

THE USE OF NARRATIVE THERAPY IN COUNSELLING BRIDGING PARTICIPANTS

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

Our economy is changing from an industrial base to an information base - a change so profound that one career writer has compared this shift to a "Workquake" (Bolles, 1993). The very nature of work as we have traditionally viewed it has shifted. Not only the nature of "work" and the definition of "worker" has changed, but our traditional view of job security has also drastically altered. No longer can we count on having full time positions with benefits and long term security, but rather we must concentrate on entrepreneurial activities where consulting, term project work, and part time positions are increasingly the norm. In addition to the change we have experienced by moving from an industrial to information economy with its corresponding job losses, the stability of families, jobs and occupations have disappeared (Peavy, 1992). Because job security as we have traditionally viewed it is disappearing, job search and career planning skills become increasingly important. The first step in this process is being able to articulate the transferable skills acquired through life experience. As well, one must have a well developed sense of self to effectively compete in today's dynamic labour market. Traditional career counselling methods have relied heavily on psychometric evaluation to measure values, interests / aptitudes and temperaments. In this information economy, however, using psychometric assessments alone will not allow individuals to identify their strengths. Rather, their life experience and accomplishments must be identified in order for a life work planning process to begin. Career planning is no longer a simple and singular project but rather a life-long process.

Adjusting to a dynamic and competitive labour market is difficult as higher levels of education are required to find knowledge or information based work. As well, adaptability and

a strong sense of self esteem are required in order to manage a career as if it were an entrepreneurial project, and constantly cope with change. If this era of transition is difficult for the well educated, flexible and confident individual, how then does a woman who has been involved in an abusive relationship compete? For the most part, women who have been involved in long term, abusive relationships often suffer from limited self esteem and consequently find competitive work environments very difficult.

Walker (1979) described a three stage model of domestic violence, commonly referred to as "the cycle of violence" which includes a first stage of conflict escalation, followed by a second stage where the actual physical violence occurs and a final or third stage of reconciliation where the battering spouse begs for forgiveness and promises that the violence will not occur. A typical pattern of such an abusive relationship is that the battered wife blames herself, tries to see her own guilt and looks for ways to change to prevent the violence from re-occurring (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). As a result of this cycle, she may have low self esteem and limited coping responses. She may sometimes withdraw from other sources of stress thus becoming more dependent on an abusive partner, an effect termed as "learned helplessness" by Walker (1997) who coined this phrase from psychological research completed in the 1960's.

Using traditional career counselling methods which include assessments to help identify strengths and interests could be quite destructive as the abused women will often approach the interpretation of the results with a self-defeating attitude or a negative set of expectations. This would simply reinforce an already negative self image rather than encourage growth. Constructivist counselling techniques however, empower a client and can promote self

knowledge, feelings of adequacy and confidence as well as facilitating interactive skills because of their focus on the clients ability to rewrite her dominant narrative. As the client begins to identify real life accomplishments and recognize the validity of these experiences she begins to understand that she is the expert in identifying her strengths and constructing appropriate solutions. As the expert in identifying strengths she can change her life story and replace it with a more positive approach.

Traditional career counselling techniques have often been utilized in Bridging projects, which are designed to encourage abused women who wish to re-enter the labour force, to enter school, or to find work. As constructivist career counselling techniques are relatively new, I felt that it would be interesting to design a Bridging program for abused women which included constructivist counselling techniques in both the career and personal counselling portions of the program. Consequently the idea for Transitions' first Positive Choices Bridging program was conceived. A proposal was sent to the Ministry Of Education, Skills and Training outlining a Bridging Program that outlined not only the traditional bridging curriculum of life skills, academic upgrading, computer literacy and career planning but also advocated the use of a narrative or constructivist approach for the careers and personal counselling portion of the program.

CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE RELATED TO PROJECT

Constructivism

Mahoney (1991), states that constructivism was first mentioned in 1621 when Frances Bacon wrote that people rewrite their experiences in order for them to “fit” with their memory of an event. In 1725, Giambattista Vico wrote that people categorize unfamiliar experiences by using familiar categories to provide order thus being the first to discover that “to know” is “to make” (Mahoney, 1991). Mahoney states that later, Immanuel Kant wrote in his Critique of Pure Reason (1781) that individuals re-order experience according to their own personal frameworks or background. Mahoney (1988a) described individuals as “proactive” rather than “anticipatory” in creating personal constructs which interact with reality. (Also see Kelly, 1955; Neimeyer, 1987).

Some constructivists believe that human beings construct the agreement on reality based on their own mythological framework. Mahoney (1991) states:

For critical constructivists, the individual is not a self-sufficient, sole producer of his or her own experience. Rather, the individual is conceived as “co-creator” or “co-creator of personal realities; co-emphasizing interactive interdependence with their social and physical environment. (p.11)

Neimeyer (1993) describes constructivists as differing from simple pluralists in their insistence on a view of knowledge as invented and evolving, “validated” through internal consistency and subjective viability more than by the correspondence with objective truth. Neimeyer’s (1993) reality is thus subjective and variable.

White and Epston (1990) write about constructivism in Literate Means to Therapeutic Ends, a collection of letters which exemplifies storied therapy, a stance utilized by both therapists in their practices. Storied therapy contends that people develop problems when their

life stories are not congruent with lived experiences. Therapy then becomes a process of re-storying or re-writing the dominant narrative. In their re-edited book, Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends (1990), a more thorough discussion of narrative systemic therapy has been added. White and Epston (1990) discuss Bateson's influence on their work. Bateson, an anthropologist, introduced White to the "interpretive method" where:

The occurrence of any new event in the world of the living should be considered a response to information about difference where nothing can be understood until differences and distinctions are evoked. (Bateson, 1980, p.8).

Consequently, knowledge becomes subject to interpretation and is subject to context, or patterns which allow us to map our world and events through temporal dimensions. White and Epston cite Foucault (1979), an historian, as adding the idea of knowledge/power as inseparable and the concept that techniques based on knowledge disempower persons thus empowering problems. An example of this is in the use of psychometric testing which results in the psychologist or counsellor becoming the expert in a person's career rather than empowering the person to write his or her own story.

As constructivists, White and Epston (1990) believe that people construct their own reality consistent with the cultural mores from which they operate. Problems occur when the stories that people write contradict the dominant narrative. Consequently, the aim of therapy is to assist clients in storying or restorying their life script. Through externalization, a mechanism which allows the therapist to separate the problem from the dominant narrative of the people involved, the therapeutic process then allows the clients to concentrate on previously ignored stories and re-script their lives. "Unique outcomes" (which are those

aspects of our experience not pertaining to the dominant narrative) are identified, and questioning that encourages the construction of an alternative story then ensues.

Externalization sometimes, for the first time, allows clients to see that it is “not the person who is the problem, [rather; it is the] problem that is the problem” (O’Hanlon, 1994 p. 23). As well, the on-going existence of the problems and failure to correct them is not a reflection on themselves or their family. Consequently, externalization enables the family to work together to combat their difficulties rather than isolating the member of the group viewed as responsible for the dysfunction. Because the person is no longer identified with the problem, it also encourages them to take more responsibility for combating the difficulty in a lighter, less stressed atmosphere.

In his “therapy of literary merit”, White proposes that the therapist externalize the problem using “relative influence questioning” a method which maps the extent of the problem and the relationship of the family to the problem (1988, p. 8). Using this questioning technique the therapist maps the influence of the problem in every aspect of the clients life.

As well the influence of persons and their relationships to the continuation of the problem is identified. Using an historical review process which encourages people to identify when the problem was not present, unique outcomes are identified which break the influence of the problem and encourage future unique outcomes which ultimately destroy the problem’s support system (White, 1988, 1989).

The major strength of this therapy is that it allows people to re-articulate their life stories. They become persons without labels who are encouraged by the heroic view that they are battling “temper” or “manic depression” as any knight searching for the Holy Grail would

do. As a result of the externalization and re-framing of their problem they are no longer identified as victims but conquerors, and every small triumph is celebrated along the way. It is a positive therapy and has been effective with many individuals who have felt their lives were hopeless. They are given responsibility for combating their problem and because they can view it in a different context, a major paradigm shift seems to occur which then gives them strength to continue their personal battle. The therapy is thorough and sequential, building on any small success the client demonstrates along the way. Because the problem is externalized, this therapy can be used with difficult clients as there is an assumption of responsibility; this encourages clients to work constructively towards a solution. O'Hanlon (1994) however warns that if externalization is used simply as a technique without a strong narrative belief that people are not the problem, then these changes will not occur.

As well journals, letters and certificates can be utilized in this therapy to redefine the person's relationship with the problem. Letters cast the therapist in the role of "amanuensis; a scribe" that copies down the life stories heard and adds a therapeutic perspective (Epston, 1994). Epston describes his role as being

Like a butterfly catcher waiting for the metaphor to rise up so I can net it and then display it to the clients, who if not gratified by the first attempt to have a concrete way to describe the concerns that are plaguing them usually satisfy themselves with some revision. (p. 33).

Epston and White (1990) feel that the letters must not be reviewed as an intervention that occurs outside of the therapeutic setting, but rather as a necessary part of the whole.

For example, Epston says:

My advice to therapists starting out using letters is not to think of the letters as an intervention apart from the therapy session; but to see the two as completely and organically intertwined, the one following from the other like the drawing in and letting out of breath. I ask my clients questions and write down their answers and then read them aloud, which sparks off further inquiry, becoming the stuff of the letter. It is all part of the same therapeutic dialogue, all I am doing differently is using the medium of written language to continue to enrich the conversation. (Epston, 1994, p. 33).

In addition to acting as the clinical file, letters invite reluctant clients to attend therapy, celebrate achievements, declare independence from oppression and contractually end redundant clinical roles. The letters enable the therapist to summarize the session and ask additional questions that he or she might not have thought of when writing up the session. In addition, difficult questions that are easier for the client to read than listen to within the session itself can be included in the client summary. Another strength of this technique, as Epston states, is that the very act of note taking within the session, slows down the question and answer intervals giving the therapist time to strategize. After the session, when the letters are written, the therapist has time to reflect on the conversation, identify which areas are cloudy and ask questions that clarify or crystallize, as spoken language is fleeting whereas written language freezes thoughts for analysis and distribution. Letters also collapse both temporal and spatial dimensions. In a sense, they bring the therapist into the home between sessions and through the increased interest of the therapist, seem to promote progress.

