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# **Support Networks for Inclusive Schooling**

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***Interdependent  
Integrated Education***

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**William Stainback  
and Susan Stainback**

Foreword by **Jeffrey L. Strully** and **Cindy Strully**

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**CHAPTER 12  
FOREST, PEARPOINT  
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## Supports for Addressing Severe Maladaptive Behaviors

*Students* who exhibit severe aggressive behaviors constitute a formidable challenge to educators in terms of inclusion and support of all students in the mainstream of school and community life. In regard to students who exhibit such behaviors, there are two competing themes in the educational literature: "kick 'em out or keep 'em in."

On the "kick 'em out" side, for example, a \$6.9 million institution was planned for children who are so "severely behaviorally disordered" that they *need* rooms with video surveillance and all sorts of "special" facilities. When asked who actually would be served by this institution, no clear answer was given.

However, on the "keep 'em in" side, with the recognition and utilization of innovative support options, inclusion is not only possible but highly desirable. In addition, by using millions of dollars to support educational reform, rather than building institutions, these authors believe that more worthwhile alternatives to the "kick 'em out" model exist.

The movement toward inclusive education is a process—a journey to create an educational system where excellence and equity walk hand in hand and where the highest values of the nation are respected, honored, and achieved. The purpose of this chapter is to help make inclusive education a viable option for students who have or could potentially exhibit severe aggressive behaviors. Presented in the chapter are emerging possible solutions that have been successfully used in keeping

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This message of unconditional love coming from a hardened life-long criminal was staggering to kids. They did not know how to deal with it. Each, in their own way, tested Charlie. They ran, did drugs, stole his money and clothes. Charlie always found them and offered more. Mostly, he gave the only real thing he had to give—himself—a commodity that was in short supply.

Not all of Charlie's kids survived, but two, Angie and Kelly, made it. This author found out about Angie by accident. At a HELP staff meeting (HELP is a Frontier College program that employs approximately 37 ex-offenders to find jobs for ex-offenders) a young woman came up and asked, "Remember me?" She said, "I'm Angie . . . Charlie's Angie!" She was on the HELP staff. Since then, she has become a loving mother and a part-time graphic artist.

However, at that moment the world closed in. Charlie had died—4 years after all the doctors said he could not live another day. Charlie drove himself beyond bodily limits because he had to live to save more kids. And he did. Angie was the first of Charlie's kids. She was one of the toughest women offenders in Canadian prison history and now she is Angie.

There are hundreds just like Angie. Charlie even married one of his "stray kids." Her name was Kelly. She graduated from the university at the top of her class. One professor said he had never had a student like Kelly.

The problem Charlie, a rejected community member, became part of the solution. With Charlie's help and help from others like him, a number of "incurable" teens were able to turn from undesirable behaviors to more acceptable positive behaviors through acceptance, friendship, inclusion, and success in the mainstream of educational and community life.

However, Charlie could not have salvaged those youth if some "straight" people had not been willing to trust and work with him. This is not a traditional partnership based on a negotiated contract. However, if anything, the bonds are more powerful and the implications more dramatic.

### Conclusion: Community Members

It is easy to think that Charlie was wonderful, but what does Charlie have to do with oil spills in Valdez, the school crisis, and so forth. The

point is that there are Charlies everywhere. It is hoped that most will not have to waste 27 years in jail before someone helps them. In the family, in the classrooms, across the fence or street, at work, at school, and in a church or synagogue, there are people who need help.

As long as people are pushed out—rejected—devastation and despair will continue. People will grow more angry and more frustrated. This does not have to happen if members of society begin to accept all people in their homes, in their families, in the classrooms, in the communities, and as their friends. The accumulated anger and frustration of decades of systematic failure and rejection will not disappear overnight, and there are no "microwave" solutions to long-term problems.

Charlie Tann could not possibly have helped kids. Think about it, he was an uneducated life-long criminal. But Charlie did save lives. He and others like him are among the best teachers.

### CONCLUSION

Students who display severe behavior difficulties, like all children, can and should be included in the mainstream of schools and communities. The key to making it possible is relationships. It should be no great mystery that if one cannot lean over the back fence and talk to his or her neighbors as people, then similar trends cannot begin in boardrooms, international negotiations, and prison ranges. There is a common factor—people relating.

A fundamental element of relationships is that *everyone* has a role to play. Not everyone can or should be the same. Someone with a Ph.D. in theoretical physics may not be a master at human relations or be able to repair the lawn mower, while an "untrained farm hand" can talk his way through a country auction and be "Mr. Fix-it." The point is that everyone has strengths—and often the people identified as "the problem" are a key to the solution.

