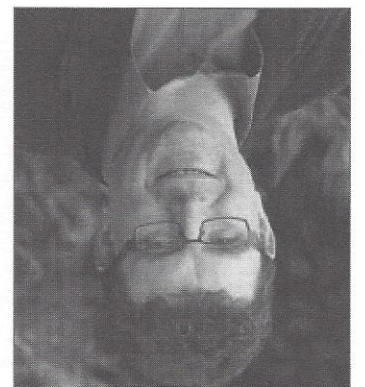


INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTIONS Newpin Inside Fathers' Program

By Andrew King



This paper reviews the experience of running the pilot Newpin Inside Program (Uniting-Care Burnside, 2005) at South Coast Correctional Centre. A significant amount of this report involves transcripts of the participant's graduation speeches (*in italics*). Over the past few years, the Department of Corrective Services has been committed to reducing recidivism of inmates in New South Wales. One of

the initiatives to achieve this goal has been through the concentrated use of evidence-based group work programs that change offending behaviours with the help of highly skilled group facilitators. It was with this background that the decision was made to trial the Newpin Fathers Program at the most recently built Correctional Centre in the south coast of NSW, Australia. This involved support from the Correctional Centre, the Senior Management and the State Government Minister. Most of the programs facilitated by Corrective Services are closely mapped to address inmates' offending behaviours. The Newpin Fathers' Inside Program is part of a new approach that does not specifically address the offending behaviour, but uses the men's role as a father to their children to increase the motivation to change.

Overview of the Newpin Inside Program

Newpin is an intensive child protection and parent education program that works with families under stress to break the cycle of destructive family behaviour and enhance parent-child relationships. The Newpin program emerged from the United Kingdom (UK) in response to the needs of new mothers experiencing issues such as isolation, mental illness, family violence, social disadvantage, and low self-esteem. The principle strength of Newpin is its collaborative approach to working with participants to live out its four core values of respect, support, equality and empathy. A fifth core value of self-determination has also been recently adopted. As a result, everyday interactions in Newpin support

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groups are characterised by mutual sharing, learning and support. Newpin involves a self-development process that works to create an awareness of an individual's own intrinsic value as a person, a parent and a fulfilled member of the community. One participant said "That's when I found out this [course] was about bettering myself as a person, so I could make better any relationships I have. The most important is being a parent".

Newpin aims to:

- prevent child abuse with a particular focus on emotional abuse and neglect
- reduce the impact of family violence
- encourage self-help and lasting change
- inspire good parenting and encourage the valuing of positive parent/child relationships
- raise the self-esteem of every individual
- break the cyclical effect of destructive and negative family patterns

What the Newpin Inside Program involves:

- A pre-interview (an opportunity for prospective members to meet the Newpin Inside Group facilitators and learn more about the Program)
- A group that includes a support group and education group sessions. These education sessions rotate over a ten-week period. The manual contains five educational topics:

- Fathering Today
- SEERS (Support, Equality, Respect, and Self-determination)
- Conflict Resolution
- Family Relationships
- Our Skills as Parents

The Newpin Inside Program Format:

1. **Therapeutic support group session (1 session per week)** is a less structured group (open discussion group) that focuses on the changes the men make each week, how they are implementing the program and the challenges they are experiencing. This is a vital experience as the members appreciate learning from other men's lives and how they deal with similar or different challenges. The men's goals are regularly reviewed. Challenges are discussed in a supportive environment that aligns with what is demanded of the men as fathers and how they can best respond to their children.

group continually focused on how these goals were being achieved and the challenges the men experienced. Some of the participants goals were:

- Staying in this course
- Honesty about my feeling & my responses to others
- More open to the challenge of sharing about myself in each session
- Responding in sensible, communicative and respectful ways to other people
- Being less reactive to other people who I dislike when working alongside them
- Skills to help my boys deal with challenges
- Have more contact with my son
- Being less reactive to their mother
- Reduced ability to hit 7 out of 10 on anger scale in 3 minutes [become angry very quickly]
- Building respect for the mother of my son
- Being more supportive, helpful, wellbeing, responsive to my son using phone calls, visits and mail etc
- Learn new skills and work towards contact with my children
- Develop a clear image of myself as a father.

Even though most goals were focused on the participants as parents, the discussion often involved how they could practice the skills required with other group members or in the pods. The men were often surprised at this challenge. For example, one group member said "Personally, I always thought [of myself] as a fairly good father to my only son, but since doing this program I can now claim to be better at fathering, especially through the wealth of insight in this program's content, core values and expectations".