White and Epston (1990) refer to their use of constructivist therapeutic techniques as narrative therapy, storied therapy or therapeutic conversations.

In our work we do not construct problems in terms of disease and do not imagine that we do anything that relates to “a cure”. There have recently been some attempts in the literature to address concerns of this nature and the notion of “therapeutic conversations” has been proposed [and has appeal] “because” the terms “therapy” and “conversation” are contradictory by definition and conversation goes some way towards challenging the realities constructed by, and the mystification introduced by the term “therapy”. (p.14).

As a result of utilizing conversations rather than therapy for client/counsellor discussions the focus moves towards strategizing to overcome present obstacles and moves away from “client illness”.

Constructivism in Career Counselling

Richardson (1993) proposes that a constructionist approach be utilized by career counsellors as she feels the field was dominated by personality and developmental psychologists. In her estimation, career development models are unchanging and do not adapt well to life span development theories or the post modern concept of life / work as a career. Richardson contends that career counsellors, in consequence, emphasize individual career development instead of separating career issues from their clients’ needs.

Savickas (1993) contends that as a result of the dramatic changes engendered by the post modern era, individuals are feeling a sense of insecurity about the future as well as corporate betrayal as companies “downsize” or “rightsize” with little regard for the number of years spent loyally serving the company. Consequently, career counselling for post modern clients will be impacted by six career development innovations. These include an emphasis on the client as expert, client enablement, client/job fit emphasis, personal career development theory rather than counsellor theory and examining the grand narrative (client stories instead of test scores) Savicks, 1993. Savickas feels that the role of counsellor as “expert” will

disappear and be replaced with the role of “facilitator” to enhance change and remove roadblocks. Diversity will flourish and individuals will be empowered to design their life plans. As well, life designs will replace the traditional outlook of occupational decision making. The emphasis on life/work planning has already been demonstrated in Savickas’ estimation, by the increasing use of Values and Salience Inventories which measure the importance of life roles. As the idea of career will become increasingly personal when work roles and life roles are no longer dichotomized, career counsellors will begin to reassess and rewrite their roles as life/work planning counsellors. This shift in emphasis also causes a shift in assessment techniques, for, if clients are empowered to design their life/work plan then their life stories must also be addressed.

Peavy (1993) also identified constructivist theory as an innovative framework which would assist career counsellors in addressing some of the challenges faced by their clients in our post modern world. In Peavy’s estimation, the theory celebrated client differences, recognized the impact of context on life style choices and promoted empowerment. Conversely, career testing and assessment techniques disempowered clients as the career counsellor remained the expert. Peavy felt that career counselling techniques that promoted client empowerment would encourage client decision making, action plan formulation and self evaluation.

Peavy (1993) also uses the term, “story” or “life storying” to describe a person’s self identity and refers to client problems as stories that have deviated from the dominant narrative. From Peavy’s perspective career counselling techniques must enable clients to restory or co-

author narratives that will promote success. Once clients become actively involved in rewriting the script of their life stories they become personally responsible for change.

According to Peavy, the principal tenets of constructivism that should apply to counselling include an individualized client orientation based on client past experience, perceived meaning, values/assumptions and constraints. As success in daily living is dependent on how we respond to change and uncertainty, career counselling should also be non-linear and include chance as well as developmental life stages and formal planning as factors. Peavy also felt that individual traits or “selves” were dynamic and could be best described through stories told by the individuals themselves.

Selves do not have a trait basis, they have a narrative basis. Self assessment in counselling needs to be shifted from testing of personality traits, interests and abilities to assessment of life stories, personal projects and activities. Self observational ability is promoted by counsellor education and is a method to be used in counselling with clients. (1993, p.16)

Peavy (1992) began to apply Constructivist counselling techniques to career counselling as he felt that “word sculpting”, (similar to doodling, where the client makes free hand gestures with a pen, allowing their imagination free rein) letters, journals and life stories would provide clients with enhanced self-knowledge, better critical thinking skills and increased feelings of self-esteem. Peavy (1993) developed the dependable strengths articulation process as a counselling tool which encourages clients to use life stories in order to identify transferable skills. Peavy defined a “dependable strength” as a quality that has been developed throughout life which, when combined with other talents, enables one to perform exceptionally well. A “good experience” was further defined as a time when you completed a task in which you could take pride or in which you had fun participating. This process is similar to the Life

Story exercises identified by Bolles (1990) in the New Quick Job Hunting Map. In this exercise Bolles asks his readers to:

Look at your accomplishments. Whether they were early in your life, or more recently, whether they were in your leisure life, or your learning life, or your labor/work life, does not matter. Just be sure also that it deals in turn with TASK, TOOLS and MEANS, and OUTCOME or RESULT. See the example that follows here:

A TASK. Something you wanted to do, just because it was fun or would give you a sense of adventure or a sense of accomplishment. Normally there was a problem that you were trying to solve, or a challenge you were trying to overcome, or something you were trying to master or produce or create.

1. TOOLS or MEANS. You used something to help you do the task, solve the problem, overcome the challenge. Either you had certain *Things* to help you—objects, materials, tools or equipment, or you had other *People* to help you, or you got a hold of some vital *Information*. Tell us what tools or means you used, and how you used them.
2. AN OUTCOME OR RESULT. You were able to finish the task or solve the problem, overcome the challenge, master a process, or produce or create something. You had a sense of pride, even if no one else knew what it was you had accomplished. (Bolles, 1997 p. 28)

Both Peavy (1993) and Bolles (1990) ask their clients to relate a personal story detailing an accomplishment to others which outlines the task, tools and results achieved. As the client narrates the story the counsellor probes for more information in order to ensure complete understanding. Once the narration is completed the client is asked to describe the dependable strengths that he or she felt were demonstrated in the story. The counsellor then describes any strengths and assets that must have been overlooked by the client. Amundson (1995) has developed an exercise similar to Peavy's dependable strengths model which he entitles the pattern identification exercise which again encourages a client to identify an enjoyable activity then describe positive and negative incidents surrounding the occurrences. These experiences are then transferred to a work situation so that the counsellor and client can identify patterns and expand awareness of client motivation, values, feelings and behaviour.

Amundson also uses metaphor to identify how clients view themselves and their progress often incorporating client drawings to understand pre and post counselling attitudes.

The assumption behind this process is that the stories of our achievements are far more relevant in identifying transferable skills for career choice program participants than using psychometric assessments which can categorize or label clients. While the use of testing was promoted in our industrial age when trait factor views of individuals were dominant, in our post industrial age the world of work has changed dramatically. Workers are now defined in terms of their competencies rather than careers, and career planning encompasses all life roles. In this era where “the triumph of the individual” is increasingly promoted, client empowerment and participation in the career counselling process must be correspondingly articulated. The life story process provides such a tool. It is a dynamic process that empowers the client, emphasizes the construction of personal meaning and increases self-esteem as the client begins to re-author her life and create new life work possibilities.

CHAPTER THREE - BRIDGING PROJECT

Transitions

After researching the new narrative counselling techniques and attending a two week workshop with Bolles in 1993 where he taught the use of seven life stories to identify accomplishments for career planning purposes, I became increasingly interested in utilizing these tools in a group counselling format. My firm, AMS Consulting Ltd., doing business as Transitions - Career Consultants, has been in business since 1991, and has specialized in providing individual and group counselling services. Transitions also provides counselling, job search and career planning assistance to unemployed workers. As well, the firm administers and interprets career related psychometric tests for individual clients and for other employment counselling services within the Prince George Employment Counsellors Network. Consequently, administering a Bridging program for abuse survivors would be a unique project for Transitions for two reasons - it would incorporate group personal counselling as well as career counselling, and would utilize a narrative format.

As the principal for Transitions, I am responsible for the management of any projects for which the company has contracted. As an experienced career counsellor I also carry a full counselling load. As projects are negotiated, I hire various consultants to participate in selected functions. For the purpose of this contract, Dr. Ron Lehr, a counselling psychologist, was hired to provide 20 sessions of narrative/solution focused counselling with myself as co-counsellor. In addition, I delivered the career counselling component of the project using a narrative approach. During the time frame allocated for the project, participants were asked to narrate seven life stories which exemplified accomplishments that they had experienced. Utilizing the "life story" process, the group identified transferable skills and individual

strengths increasing self esteem. In addition, a trained adult educator, Patricia Anne Duncan, taught academic upgrading, job search skills, lifeskills and job-specific skills to program participants.

(a) Rationale

Lone parent families headed by women have the lowest incomes of all family types in Canada. Poverty profile (1995) indicates that 57.2% of female lone-parent families fall below the poverty income cut-off. In addition to the issue of poverty, many of these women have left abusive relationships and are dealing with the dynamics of abuse, low self esteem and family functioning problems. Consequently, the objective of this contract was to provide eight to twelve women who were poor, victims of abuse, suffering from low self esteem and lack of career focus with the counselling support and interventions necessary to succeed in the development and implementation of a personal action plan. Personal counselling was provided in both group and individual settings using a narrative / solution focused approach. Following the seven week Bridging component, an additional 13 weeks of Job Readiness training was added for the Bridging participants and for an additional 12 clients who were facing similar barriers to employment. This component included the teaching of skills necessary to succeed in a retail environment.

(b) Client Participant Profile

The clients selected for this project had multiple employment barriers and challenges. All had a history of abuse (either childhood, adulthood or both). As a result of the abuse suffered, all had limited self esteem, and most suffered from drug and alcohol problems, mental health or emotional issues. Many had dropped out of school early and had limited formal education

and/or literacy problems. Because of the lack of positive role models and a limited support network most clients had extreme anxiety about joining the workforce or returning to school. In addition to these concerns the women had limited or no work experience, inappropriate work wardrobes, outdated job skills and inadequate daycare.

c) Selection Criteria

The women were selected for this project if they had been on social assistance for at least ten months and had a history of abuse. Almost all were heading lone parent families and had shaky support systems, as well as limited self esteem. Because the objective of the contract was to provide the participants with further training or employment we also looked for a minimum Grade 10 reading level, a sincere commitment to return to work or school and a wish to make some positive changes in their lives. Finally, because both career and personal counselling was to be provided within a group setting, all the women had to be willing to participate in this process.