Together, in new and genuine partnerships, it can be done. The impossible just takes a little longer. If the people who are "labeled as problems" are invited to join, the talent, commitment, creativity, and resources will grow. It is all a matter of will.

**Rule #5** The next step is to stop talking about the person with the problem and turn the conversation around to each student's own life. When the conversation about Jane became heated, everyone was asked to forget Jane for a moment, and think of their own lives. This was done by having each student construct their own illustration of their circles of friends. Each student was given a sheet of paper and asked to draw four concentric circles around a small one in the center of the page with each new circle progressively larger than the smaller ones. The four circles should be large enough to cover the entire page. Then the circles were explained:

- A. In circle #1, the smallest and closest to the center, put the names of people who are the closest to you in your own life—the people you love most. (When everyone was finished they were asked these questions: "Why did you put those people in circle one? What do you do with the people in circle one? How do you feel about the people in circle one? How do those people feel about you?")
- B. Circle #2 is exactly the same except the people included are not quite as close as those in circle #1. Follow the same procedure.
- C. Circle #3 includes groups of people in your life—sports groups, teams, Boy/Girl Scouts, church groups, and so on.
- D. Circle #4 are people who are paid to be in your life—teachers, doctors, hairdressers, and so on. (Throughout the procedures students were requested to share and discuss their insights).
- E. The students were then asked to switch gears for a moment and think about how they would feel if they had just a few or no people in their circles. (A circle illustration of a person whose life included few friends was shown to the students).
- F. How would you feel if your life looked like this?
- G. How do you think you'd *act* if your life looked like this drawing? The list of actual student responses included: "silly, I'd lie, act mean, do bad things, act stupid, I'd commit suicide, I'd be scared to death, I'd think I had to go to an institution, I'd annoy people, and I'd hurt people."

When this exercise was used with children and adults in the past, without exception, they connect the "behaviors" to a person's attempt to send messages. In this case, everyone realized that Jane was behaving a certain way because she was sending a message. It was now their job to figure out the message, respond positively, and thus change the destructive behavior.

The circle process cannot be done by lecturing. People have to experientially relate Jane's suffering to their own lives and see that a person's behavior has something to do with the environment he or she

is in. The person cannot be "cured" without looking at that person's whole life.

The eighth grade students immediately saw that Jane was acting in almost the same ways that they had described in their lists. What particularly scared them was the part about suicide. The final question involves *action*.

- H. "What can we do to get Jane back on track?" Again, a flood of response followed: "tell her right away that we're her friends, tell her we like her, invite her to our parties, go shopping with her, phone her, visit her at home, and make sure she's not alone."

An interesting event happened during this discussion. The principal of the school got so excited about the process that he went to his office and canceled recess that morning so the discussion could continue and he could participate. In short, the students did what they said they would do, and Jane's behavior has changed remarkably.

**Rule #6** It is important to have a strong adult from the environment present to facilitate and assist the circle to grow and stay together. The individual with the problem behavior must also be present at all (or most) meetings. The group should name itself, but not use the name of the person.

The teacher took on the task of nurturing what had already been started. A group of 17 students from the class decided to name themselves the S.W.A.T. Team (Students Who Are Together).

**Follow-Up** A follow-up of the situation was done 2 months later to find out, in the students' own words, what was happening. The following is a summary of the discussion:

Our S.W.A.T. team has a weekly meeting with Mrs. Gill (the resource teacher). Jane comes to every meeting. At the first meeting we told Jane we wanted to help and be her friends. We told her that no matter what she did, we'd be there for her. We apologized for not being around enough before. Sarah invited her to a party and Sue went to visit her at home. Danny, Rose, and Linda call her a lot. Jane's happy now because she's got the S.W.A.T. team and because she has friends. We're all making new friends, too. Jane's whole attitude has changed and she hasn't hit or attacked anyone since we talked to her.

**Educators' Response** The teachers reported that they are amazed at the change in Jane and that she is: "more included in everything the other kids do, knows everyone in the class now, is generally happier, is much friendlier, and has not been in the principal's office in 2 months."