Newpin's strength is that it interconnects the important role the men play as the father to their children, with who they are as a person and how this can be more fully lived. One participant said

"I would like to start by saying that when I started this program I thought it was about my children but I soon found out that it was about me. I've really learnt a lot about myself as a person and how I react to things".

Another participant said

"the program helped me to set goals and work towards achieving positive outcomes. This has helped me to spend more time with my kids and build a better relationship with my wife and children".

The Newpin Program targets parenting skills in an effort to reduce offending behaviour. Many participants commented on this connection:

"The goals I have set of myself are to – complete the program; learn more skills; work towards contact with my children; be more patient and stop

2. Educational group session (3 sessions per week) involves structured discussion of a wide range of issues including: masculine identity, relationships with men's own parents, aggression and violence, communication and problem solving with adult partners, children's psychological and physical needs, valuing the role father's play, child development and positive approaches to discipline.

The therapeutic support group is a key aspect of the Inside Parents - Newpin Program. Most of the participants appreciate talking about their immediate issues. The connection between the therapeutic focus and the education component creates a driving force for change. The men are exposed to new ideas and issues and can talk in depth about the challenge of implementing changes in their lives. One participant said "after my voluntary admission and participation in the program, I was in-fact surprised with the integrated subjects/contents and its awe-inspiring awareness on our conduct and character; and more importantly the impact on our family".

The following example of the Newpin Program took place over 10-weeks. This intervention was facilitated at South Coast Correctional Centre with seventeen minimum security inmates expressing interest in the program. Fourteen of those men accepted a position in the program and completed the Managing Emotions Program that was facilitated to ensure all participants had previous group work experience.

"The Managing Emotions Course was very good in teaching me how to deal with my feelings and better understand me". For example, in reviewing how "I use to deal with a situation in the past, now I have learnt new tools in which I can do things in a more respectful and easier way".

Of that group, ten men attended the first session of the program. Of the ten who commenced the program, two men left early. One participant left in week 2 as he was transferred to another Correctional Centre and the other person left in week 4 due to his unanticipated release. Of the eight men who completed the program (attended at least 80% of the sessions), six men attended the last session and graduation day. The other two men were either released in week 9 or transferred to a prison Hospital for medical treatment. At the graduation, all the remaining men spoke about their experiences in the Newpin Fathers' Group.

The program effectively engaged and worked cooperatively with a cross-cultural group of inmates who were from African, Maori, Vietnamese and Anglo-Saxon cultures. As one of the participants said

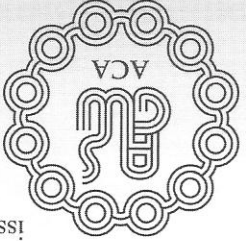
"my background may be different to the views of Western Society and my up-bringing was based on Asian ways. Although I tried to adapt and blend my family into the modern concept, it was this program that made a greater difference in my way of thinking and dealing with my children".

Overview of some of the participant's goals

The use of goals and the men's regular reflection on the progress of their attainment is critical to this course. The therapeutic support

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For ease of use, activities are arranged by age as well as by stage. Introductory chapters highlight selection, use, and processing of activities, as well as ethical issues inherent in working with students in the schools. Each activity contains specific directions, goals, materials, and suggestions for adaptation. Suggestions for creating a supportive environment for groups are also included.

Groups for elementary, middle, and high school are included to provide plenty of creative ideas for conducting effective school counseling groups. Members of the Association for Specialists in Group Work have shared many of their favorite group activities in this useful volume.

This book is a compilation of over 65 group activities that represent a variety of types of school counseling groups on topics including career awareness and planning, grief and loss work, school transition, diversity promotion and many others.

Edited by Louisa L. Foss, Judy Green, Kelly Wolfe-Stitner and Janice L. Delucia-Waack

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"The word 'support' means a lot to me and provides the point of my reflections. The course...I cannot speak enough about how it has impacted in my family life".

"I got a lot out of the groups such as: SEERS (Support, Empathy, Equality, Respect, Self-determination). It has helped me to support others and to listen to what they have to say. Treat everyone equally and not be judgmental. Have empathy for others and be more respectful for myself and others".

"So instead of being angry, I apply these values to my life in hope that my family can trust me and feel safe and close to me".

"I thank everyone involved with the course for their wonderful efforts in bringing new parenting core values to inmates who need guidance and insight".

The depth of the core values is one of the lasting reflections that the men take from the program and will continue to use, even in different contexts and after they leave the Correctional Centre.