(d) Project Activities

The Bridging project comprised four modules. The first module concentrated on personal and career planning issues and utilized a narrative counselling approach. Module two included academic and self development skills taught in a classroom setting, while the third module taught job readiness. Module 4 included a four week on-the-job work experience as well as specific skills training. An overview of the various modules follows.

Module 1 - Personal Career Development and Planning - 8 weeks

The goal of this module of the program was to assist the learner in identifying personal and coping skills and generating a personalized action plan. A variety of self-assessment tools were used to assist participants in identifying personal strengths and interests and establishing congruent employment goals. Goal-setting, action planning, and the importance of lifelong learning was emphasized.

Narrative group counselling interventions used in all phases of the program included journal writing, discussion, story telling, relaxation techniques, use of the medicine wheel, small group discussion, interviewing and sharing in dyads and triads, drawings, use of family albums and use of ritual.

The following topics were addressed: group and individual counselling using a Narrative / Solution focused approach to address personal issues and career planning needs; personal assessment utilizing the Myers Briggs Type Indicator and Bolles workbook - Create a Picture of Your Ideal Job or Next Career to identify temperaments, aptitudes and interests; and action planning/goal-setting; to establish educational and employment goals (short term and long term goals).

Module 2 - Self Development and Academic Reinforcement Skills - (8 weeks)

The goal of this module of the program was to assist the learner in developing the foundational skills necessary for personal, academic and employment success. The textbook “Becoming a Master Student” by Ellis was utilized extensively in the development of communication, personal management and lifelong learning skills.

The development of desirable work habits and attitudes (e.g. punctuality, reliability, ability to follow directions and respect workplace rules and procedures) were stressed. Computer training focused on fundamental computer literacy and the development of keyboarding skills.

The following topics were addressed: computer training (keyboarding skills; basic and intermediate computer skills); workplace communication skills (communication theory; active listening skills; conflict resolution skills); critical thinking skills (tools for creative thinking; decision-making strategies); lifelong learning skills such as learning styles; memory techniques; reading and note-taking skills; test-writing skills; managing change in the “new economy”; information management; positive attitudes and behaviour (identifying self-defeating behaviour; understanding and enhancing self-esteem; identifying values; healthy lifestyle choices); teamwork and appreciating group diversity; managing personal resources (time; money and community support); and academic reinforcement and upgrading (initial assessment using CAAT (Canadian Adult Achievement Test) with upgrading activities as required on an individual basis to meet post-secondary institution prerequisites and/or industry hiring requirements).

Module 3 - Employment Skills - Job Readiness - (4 weeks)

The goal of this module of the program was to provide participants with an opportunity to acquire the skills necessary to work in the retail industry. Participants would become well acquainted with career opportunities in industry and understand their related skill levels and academic prerequisites. Labour market information was examined and guest speakers from industry were invited to discuss post secondary educational options; employment opportunities and entrepreneurial ideas.

The following topics will be addressed: workplace performance with an emphasis on employers expectations regarding work habits and attitudes. Certificates in: Superhost , Food Safe, Serving It Right, WHMIS, and Standard First Aid were provided. As well a three day course in Cashier training was provided which introduced the participants to the electronic cash register, crime prevention, (shoplifting fraud), tax peripheral equipment (scanners, scales, slip printers, screens), responsibility and liability.

Module 4 - Employment Transition Skills - Job Readiness - (4 weeks)

The goal of this module of the program was to provide participants with an opportunity to acquire meaningful work experience in the retail industry. Work placements were an effective means of supplementing classroom instruction and assisting in career orientation as they provided the participants with an opportunity to verify interests and aptitudes and determine more precisely which jobs were congruent with career goals. Properly planned and structured, they also served as a means of acquiring new skills and industry recognized credentials. Work placements were organized for those students who identified an employment goal or required a pre-training practicum and was structured to meet their specific needs. Employers feedback was obtained through an evaluation questionnaire.

CHAPTER FOUR - EVALUATIVE PROJECT

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate the Bridging project activities that had been contracted by the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training. For the purposes of this descriptive study, the Bridging program that was implemented between January 13th and March 7th, 1997 was evaluated using the results from a cohort of nine clients. Throughout this study, "Bridging study" refers to this cohort.

The components that were added strictly for the evaluation project included changing the curriculum so that 20 narrative group counselling sessions were offered and the utilization of seven life stories as a means to access accomplishments or skills in career counselling. In addition, three assessment instruments were administered to the clients at the beginning and end of the project. The assessments included the Coping Responses Inventory, the Life Stressors and Social Resources Inventory and the Multidimensional Self Esteem Inventory. The remainder of the Bridging curriculum follows a Bridging format or template suggested by the Provincial Government and includes academic upgrading, life skills, basic computer literacy and career planning using traditional assessment instruments.

Research Questions

The Evaluation Project addresses the following question:

Does the use of narrative therapy for a group of abused women re-entering the work force increase their self esteem? The other question that I wished to ask was whether the use of a narrative focus (the seven life stories used to identify career options) would enable the women to complete a concrete action plan that identified new career possibilities. While eight project participants did complete a specific action plan relating to a new career identity, the question was clouded because traditional career assessments were also used. Consequently, it was

impossible to determine whether the career focus happened as a result of the seven life stories, the traditional assessments or a combination of the two. The Myers Briggs Type Indicator (Myers, 1993) was utilized to identify personality or temperaments, the Holland Self Directed Search (Holland, 1994) was administered in order to identify interests and CHOICES (1997) (a computerized career counselling tool) was also available for those who wished to better understand the career choices to which they were ultimately being asked to commit. I feel that the career choices made were probably a result of synthesizing all of the information obtained about themselves and the career planning process, however this cannot be verified as action plans were simply identified at the beginning and end of the process. Therefore, this question will not be considered further. The discussion that follows addresses only the question about the role of this intervention with respect to changes in self-esteem

METHODS

Subjects

The bridging participant sample $n = 9$ was extremely diverse across a variety of characteristics. Ages range 23 to 54 years old with a median age of 34, although most women were in their 30's. While one participant had completed some university, and one other had completed grade 12, seven of the nine had educational levels below grade 12. (i.e. they had dropped out of school). All were single parents although not every woman had her children living with her.

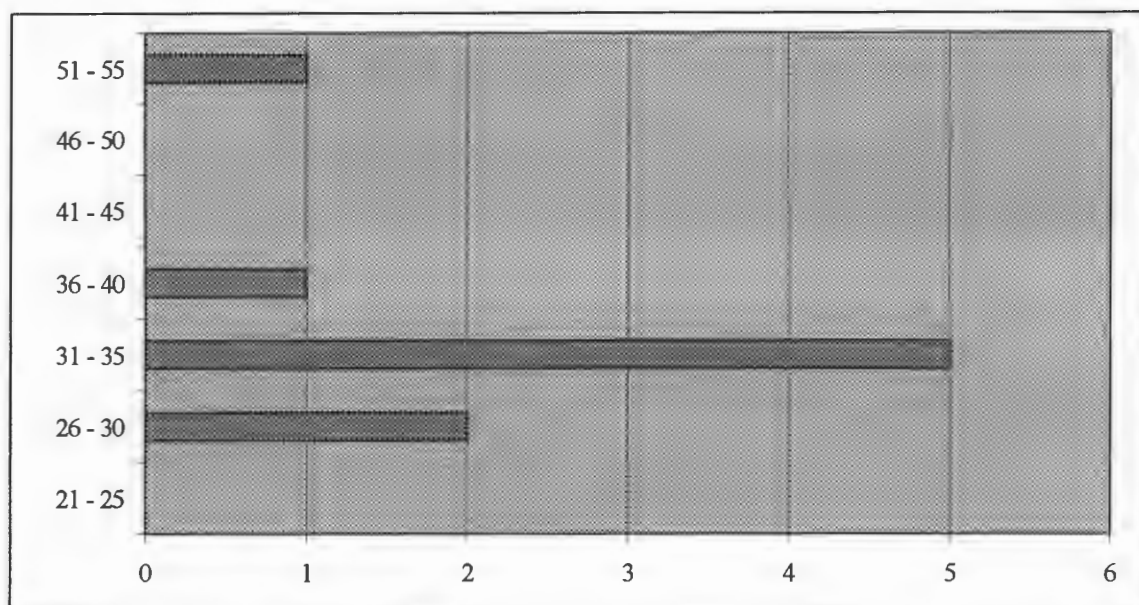


Figure 1. Participant age

As well education levels ranged from Grade 7 to second year university with the majority of Bridging participants having educational levels below grade 12.

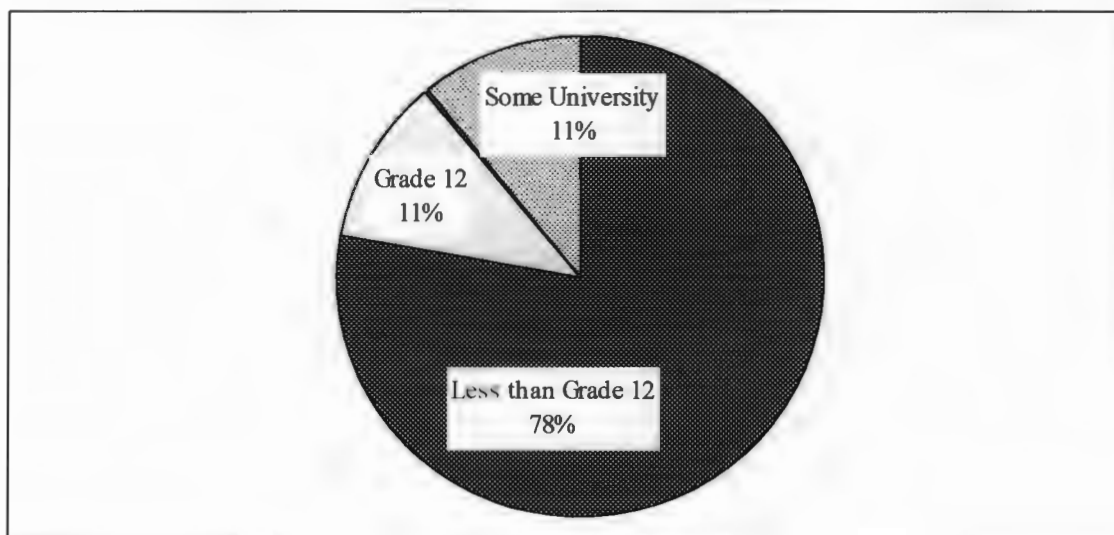


Figure 2. Education levels.