**Students' Response** The S.W.A.T. team was asked to write a few notes about their experience with Jane. This is what they had to say:

"A Poem About Jane"  
 Jane came three years ago  
 No one did she really know  
 We tried to teach her wrong from right  
 Tried to make her days sunny and bright  
 Still she walked around so sad  
 And we knew that we had  
 To make her feel like one of us  
 And over her we'd all fuss  
 Now Jane has many good friends  
 And I hope "our" friendship never ends.

(Tammi Washnuk)

Jane has changed since her first meeting with the S.W.A.T. team. These past couple of weeks she's really opened up. She now feels she belongs, and she knows *we are* her friends. She hasn't been acting up or annoying us like she used to. Instead she's been very friendly. She used to ignore us, now she's cheery and always talks to us.

She was just recently invited to her first party with boys. She really enjoyed it. I think Jane has really changed. She used to be so quiet and always kept to herself. Now she is more outgoing and talkative. Like any teenager, Jane needs friends and a social life.

(Melanie McDermott)

Before S.W.A.T. I found Jane moody, babyish, she swore, she spat, and once in awhile she would pee in her pants. When S.W.A.T. started helping, Jane was overjoyed. Jane would always say she didn't care about anyone or about school. About four days after saying how she didn't care about school she got suspended because she touched a kid in the private spot.

Because of S.W.A.T. she is really changing now. I called her at home and she talked to me for 10 minutes on the phone. Jane is trying to act like us! She's becoming *like us*!

(Krystyne Banakiewicz)

When Jane first came to this school I could tell she was nervous so I became her friend. As time went on, Jane started following me everywhere I went and she wouldn't even let me talk to my friends in private.

Finally a group in my class formed the S.W.A.T. team. Jane began to change. She stopped swearing and doesn't follow me everywhere I go. She's more open to everyone. I think the S.W.A.T. team really has improved Jane's behavior and attitude toward other people.

(Nicole Salmon)

### Jeff's Story

Jeff is another student at Regina Mundi school with major behavior problems. The teacher was concerned that Jeff would be in serious trouble in high school if his behavior problems continued.

After hearing about the success with Jane, Jeff's teacher wanted to ask the class members to assist Jeff with his problems. But, everyone was concerned that the seventh graders were not as good a group as the eighth graders and wondered if they would respond in a similar fashion. (Jeff's story, while described more concisely here, operated on the same rules described in Jane's story.)

If anything, the seventh graders surpassed their schoolmates in the eighth grade and surprised everyone by their sensitivity toward Jeff. The following is the student oriented intervention sequence that occurred for Jeff:

- A. "What are some words to describe Jeff?" The class said: "he fights all the time, pushes, acts rough, picks on the little kids, hides, swears a lot, doesn't talk, bothers the girls, is lonely, makes rude noises when he eats, and takes things and doesn't give them back."
- B. "Can you think of anything good about Jeff?" The class responded with: "he says 'hello' to some people, finishes his work, offers to help some people, listens, participates well in gym, and tries hard." (It is interesting to compare the seventh grade responses with the eighth grade group.)
- C. "How would you feel if you had no one or few people in your life?" They said: "suicidal, depressed, lonely, sad, I wouldn't care about anything or anyone, down in the dumps, weird, nobody loves me."
- D. "What would you do and how would you act if your life had no or few friends?" The class said: "quiet, aggressive, rude, mean, disruptive, lost, unable to concentrate, fail, immature, centered out, try to get attention, lying, making up stories, steal, bored, crying for help, lonely, want attention, want to be alone, and need someone to talk to."

With the help of the teachers, the class drew a picture using circles of friends of what Jeff's life actually looked like:

Circle #1: Jeff is very close to his older brother.

Circle #2: Jeff likes Mrs. Gill and another teacher.

Circle #3: He is not involved in any after-school activities.

Circle #4: Teachers, doctors

The students were shocked and surprised at the drawings of Jeff's life. He had few, if any, friends.

- E. "How do you think Jeff feels about his life?" They answered: "depressed, lonely, sad, angry, upset, down in the dumps, and weird."

They all agreed Jeff needed friends who could understand his isolation and anger. Almost the entire class volunteered to get involved.

### Conclusion: Student Solutions

Jane and Jeff are not real names, but they are real people. All other names are real. These stories can be replicated for any child at risk of being left out or kicked out at any age. All children, whether in Toronto

Los Angeles, or a small rural town in Iowa, respond to honesty, openness, and truth.

Students, and especially teenagers, know the pressures of everyday life. They relate to suicide, death, war, and disease. They do not want to run away from these problems; rather they want and need to face them head on. Teachers can help them face life, not run from it.

