



CASE STUDY #24: POOCHIE (???)

Anthony was an intelligent enough guy except for the fact that he failed classes on a regular basis. When quizzed about his promised “success” in a midterm grade he admitted: “I really screwed the pooch on that one! We are always encouraged when the group member takes ownership. It can be difficult for some young people to do that...Aw who are we kidding...It is almost impossible for many adults as well.

With some of our program members the cause of their failure is somewhat apparent after hours of observation and group sharing. Anthony was closed and protective which can often mean an abusive home life. One day before the group I happened to see Anthony and his parents arrive at the burger joint I was frequenting.

They didn't see me because the booths have rather high backs but I could hear their conversation. It was clear by the threats that Anthony had suffered considerable abuse during his formative years. Talking this over with my co-program director we decided that playing “cross over the line” might give Anthony an opportunity to share his pain with other group members. As Michael Pritchard would say “Pain shared is pain divided”. This activity involves having a tape line dividing the room in half.

The leaders take turns making statements about different situations that group members may have experienced started with innocuous examples like: “Anyone who has ever stolen anything; cross over the line” or “Everyone who has cheated on a test” and so forth. Slowly the situation becomes more serious like: “Who has been betrayed in a relationship”. Or, “Who has snorted coke?”

The final questions involve serious traumatic events like being sexually assaulted or been beaten by a parent or boyfriend. Anthony slowly inched forward after another student stepped over the line, It was amazing to see his reaction when two more group members also came forward. It was as if a crushing boulder had been removed from his shoulder. (Depending upon the reaction of the other students we may ask if anyone has anything to say about the bravery of the people who came forward).

Almost universally people will approach the people who shared hugs and kind statements. There are always tears from the observers and sometimes the victims as well.

The group leaders will speak with each person who stepped forward to get a pulse of the situation.

Obviously a police report must be filed during which the officer(s) make the determination of the potential for a possible false report. (People do get caught up in the activity and can supply a “me too” that isn't valid.

Anthony and I had numerous one-on-one sessions after his disclosure. He opened up about many events in his life that were impacting his ability to study and function in the academic setting. More important than his “train-wreck” of a family setting was his disappointment of a physical exam he took for the Air Force. He has spent many weeks planning out his future in the military with recruiters, only

to have all his dreams about flying derailed by a heart valve condition. This realization propelled him into severe depression resulting in failing grades and a total lack of motivation.

Fortunately I knew about a summer intern program with a local automobile manufacturer . Being a very bright and articulate young man he aced the qualifying test and the oral interview. During his senior year he returned to "I CARE" as a group leader and made up hours/ credits in order to graduate with his class and begin working in the factory full time. Within 10 years he became a production manager supervising a huge crew of assemblers. His performance evaluations were always A++.

Anthony's story occurs all too frequently. Having a "safety net" programs like "I CARE" can change lives. Without coming to grips with his background and how he had the inner strength and power to take control of his fate he might not have turned failure into a bright future!

NOTE TO READERS: Naturally any criminal assault must be reported to the authorities . It is essential that a school resource officer or an officer assigned to the juvenile division be notified of your intent to employ this tactic as it quite often results in several referrals to the proper authorities. In one situation I was presenting a workshop to a suburban high school using the cross-over exercise resulting in several referrals for child abuse, sexual assault and neglect. When I took the information to the SRO (school resource officer) he was far from supportive telling me that I "opened a can of worms" that was going to keep him too busy for a week or so. I didn't apologize because it seemed to me that exposure of these crimes might be exactly the kind of information that NEEDED to come to light!? Am I right or wrong? (All educators have since been classified as "mandatory reporters" which is an extremely heavy obligation but also removes the need to ponder whether or not to file a report.)