The group contained one landed immigrant, two First Nations and six Canadian Caucasian participants.

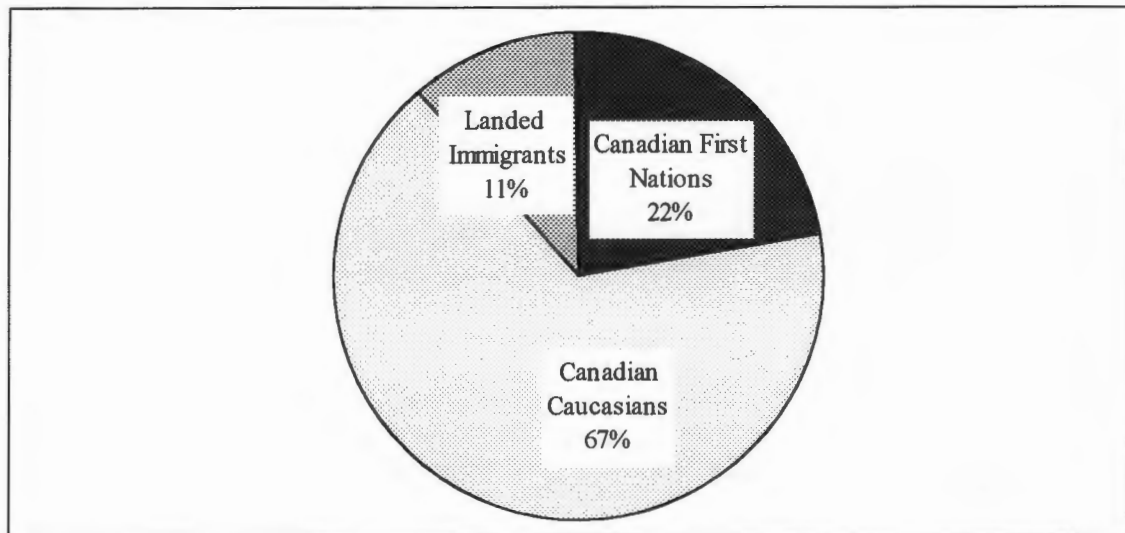


Figure 3. Ethnicity.

Upon entry to the program the participants reported various employment barriers including limited self esteem, substance abuse problems, depression, suicidal ideation and issues resulting from being adult children of alcoholics. All of the program participants identified limited self esteem and personal issues that required outside counselling as being major barriers to employment. Because the pre-requisite for attending a Bridging program is a history of abuse, 100% of the program participants had been abused physically and emotionally as adults. This pattern seemed to repeat a childhood pattern of abuse as all participants reported childhood emotional abuse, 60% reported childhood sexual abuse and 40% reported childhood physical abuse. As one program participant so aptly described her childhood situation - "Every time we moved, the first thing that I did was look for a place to hide."

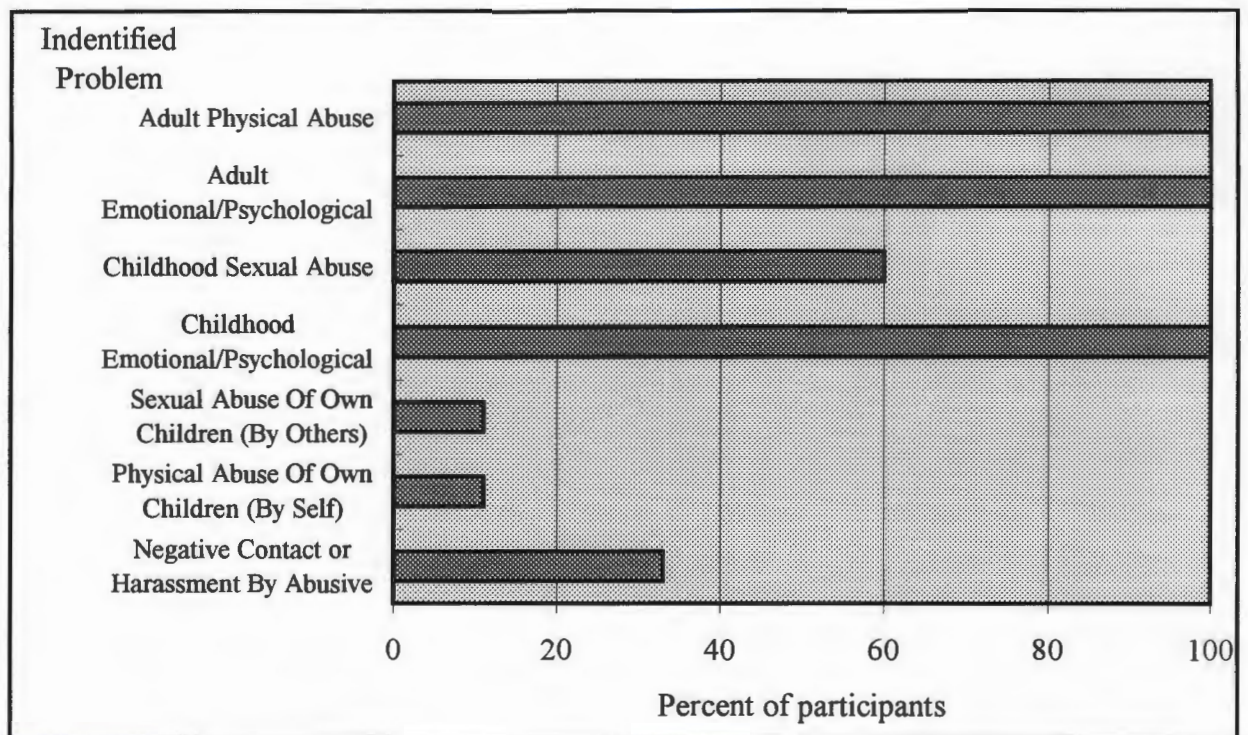


Figure 4. Abuse history Reported by participants.

Most participants were single parents, although some of them had living arrangements with male partners who had not fathered their children. The one married participant was re-examining her marital status. All had a very limited support network and low socioeconomic status, reporting incomes below the poverty level. This increased the life stressors with which they had to cope. As well, many of the single parents had difficulties with parenting which increased their stress levels as well. All of the participants indicated that at this point in their lives they were ready to commit towards change. Consequently, the personal counselling sessions utilizing a group format were identified by all as an item of interest in the program curriculum. Figure 5 graphically represents the self reported personal and social barriers to employment reported by this cohort.

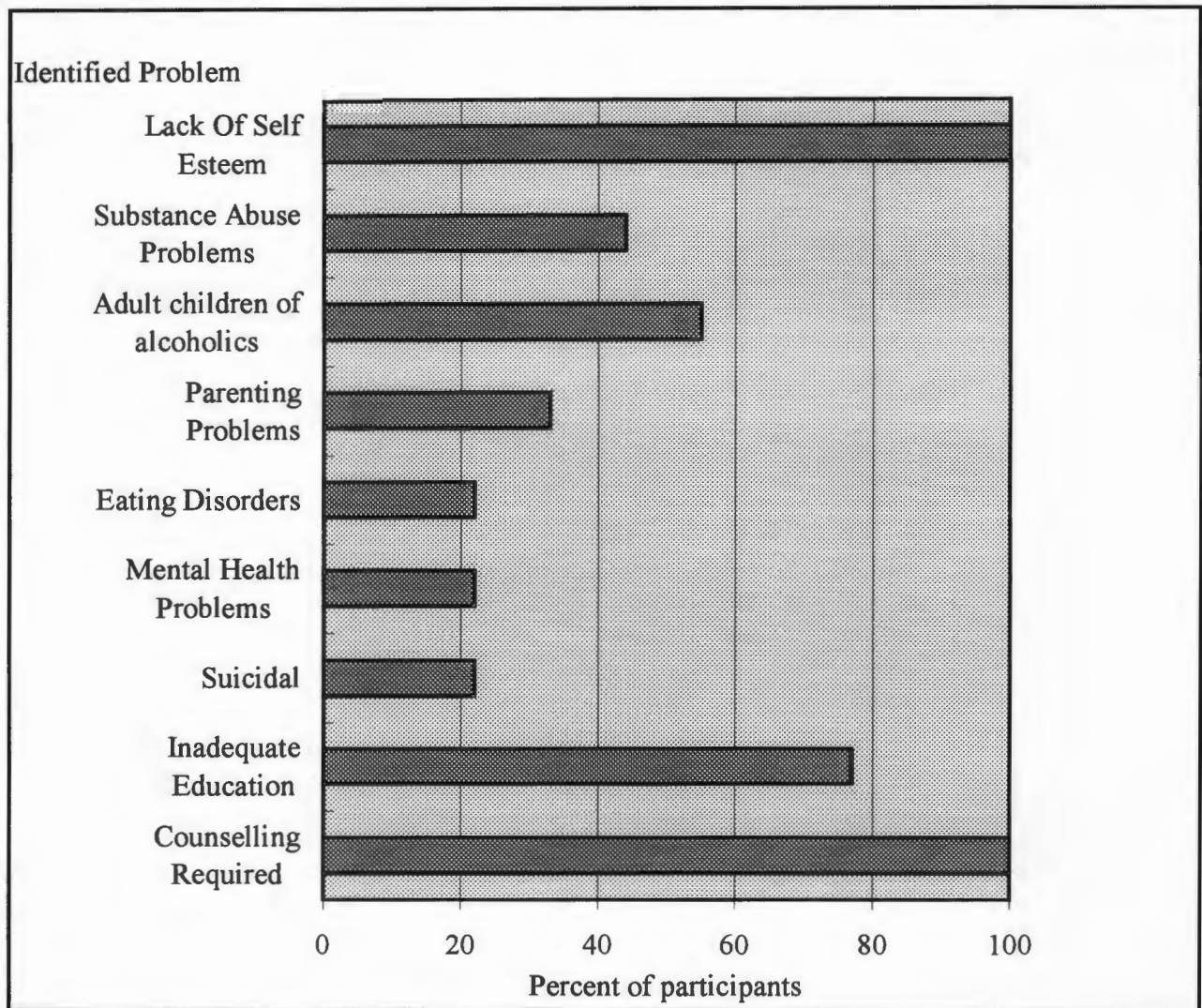


Figure 5. Personal and social barriers to employment

Procedure

Four instruments were administered to the group at the beginning of the project. At project end these instruments were completed again by the same clients and discussed with them in order for them to develop a greater understanding of their progress. The results were compared to those previously obtained in order to have a pre/post test comparison. In order to evaluate the change in career focus, initial intake interview notes were also compared with exit interview material in order to determine whether a clearer career focus was obtained. A three

month and six month follow up of all project participants was conducted in order to ascertain whether the changes that occurred during the project were maintained.