It is the adults who are frightened to confront the pain of growing up and growing older. New labels are being created to mask ignorance and fear. Diseases are born: learning disabilities, behavior disorders, attention deficit disorders, and minimal brain damage. Living, however, is not a disease to be "cured" by the medical profession.

What these authors suggest costs little and is based on common sense and human kindness: *talk to children and to each other, listen to the joy, sorrow, and pain of neighbors, do not pretend to live in a Pollyanna world.*

Jane and Jeff could have ended up in jail, group homes, or on the street. Instead they are going to parties, going to the mall, and heading for a future.

This approach is practical but not magical. It is not an answer, but a process, a journey. For more stories of success like Jane's and Jeff's there needs to be:

Time  
Time to listen  
Time to dream  
Time to hear  
Time to cry and laugh  
Time to work  
Time to act  
Time to listen again and again and again

### COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS SOLUTIONS

The following is one case study of how a community member who experienced exclusion for his undesirable behavior used his experiences to assist youth considered to have severe behavior problems to learn to function and succeed in the educational and community mainstream. There are a number of such cases that can be cited, but only one is included here to illustrate that community members, including individuals many people consider to be a problem, can provide solutions if given the opportunity and support.

#### Charlie's Story

Some years ago, Frontier College in Toronto began a small program, originally to respond to expectations about the "literacy" needs of pris-

oners in Canadian jails. A great deal was learned by listening. First, it was necessary to learn how to listen, not just to the words, but to the meaning. After listening, it was discovered that "reading and writing" were not uppermost in prisoners' minds. They wanted to get out of jail and obtain a job. It was decided that these people needed help to get a job when they were released, thus a program needed to be adapted to assist them.

Most inmates do not have enormous "job skills." Standardized tests do not say much about what people can or will do, and credibility is lost by resorting to them. Therefore, a simple "test" was devised. Over coffee, inmates were asked: "What do you like? What do you want to do?"

All kinds of guesses were made about what people wanted and needed; usually they were wrong. However, by listening, and because jobs were sought that people said they wanted, the small program worked remarkably well. Then along came Charlie.

Charlie Tann had been in prison for 27 years. He was "released" to participate in the program largely because he was dying of cirrhosis. He had been given three months to live, and it was going to be more convenient to have him die "on the outside." Charlie was asked, "What would you like to do?" He replied, "I'd like to work with kids."

Charlie made his case. He argued that he had completely wasted his life, had been addicted to every drug, messed up in every conceivable way, and that was exactly what he had to offer. He argued that other adults could not really communicate with kids who were already on the skids but that he could. He could tell them that he was just like them and if they did not get smarter, they would end up just like him—dying—after having spent most of his life in jail. Charlie argued that he could do something others could not, and that he deserved the chance. He said he wanted to do something decent in his life, and he did not have long to do it.

Charlie was convincing and sold his idea to the programmers. Then the nightmare began. No responsible school official would allow a lifelong criminal like Charlie near children. Therefore, the programmers retreated to the prison system. There was a "lockup" where young offenders were kept—after everyone had given up. These prison officials reluctantly agreed to let Charlie talk to these young offenders. These offenders had frustrated the officials best efforts again and again. Fundamentally, it was a waiting game—waiting for death by suicide, overdose, or murder. Since those were the choices, no one had anything to lose. Charlie was allowed access to these kids.

Charlie's "technique" was extraordinary. He went into the lockup, picked the toughest kid, and appointed himself his or her friend for life. He would simply walk in, sit down, and say, "Angie, I'm your friend."

That was all there was to his technique. He would tell them, "I am self-appointed. I have decided that I am your friend. There is nothing you can do about it. There is nothing you can do to offend me, because I have done worse. And I will find you—and I will be your friend. You are stuck with me."

This message of unconditional love coming from a hardened life-long criminal was staggering to kids. They did not know how to deal with it. Each, in their own way, tested Charlie. They ran, did drugs, stole his money and clothes. Charlie always found them and offered more. Mostly, he gave the only real thing he had to give—himself—a commodity that was in short supply.

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There are hundreds just like Angie. Charlie even married one of his "stray kids." Her name was Kelly. She graduated from the university at the top of her class. One professor said he had never had a student like Kelly.

The problem Charlie, a rejected community member, became part of the solution. With Charlie's help and help from others like him, a number of "incorrigible" teens were able to turn from undesirable behaviors to more acceptable positive behaviors through acceptance, friendship, inclusion, and success in the mainstream of educational and community life.

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