parents every time, but it depends based on the group that you are working with.

**GM:** A lot of my work is in the schools where parent involvement is very low. My agency became bloodhounds to track down the parents. If the mother or the father aren't the one, find the grandmother, the aunt, somebody that will help me help their child. When I realized that I could not get parental support – talk to that child – you know what, you need to survive. Pour into that child the tools that they need to get by, to survive. Fight to get the parents in their lives, but when they are totally missing – the child has to live.

**BJ:** Be accessible to parents – build trust, relationships, reliability.

**MH:** Our agency, we make house calls. We will never cheat a child or their family out of the services that they need. Think outside the box – services for the child and the parents, help them to get what they need to. Parent supports – know the families know what they need and what can help them. Parents are lacking in self esteem themselves – help them to feel that they are part of the solution. Help to rebuild families and connections – families are so disconnected these days – rebuild and rebridge that gap.

**Audience comment:** Just like we try to make our children feel welcome, make the parents feel welcome. Say hello to them. Don't only talk to the parents when the child is misbehaving. When kids have a really good day, let parents know as well.