Measures

The first of three self report instruments given to the students to complete was the Coping Responses Inventory (CRI) which identifies the following adult coping strategies Approach coping responses were: cognitive (logical/analysis and positive reappraisal) and behavioural (seeking guidance/support and problem solving).

The avoidance coping strategies include: cognitive (cognitive avoidance and acceptance or resignation) and behavioural(seeking alternative rewards and emotional discharge) Moos, RH, 1993, p. 2.

This inventory was designed to measure the coping responses of adult populations. For normative purposes the CRI test was administered to 1800 adults (drinkers and non-drinkers), 1100 men and 700 women with an average age of 61. In the field trial studies conducted it was found that both the less well educated and problem drinkers were more likely to use cognitive avoidance, acceptance, resignation, emotional discharge or positive reappraisal which are all avoidance coping responses. The coping scales were found to remain moderately stable over a 12 month interval, average $r = .43$ for women (Billings & Moos, 1985; Fondacaro and Moos, 1981, 1989; Holahan & Moos, 1987). As the majority of the norm group was married (69%) and of average to above average socioeconomic status however, the generalizability of the inventory to the current subject group is questionable. The average age of the subject group is 34 years old, almost all of them are single parents and all are of low socioeconomic status having incomes below the poverty levels. Appropriate populations designated for usage include adults over the age of 18, who are healthy, and who have medical problems or

psychiatric issues or have dealt with issues of substance abuse. (Moos, 1993). The CRI Professional Manual (Moos, 1993) states that the studies conducted to validate this test found that approach coping responses were associated with better stressor resolution and functioning outcomes, where as avoidance coping responses were associated with worse outcomes. A similar pattern of relationships between the predictors and functioning outcomes in the non-drinking group was also found (Moos, 1993, p. 24).

The second instrument used was Life Stressors and Social Resources Inventory (LISRES Adult), which provided an overview of an individuals life context, relationship to mental health and temporal stability. Eight Life Stressors and Social Resources are identified. These included: physical health, housing and neighborhood, finances work, relationship with spouse or partner, relationships with children, relationships with extended family, relationships with friends and social groups. (Moos, & Moos, 1988 p. 1).

As with the CRI, the LISRES - Adult is designed for healthy adults over the age of 18, with psychiatric, substance abuse or medical concerns. (Moos, & Moos 1988; 1992; 1994). The initial norm group was a sample composed of 80 adults who were depressed, alcoholic, arthritic or healthy. The second follow-up study was of normal and problem drinking adults with an average age 61 (1181 men and 703 women). Internal consistency of the life stressor scales ranges from .64 (moderate) to .93 (high) while those for the social resources scales ranges from .50 to .92, (low to high internal consistency) (Moos, & Moos 1988, 1992, 1994, p.18, 19). Test / retest reliability over one year ranges from .38 (low) to .90 (high) and over four years from .26 (low) to .79 (moderate). Further technical information can be found in the LISRES - A Life Stressors and Social Resources Inventory. Adult Form Professional Manual (Moos, & Moos 1988; 1992; 1994).

In terms of generalizability, this inventory also might be problematic as the average age of the norming participants is far higher than the Bridging cohort, as is the educational level for the norming sample, (two years post secondary). As well the socio-economic status of the norming sample was average, while the average age was 48 (Moos, Moos, 1988, 1992, 1994).

The Multi Dimensional Self Esteem Inventory (MSEI) is based on Epston's (1980) theory that self evaluative elements are structured hierarchically. The highest element is global self esteem, the second highest includes self esteem components such as competence or lovability, and the lower elements concentrate on situation specific components such as specific task performance. The MSEI provides the following scale:

- A) Global Self Esteem
- B) Self Esteem Components
 - Competence
 - Lovability
 - Likeability
 - Personal Power
 - Self Control
 - Moral Self Approval
 - Body Appearance
 - Body Functions
- C) Identity Integration
- D) Defensive Self Enhancement (Validity measures)

(O'Brien & Epstein, 1983, 1987, 1988)

The MSEI requires a grade 10 reading level and is appropriate for individual and group administration. During the development of the MSEI seven studies were conducted with university undergraduate students over a seven year period. The various studies included an item analysis study with the original MSEI conducted in a university setting with 264 students; a cross validation study using the MSEI and Guildford-Zimmerman temperament survey for comparison using 381 students; a scale revision study using 391 students from a large university as subjects; an internal consistency study which included subjects from the cross validation study and students from a private university for a total of 849 students who were

surveyed; a stability study (test/retest) using 225 students; a validity study in which 288 students from a state university were tested; and finally a factor analysis study which included subjects from the scale revision and internal consistency studies as well as students from a private university (1086 students in total). (O'Brien, & Epstein 1983, 1987, 1988).

Reliability studies of the MSEI indicate that the test scales are internally consistent, ranging from .78 for defensive self enhancement to .90 for global self esteem and body functioning. The test/re-test reliability of this MSEI ranges from .78 for identity integration to .87 for global self esteem. The MSEI scales were also compared to various instruments to determine correlation between the scales. Further technical information can be found in the MSEI, the Multidimensional Self Esteem Inventory Professional Manual (O'Brien, & Epstein, 1983, 1987, 1988).

According to a review of the MSEI by Joseph G. Ponterotto in the Eleventh Mental Measurements Yearbook (Kramer, & Conoley 1992), the reliability studies were quite satisfactory ranging from .78 for Defensive Self Enhancement to .90 for Body Functioning and Global Self Esteem. As well, an analysis of gender differences recorded no significant differences. Test/re-test reliability was also felt to demonstrate short term stability. It was felt that a high level of convergent and discriminant validity was also demonstrated within the MSEI construct of self esteem when compared to other tests that also measured this construct, e.g. (Eagly (1967) and Rosenberg (1965) self esteem scales).

The author concludes by stating that the MSEI has high internal consistency, reliability and moderate test/re-test reliability which makes it an excellent self esteem measure for college students. However, as the MSEI was normed with a normal college population (no validation studies have been done yet on minorities, re-entry students or non-students), its generalizability

to our Bridging cohort, which consisted of mostly women in their 30's with low socioeconomic status, limited education levels and a history of spousal assault, may be questionable.

The fourth measure that was used to indicate student progress from program start to finish is one which was devised by the researcher. Students were asked to identify their knowledge or understanding of a variety of curriculum items by rating their skill level on a scale from 1 - 5; 1 indicated a limited skill level; 3 indicated a moderate skill level, and; 5 delineated excellent skills.

The Questionnaire included the following items: self esteem, counselling (Group) and (Individual), life management skills (budgeting, such as wardrobe planning and nutrition). Identifying career goals and utilizing conflict resolution (getting along with difficult people), team work, and job search skills. The local labour market information provided by guest speakers from education and industry as well as the Specific Skills Training Certificates (e.g. GED, WHMIS, Superhost, Computer Skills) were also rated (see Appendix C).

At the end of the course students were also asked to write letters in which they described their progress, as well as what they liked and did not like about curriculum elements. When asked to write these letters, students were assured that their comments would be taken seriously and that their suggestions would be incorporated into the next program.

Procedure

The four instruments were administered to the group at the beginning of the project. At project end these instruments were completed again by the same clients in order for them to develop a greater understanding of their progress. The results were compared to those previously obtained in order to have a pre/post test comparison of self esteem. In order to

evaluate the change in career counselling aspirations the initial intake interview notes were compared with exit interview material in order to determine whether a clearer career focus was attained. A checklist identifying skills before and after and career aspirations before and after the project, was also be used to identify progress. A six month follow-up of all project participants was conducted in order to see if the changes that occurred during the project were maintained.

RESULTS

Bridging Results

In order to meet ministry contractual requirements, at project end the agency requires that students complete a document entitled the Program Completion Report. In part two of this report students were asked to state their employment status or school plans. The contractual requirements for Transitions included the following:

83% of participants to graduate from the Bridging Program

83% of project graduates will then move to next step of their career plan (either school, work or other programming)

A three month and six month program follow-up was also to be conducted to determine long term student success. The Bridging results (at three and six month follow-up) follow

Table 1 - Bridging Results at program end and at follow up.