Respecting the mother of their children

An important theme in the program was the emphasis on respecting the mother of their children. This was a challenging concept at first, but a central one for the development of safer and healthier families and the reduction of family violence. One of the participants, who had

themes/issues that arose in the program

The Newpin Program focuses on the immediate implication and use of the skills in everyday life. Many discussions explored the challenges the participants due to their own growing up, the lack of adequate role models and the street values they have previously used (rely on themselves to make amends, even if it leads to imprisonment). The Newpin program focuses on the use of the core values (SEERS) as an alternative framework to view their life and how they can make a difference in their key relationships. Even though SEERS was a regular focus, the men's reflections indicated that it had a far greater impact than was even expected. Some men shared the following sentiments...

"I have learnt so much that I would be here all day telling you all about this program. So in short I say it's the best course I have done in jail and that I feel every parent should do".

"I am proud of my positive transformation towards a life of happiness and developing better wisdom to my wife and family. It has given me much confidence and courage to tackle the demons of the past and be able to manage my affairs more appropriately upon my reunion with my loving family".

and hopefully keep me out of trouble".

rusting. So far, I have completed this program which I struggled with from time to time. But with support and help from the group, I have succeeded to do this program. I have certainly learnt a lot - to better handle and help my kids, I'm becoming more patient which will help my children a great deal

were released in the closing weeks of the program, several men were to be released within the next three months and the remainder were to be released in following 8 months except for one man, who was to be released in another 2 years. All of the men requested it would be useful to have a maintenance group following this program to keep reinforcing the values and ideas that they had learnt. This was beyond the scope of this trial, but it is recommended when the program is implemented in the future. In closing, the facilitators express their appreciation for the support given by the UnitingCare Burnside, the Department of Corrective Services, the Correctional Centre management, other staff at the Centre and the risks the men took to have a stronger vision for themselves, their children and their family.

Summary

It is apparent based on the feedback from the participants that the course should continue in jails and in communities so fathers can gain knowledge, experience, and self-development for their children's sakes. In fact, the Newpin Inside Program continues to be facilitated on a yearly basis at the Correctional Centre. The Newpin Inside Program Manual is updated as part of the facilitation experience at the Correctional Centre and the program has been adopted as a NSW State wide parenting program by Corrective Services and is implemented in other Correctional Centres.

Fathering is a key role that has been and will continue to be an important social role for each of the men. It is by highlighting their significance as a father, that this social role builds empathy and a greater reflection on the consequences of their actions. It challenges previously held beliefs, attitudes and values they have used previously to survive in life. This change was demonstrated over time by:

- their openness to be challenged and consider alternative perspectives
- the respect they showed towards the female facilitator
- the emerging respect they showed towards the mothers of their children
- the respectful ways they started to use when communicating in the group
- accepting the differences they had towards some other group members.

For further info, please use the following websites:
info@groupworksolutions.com.au
www.groupworksolutions.com.au
www.newpin.org.au

References

UnitingCare-Burnside. (2005). *Newpin Inside*. Parramatta: Self published.

been very resistant to the idea of respect for the mother at the beginning of the program, said the course
"also helped me to realise the mother of my child is struggling being a single parent when I'm in here. She might cope in ways I don't understand or con- done, but I imagine it would be tough, so I respect her for that"

As part of the program the men were required to write statements about what they appreciated about the mother of their children. After sharing these responses with the other participants, many of the men, one at a time, imagined one of their children sitting in an empty chair and completed the sentence - 'Hi (their child's name), there is something I have been meaning to tell you about your mum...'. They would then complete the sentence with what they appreciate about the mother.

This was a very challenging exercise, but it had profound results for most of the men. For example, one participant stated,

"I have come to realise the importance of good parenting and also ever thankful for the efforts of my wife for her understanding and kind contribution to keeping our family together with the day to day running of our household, especially due to the current situation [incarceration]"

Increased confidence and perception of themselves as their child's father
Newpin also has shown to build the participant's sense of character and their role as the father to their children. This perception is critical as it can help them to overcome other feelings of inferiority about their past and criminal history. Many men spoke about this increase in confidence:

"I feel a lot more responsible than before and much more comfortable discussing my family's needs, wants and affairs, especially my children's state of mind"

"I always thought I was a good father, good husband, but now I have learnt a much more effective parenting style. The program has offered me and my family the chance to develop into a healthy relationship... it has inspired me to change for the better. The many valuable lessons and experience of the program has made me more aware of my role and duty as a father"

"The course has brought about positive changes in my attitude and understanding of a new parenting style. I have changed my way of thinking in order to correct my past lack of cooperative and close role-models. I've learnt the power of empathy and effective communication and how to be a supportive father. My role as a father has definitely improved based on my children's responses and praises from my wife"

Challenges
A challenge in implementing this program and achievement of the outcomes was the varying length of time between the programs conclusion and when many of the men were due for release. Two men