	Completed Bridging	Placement in Work, School or Program at follow up	
Subgroup	Program End	3 MONTHS	6 MONTHS
Women	100 % (100%)	100%	100%
First Nations	22% (20%)	11%	11%
Persons with Disabilities	11% (50%)	11%	0%
Youth	22% (50%)	22%	22%
Total Completion Rate	88% (83%)	88% (66%)	55% (66%)

Note: Target figures are in brackets

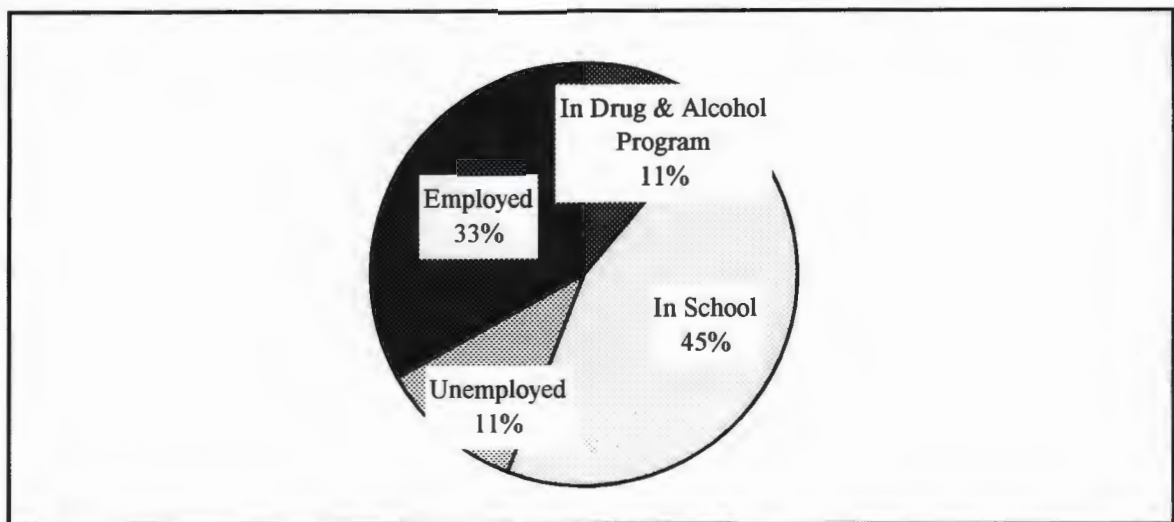


Figure 6 Program Results 3 Month Follow up

At the three month follow up, only one program participant was not involved in training or work. Struggling with issues brought on by an alcoholic partner, she seemed to find it difficult to focus on career. Once the spouse was readmitted to jail, however, her life became much more stable. She returned to her band on the reserve and found work as an archeologist's assistant.

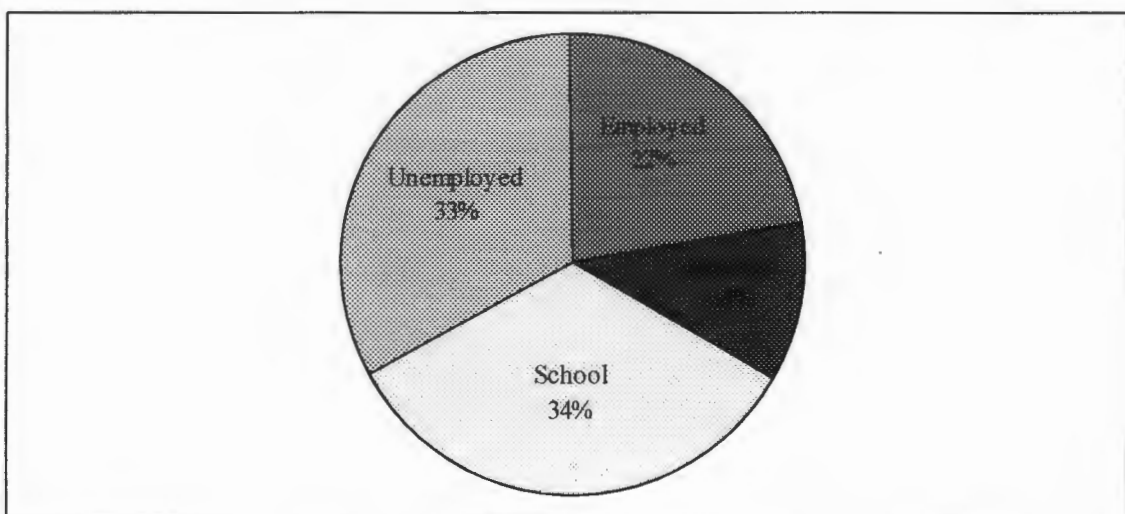


Figure 7 Program Results - 6 Month Follow up

At the six month follow up, career placement results had decreased. Two of the three participants who had been employed had lost their jobs, while one of the students had found work. As well, a program participant who was working on issues resulting from a car accident had declared herself to be disabled and unemployable. However, it is important to note that six months after completion the Bridging program, five of the nine women were either employed or in school despite their low educational levels and their difficult histories of life experiences.

Evaluation Results

Given the nature of the evaluation (small group, non inferential) effect size (Glass & Hopkins, p. 290) was used. As Glass & Hopkins (1996) suggest, effect size can be used when the nature of the dependent variable is arbitrary and there is a need to convey the magnitude of difference between two groups (usually a control and experimental group). Effect size is calculated by subtracting the mean of the experimental group from the mean of the control group then dividing the result by the standard deviation of the control group. Glass and Hopkins (1996) prefer the standard deviation of the control group to be used as in some experimental groups the heterogeneity and mean of the treatment group can be affected. However, since T scores have been used for all three instruments the known standard deviation of ten has been employed. Consequently the formula used to calculate effect size was $d = (M_{\text{post}} - M_{\text{pre}}) \div 10$. Cohen (1988) cited in Glass & Hopkins (1996) uses the following cutoff scores to calculate power for effect size; small ($.2^{\sigma}$), medium ($.5^{\sigma}$) and large ($.8^{\sigma}$)

CRI - Coping Response Inventory

Eight CRI forms were completed in the pre-test phase, however, only six forms were completed for the post test phase as one participant had dropped out due to drug and alcohol problems while the other had found work in Quesnel. For the six clients who completed inventories for the pre and post test phase, the results were as follows:

Table 3 - CRI	Pre/Post Test Results	T Scores		
		Pre	Post	Cohens d
	Approach Responses			
Cognitive	Logical Analysis	58	57	-.1
	Positive Reappraisal	54	54	0
Behavioural	Seeking Guidance & Support	58	61	.3
	Problem Solving	59	57	-.2
	Avoidance Responses			
Cognitive	Cognitive Avoidance	67	67	0
	Acceptance or Resignation	60	54	-.6
Behavioural	Seeking Alternative Rewards	60	61	.1
	Emotional Discharge	75	76	.1

Moos, 1993

The reader is reminded that T scores are standardized scores with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10. Therefore average scores are in the 40 - 60 range. A score higher than 60 indicates a higher than average use of this coping strategy while a score below 40 suggests a below average use of the response. For the following analysis Glass and Hopkins' power for effect size parameters will be used.

Overall the cognitive approach responses remained the same for both the pre and post test phase. The behavioural approach response of seeking guidance and support increased by $.2^{\sigma}$ (small effect size) however problem solving decreased by $.2^{\sigma}$ (small effect). For the avoidance responses again most categories remained constant except for acceptance or resignation which decreased by $.5^{\sigma}$ (medium effect). It is interesting to note that the changes that occurred were in seeking guidance and support with a decrease in individual problem solving as well as acceptance and resignation all of which could be a direct result of the personal group counselling component that was offered to the participants. In the classroom as well, a constant program theme that was articulated was “if you want to keep on getting what you’re getting, keep on doing what you’re doing.”

Life Stressors And Social Resources Inventory - LISRES - A Adult

Although this inventory was also administered at the beginning of the Bridging project as well as at the end, it was not expected that there would be any significant change as neither life stressors nor social resources could be immediately influenced by the course curriculum. In the event, however, that some participants might leave the course early due to employment the inventory was administered pre/post. The inventory gives a very good picture of the types of Stressors with which this cohort has to contend and relates well to the CRI which shows their stress resolution mechanisms. A score above 50 on the Life Stressors Profile indicates a higher than average experience of this type of stressor while scores above and below 50 in the Social Resources profile indicate salient resources and resource gaps respectively.

Inventories were administered pre and post with the following results:

Table 4 - LISRES - A Pre/Post Test Results

Life Stressors Profile	T Scores		
	Pre	Post	Cohens d
1. Physical Health	57	52	-.5
2. Home and Neighborhood	57	54	-.3
3. Financial	70	70	0
4. Work	30	30	0
5. Spouse or Partner	30	36	.6
6. Children	67	68	.1
7. Extended Family	56	49	-.7
8. Friends	55	57	.2
9. Negative Life Events	57	72	1.5
Social Resources Profile			
1. Financial	42	42	0
2. Work	≤20	≤20	0
3. Spouse or Partner	30	26	-.4
4. Children	48	46	-.2
5. Extended Family	48	47	-.1
6. Friends	49	48	-.1
7. Positive Life Events	59	58	-.1

It is interesting to note that the life stressors are all rated at or above the mean except for “work” and “spouse” which were not an issue as none of the participants were employed and only one was married. As well social resources mean scores are all at or below the mean of 50, except for the rating given to “positive life events”. As a group, it became evident that they had a limited support network on which to rely and very chaotic lives with which they had to cope.

A comparison of pre and post test results show that mean scores on life stressors such as physical health decreased by 0.5^{σ} (medium effect) as one participant was coping successfully with physical conditions and emotional trauma caused by a car accident. Home and neighborhood as a stressor decreased by $-.35^{\sigma}$ (small effect) while extended family decreased by $-.75^{\sigma}$ (medium effect). However spouse or partner as a stressor increased $.6^{\sigma}$ (medium effect) as one participant began to seriously question her marital relationship. Negative life events also increased dramatically to 1.5^{σ} . This again might be attributed to the focus of the personal counselling received by the group. Throughout the project issues of wellness and spouse/partner abuse, child abuse, child attempted suicide and negative past events such as incest, rape and physical assault were disclosed and discussed. Events that had been buried were brought to the forefront in order to begin a healing process that would ultimately assist these women in making healthier choices and moving on to more positive living environments. Spouse or partner as a social resource decreased by $-.4^{\sigma}$ (small effect) and children by $-.2^{\sigma}$ (small effect) as these women began to acknowledge that their relationships with spouse and children were often not healthy and could be major contributions to the life style in which they had become immersed. In some instances decisions were made to discontinue these relationships in order to begin a more positive life/work plan.

MSEI - Multidimensional Self Esteem Inventory

Seven MSEI inventories were administered at program beginning and end. Both the pre-test and post-test results follow

Table 5 - MSEI Pre/Post Test Results

		T Scores		
		Pre	Post	Cohen d
Global Self Esteem		41	49	.8
Competence	Self Esteem Component Scales	45	50	.5
Lovability		45	50	.5
Likeability		49	51	.2
Self Control		47	56	.9
Personal Power		53	53	0
Moral Self Approval		48	56	.8
Body Appearance		54	55	.1
Body Functioning		48	53	.5
Identity Integration		44	50	.6
Defensive Self Enhancement		54	63	.9

A score above the mean on the global self esteem and identity integration sub-scales represents moderate to high self esteem while a score above the mean on the defensive self enhancement represents defensiveness and an inflated sense of self. Low scores for global self esteem or identity integration would be a concern as they point to a lower sense of self esteem. Global self esteem increased $.8^{\sigma}$ a large effect while the components of self esteem varied from 0 increase to an increase of $.9^{\sigma}$. Identity integration which measures global self concept increased by $.6^{\sigma}$ (medium effect). However the validity measure, defensive self enhancement,

which was designed to measure whether the person is defensively increasing their scores or is biased in their self presentation increased by $.9^{\sigma}$ (large effect). The defensive self enhancement increase between pre and post test scores forces the question “has global self esteem actually increased or are the scores inflated due to a defensiveness by the test respondents?” In the MSEI professional manual, (O’Brien & Epstein, 1998) compare the defensive self enhancement scale (DSES) with three alternative defensiveness scales. For the Epstein defensiveness scale the correlation with the MSEI DSES scale is .85 (perhaps due to the fact that the scale content between the two inventories is quite similar). When DSES compared to the Crowne-Marlowe social desirability index the correlation is .77 (moderate) while with the Eysenck lie scale the correlation derived is .33 (low). All correlations quoted were for female only samples. The number of subjects used for the Crowne-Marlowe / MSEI correlation were 78 females while for the Eysenck Lie Scale (MSEI correlation 180 females were used (O’Brien & Epstein, 1988). The small sample size for the Crowne-Marlowe correlation limits result confidence while the larger sample size for the Eysenck Lie scale increases the confidence in the results. Consequently, the defensive self enhancement measure is not a good indication of validity.

Student Questionnaire

A student questionnaire was also administered to the participants both at the beginning and end of the course. In the questionnaire students were asked to rate their skills and development in a number of areas on a five point Likert type scale. The scale was designed so that one indicated limited skills, three denoted moderate skills and five measured excellent skill levels. Six student questionnaires were completed before and after the bridging project.

Table 6 - Student Questionnaire Pre/Post Results

	Pre	Post	Cohen d
Self Esteem	2.6	4.2	3.3
Personal understanding as a result of Group counselling	2.4	4.0	3.3
Personal understanding as a result of Individual counselling	3.2	4.0	1.6
Life Management Skills	3.4	4.0	1.2
Career Goals	2.2	4.0	3.8
Conflict Resolution	3.2	4.2	2.1
Team Work	3.6	4.6	2.1
Job Search Skills (resumes, interviews, etc)	2.8	4.4	3.3
Labour Market Information	2.6	4.6	4.2

In all training areas students reported a large effect size with self esteem, personal understanding as a result of group counselling, career goals, job search skills and labour market information receiving higher scores. As Cohen states that $+0.8$ is a large effect size, the massive changes reported from the student questionnaire are quite dramatic. Letters from students also indicate that they felt that the group counselling had increased their personal growth and enhanced self esteem (see appendix D). Letter one talks about the fact that acceptance to the group made her feel “really good” and that the program has given her “a purpose to get

motivated everyday.” Letter number two talks about gaining “a clear understanding of my goals and the confidence to achieve them.”

In the third letter, the writer talks about starting “to feel more confident in my abilities” and feeling “hopeful too” adding that today she feels more “positive, assertive and (has) a better outlook on life.” The fourth writer adds that Bridging has been “every beneficial for me” and mentions that although the group counselling was very difficult for her she “made the right choice and struggled with my self to be here.” Writer number five mentions that “I am doing much better today. I feel a sense of purpose, I feel hopeful. I feel more up than not and I’m not depressed.” The sixth writer concludes that the course has “helped me more than I have realized. I am getting closer to completing my education, I am not blaming myself for the things that happened to me when I was little.”

Career Focus - Changes From Intake To Exit Interviews

During the Bridging project assessment interviews were completed at the beginning and the end of training in order to assess career goals and formulate action plans. The following table shows pre and post project career goals. Each row comprises one student’s goal.

Table 6 - Pre and Post Program Goals

Initial Goal	Exit Status
Employment	Found work in a fiberboard plant
School and needs to explore career alternatives	Enrolled in adult basic Education at the College of New Caledonia as a prerequisite for the two year diploma in Marketing and Management
Employment	Found work in Greenhouse (seasonal position)
Needs to explore career alternatives, and find Employment	Enrolled in part time studies at the College of New Caledonia - Social Services Foundation Program
Needs to explore career alternatives, and find Employment	Enrolled in part time Entrepreneurial studies at Community Futures.
School Needs to explore career alternatives	Enrolled in full time studies at the College of New Caledonia - Social Services Foundation Program
Employment	Left the program due to drug and alcohol problems. Later returned to us and asked the psychologist for a letter referring her to a Drug and Alcohol program
Employment	working for a drug store and a health support group (both part time positions)
Employment	Still looking for work and dealing with past issues

CHAPTER FIVE - CONCLUSIONS

In the inventories where questions relating to self esteem were asked it was clear that the participants felt their confidence had risen. As well, in their letters written to the Provincial project officer it also became evident that the students felt the career and group counselling to be beneficial. Although the participants often found group counselling to be very emotional and draining, they persisted in attending the sessions and used the moral support to implement some very dramatic personal changes. It is reasonable to compare the Bridging project results at three and six months in order to determine whether the enhanced feelings of self esteem contributed to long term success in attending school or finding work.

At the three month follow up all but one of the program participants were actively engaged in following through on their action plan. These outcomes were not maintained across all participants over time, however, at the six month follow up those who had found seasonal or temporary positions had again become unemployed. Those enrolled in school also changed, as one had been enrolled in a short term program and had herself classified as disabled while another re-entered the workforce. However, even after six months, more than half of the participants were still engaged in either work or school. While this might not look like "success", keep in mind that this is a very true result for these five women considering the multiple barriers with which they have had to contend. As can be seen from the MSEI global self esteem arose to demonstrate a large effect size. With the increase in self esteem the participants began to make much more positive choices e.g. leaving an abusive spouse, moving to a different town for employment, returning to school after a long absence, entering a drug and alcohol program. As a result of the narrative therapy group sessions the clients seemed to feel more empowered and less willing to be accepting or resigned to their fate. The sharing of,

often horrendous stories created a strong bond between group participants and counsellors. As well, the support derived from the group gave all participants the strength to make some very positive life style changes. Once the support was removed however, (at the six month stage) the clients seemed to lose their forward momentum.

It became evident while following the post Bridging program activities of this cohort that personal changes occur rapidly. They move to different homes or towns; telephones are disconnected; they are laid off from their jobs because the work is seasonal or they have limited education and skills to offer. As well, the life stressors with which they continually have to cope intervene causing temporary or long term set backs. Consequently, a Bridging program of four months, while helpful in increasing self esteem and creating a positive climate for better life choices can only point the way. Longer term interventions and support mechanisms are needed in order for the women to achieve long term success.

Because many of those who are employed or in school seem to have a very tenuous hold on the world of work or academic world it also becomes necessary to reevaluate how we define program success. Is a bridging program successful if the course participants find long term employment or attend and graduate from an academic program? Or should success be redefined encouraging smaller more achievable steps towards a long term action plan?

Program Design

Based on the experience gained from the first group of participants reported on here, the curriculum has been altered. During the first Bridging project our negotiated contractual agreement stated that Bridging would run for two months and would then be joined by an additional group of twelve women for the assisted job readiness portion of the project. At the end of six weeks we realized that our initial group required more time alone as a group before

being joined by the second intake and consequently we requested a two month extension from our Project Officer. The two month extension was granted and consequently the first group worked as a cohesive whole for four months to resolve personal issues and provide support to other program participants.

At four months, however, the second group of twelve participants joined the Bridging cohort in order to work on job readiness issues, obtain certification in Food Safe, Superhost, Serving-It-Right and other workplace skills and work in Job Shadow/Work Placement opportunities. When the second group was added our cohesive Bridging team seemed to disintegrate. The participants became very territorial arguing about “their chair,” “their place” or “their teacher” (see letter in appendix E). Conflict resolution activities had to be increased and despite all attempts to mold a cohesive larger group, this never happened. To program end we found that we were working with two different groups, with their own dynamics and objectives.

Work placement activities also caused difficulties as many of the women had not felt ready to go out into the workplace. As well, clothing was an issue for them as they usually did not have an extensive wardrobe and were more comfortable in jeans. When work placements were initially organized many of the women did not arrive at the workplace at which they were scheduled to attend. Consequently the actual placements had to be re-evaluated with each participant and a stringent follow-up system implemented with the employer. Forms were drafted for the employers use which allowed us to get written feedback from each work placement host as well.

Client Readiness

Another difficulty that we encountered with this group was having clients perceive themselves as “ready” to attend and work on the issues when in reality they had not come to terms with drug and alcohol problems. Clients that identified themselves as “dry” during the screening process were in reality still grappling with drug and alcohol concerns. As a result of this problem, one of the women arrived at Monday class after a weekend of binge drinking and after discussions with the psychologist agreed to admit herself to the detox centre. After completing the treatment she dropped out of the program as she was not ready to deal with her personal issues at that point in time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the evaluative project implemented within our first Bridging program a number of recommendations have been developed.

1. The Bridging program offered by Transitions will continue to be four months in length and will offer traditional Bridging components such as life skills, computer literacy, career planning and academic reinforcement as each of these components contribute to skill enhancement which builds self esteem.
2. Group counselling using a narrative approach will continue to be offered within the program using both male and female counsellors as co-facilitators. Minimum educational standards for counselling staff will continue to be a Masters or Ph.D. level because the program participants are extremely fragile and their stories must be debriefed by competent therapists.
3. Career counselling using a narrative approach (Bolles seven life stories) will also continue to be incorporated into the program because it is necessary to celebrate individual life accomplishments and due to the low literacy levels of some program participants aptitude testing could destroy rather than enhance self esteem.
4. None of the measures used in the evaluation portion of the initial project will be retained because they were only added to this curriculum for the propose of this evaluative project. However, individual assessment interviews will continue to be used at program beginning, middle and end to determine student progress and complete action plans.
5. Clients will be carefully screened for drug and alcohol issues as well as psychological problems. Only those who demonstrate their commitment and readiness toward resolving

their issues will be admitted. Standards relating to class attendance and participation will be developed on Day 1 when group norms are established.

6. Because of the apparent importance of maintaining a supportive, cohesive group, at no point will the Bridging group be joined by an assisted job readiness group. If a second project is to be offered which offers specific skills training this project will stand alone with a separate curriculum and client intake.
7. One week work placements will continue to be arranged for those Bridging participants, but only when they feel they are ready. Those who are not ready to reenter the workforce could work on their individual action plan during job shadow week.
8. In order to enhance maintenance of their gains in self esteem and to expand their support time into the placement phase, weekly group support meetings will be initiated to provide encouragement to students after program completion.

The recommendation for program length and curriculum were written into our second proposal which was accepted by the Ministry for the 1997 - 1998 fiscal year. Two Bridging programs will be offered by Transitions (winter/spring and fall intakes). As well, it has been suggested by one of the Ministry Program Officers that we examine the possibility of running a Bridging program for males. During this year our programs again will be evaluated against successful outcomes. As well, participants will be encouraged to comment on course content in order for us to further refine our program and better assist these resilient survivors in their voyage toward self confidence and a more positive life story.

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APPENDIX A

Letters of Permission

Adult Consent for Own Participation

Consent from the Ministry to conduct Effectiveness Evaluations

ADULT CONSENT FOR OWN PARTICIPATION

We would like you to participate in a research study entitled "An Assessment of the Effect of Narrative Counselling on Self Esteem and Career Focus".

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the effectiveness of this counselling approach. If you decide to participate in the study, your involvement will not take any additional time as the questionnaires that will be evaluated have been built into the project curriculum. You will be asked to complete the same assessments at the beginning of the project and then again at the end of the project in order to determine if any change has occurred. If you wish, your journal may also be analyzed to ascertain any changes that might occur. Your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to refuse or stop the evaluative portion of this project without penalty. Your class standing for the Bridging project will not be affected in any way if you choose not to volunteer for the assessment component of the project. All information will be number coded and strictly confidential. Your identity will not be revealed without your written consent.

Do you have any questions?

If so, please feel free to contact us:

Dr. Peter MacMillan

Dr. Judith Lapadat

Dr. Ron Lehr

University of Northern British Columbia - (250) 960-5555

Andréa McKenzie - (250) 562-0202

Please read the following paragraph and if you agree to participate, please sign below:

I understand that any information about me obtained from this research will be kept strictly confidential and that my identity will not be revealed without my written consent.

Signature

Date



Province of
British Columbia

Ministry of
Education, Skills
and Training

Skills Development Centre
#102-1577 7th Avenue
Prince George, B.C. V2L 3P5
Phone: 565-6020

December 18, 1996

Andrea McKenzie
AMS Consulting Ltd.,
995 Heritage Crescent
Prince George, B.C.
V2M 6X2

Dear Andrea,

In response to your request, this letter is to formally consent to you conducting an effectiveness evaluation of the Bridging/Job Readiness program which has been contracted with your company. This consent is dependent upon your receipt of the informed consent of the Positive Life/Work Planning participants.

Yours sincerely,

Andie Bennison
Training Consultant
Ministry of Education, Skills and Training

APPENDIX B

Work Schedule

<p>MONDAY JAN 20/97 AM PAT / ANDREA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessment - Interviews - Strengths - Constraints - Action Plan - Register GED participants for Mar 8/97 test date at CNC 	<p>TUESDAY JAN 21/97 AM ANDREA / PAT / JIM DR. RON</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction - client duties / responsibilities - schedule for six weeks - getting acquainted - group norms - barriers to employment - thankfulness exercise 	<p>WEDNESDAY JAN 22/97 AM ANDREA / DR. RON</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 phase violence cycle - myths and facts about family violence - continuation of goals of session one - sharing of stories - exploring safety issues 	<p>THURSDAY JAN 23/97 AM JIM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CAA Test - GED Prep - Master Student - "Truth is a key to Mastery" 	<p>FRIDAY JAN 24/97 AM JIM/PAT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GED Prep - Master Student - "Diversity"
<p>PM PAT / ANDREA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - as above 	<p>PM DR RON / ANDREA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - group counselling - overview - module 1 schedule - confidentiality - trust building - rapport building - creating a safe atmosphere for discussing feelings and experience - complete: self esteem stress inventories conflict tactics scale 	<p>PM BOLLES / PAT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Life Story #1 "My Ideal Island" 	<p>PM ANDREA / DR RON</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - learning about impact of violence on their life and choices - sharing of stories - exploration of destructive attitudes about family violence - introducing resiliency - safety issues continues 	<p>PM JIM/PAT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Team Building Exercise "Lost at Sea"

MONDAY JAN 27/97 AM PAT / ANDREA	TUESDAY JAN 28/97 AM PAT	WEDNESDAY JAN 29/97 AM ANDREA / DR RON	THURSDAY JAN 30/97 AM PAT JIM	FRIDAY JAN 31/97 AM PAT / JIM
- attitude	- attitude	-Exploring Marital dependency -Exploring the issue of loss and change associated with grief	- GED Prep - 9:00 Andie	Bolles - Life Story #3 "Towards a recovery of enthusiasm within all of us"
- human resolutions	- attitude - Behaviour Breeds Behaviour	-Exploring alternative role models	- Dream school	
PM PAT / ANDREA	PM DR RON / ANDREA	PM PAT	PM ANDREA / DR RON	PM ANDREA
- as above	- group counselling -Exploring fears and anxieties -Exploring resiliency and survival -Enhancing personal support systems -Learning how to express feelings constructively	Bolles - Life Story #1 "My Ideal Island"	-Improving self esteem and trust -Increasing awareness of rights and responsibilities -Empathy communication	- Team Building Exercise "Dancercise (Marengi)"

MONDAY FEB 3/97 AM PAT	TUESDAY FEB 4/97 AM PAT / JIM	WEDNESDAY FEB 5/97 AM ANDREA / DR RON	THURSDAY FEB 6/97 AM PAT / JIM	FRIDAY FEB 7/97 AM JIM / PAT
- GED Prep	- GED Prep	-sexual stereotyping and possible career options	- GED Prep	-Assertiveness
- Master Student Time Management	- Master Student Memory	- self esteem and employability	- Master Student Reading	
PM DR RON / ANDREA	PM DR RON / ANDREA	PM PAT / JIM	PM ANDREA / PAT	PM ANDREA
- Sexual stereotyping and possible career options - Self esteem and employability	-Improving self esteem and trust -Relieving feelings of responsibility for family problems -Dealing with criticism -Empathy/Communication continued	- introduction to computers -Keyboarding skills	- Decision Making - Exploring future possibilities	- Look Smart and Live on a Shoe String (part 1)

MONDAY FEB 10/97 AM PAT	TUESDAY FEB 11/97 AM PAT / JIM	WEDNESDAY FEB 12/97 AM ANDREA / DR RON	THURSDAY FEB 13/97 AM PAT / JIM	FRIDAY FEB 14/97 AM JIM / PAT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attitude - Working relationships - Productivity Bolles - Life Story #3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GED - Master Student Notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exploration of personal agendas and possible roadblocks to preferred goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GED - Master Student Test 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Master Student Wellness Health - nutrition workshop - book nutritional shopping tour for Overwaitea - Fit or Fat
PM DR RON / ANDREA	PM DR RON / ANDREA	PM PAT / JIM	PM ANDREA / PAT	PM ANDREA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing alternative problem solving skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing alternative problem solving skills (continued) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - attitude - winning combination - working relationships Bolles - Life Story #5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - attitude and stress - stress map - life stress indicator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mary Kay make up demonstration

<p>MONDAY FEB 17/97 AM PAT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GED - Master Student - Critical Thinking 	<p>TUESDAY FEB 18/97 AM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GED - Master Student "Writing" 	<p>WEDNESDAY FEB 19/97 AM ANDREA / DR RON</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exploring roadblocks to desired outcomes - Developing a plan to achieve valued outcomes 	<p>THURSDAY FEB 20/97 AM PAT / JIM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GED - Master Student "Money" 	<p>FRIDAY FEB 21/97 AM JIM / PAT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GED - Master Student "Conflict Resolution"
<p>PM DR RON / ANDREA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of personal commitment to preferred goal - Exploration of strategies to preferred goals 	<p>PM DR RON / ANDREA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exploration and review of strategies to achieve valued outcomes - Developing "Best strategies" 	<p>PM PAT / JIM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - introduction to computers - Keyboarding skills 	<p>PM PAT / JIM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Look Smart and Live on a Shoe String" part 2 	<p>PM ANDREA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Master Student - Resources Library Tour Volunteer Network PG Regional Development Centre

MONDAY FEB 24/97 AM PAT	TUESDAY FEB 25/97 AM PAT / JIM	WEDNESDAY FEB 26/97 AM ANDREA / DR RON	THURSDAY FEB 27/97 AM ANDREA / DR RON	FRIDAY FEB 28/97 AM JIM / PAT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - attitude - success as a team player Bolles - Life Story #5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Master Student "What Next?" - Workplace communication skills - John Cleese video "If Looks Could Kill" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exploration of contingency plans - Reviewing isolation and social support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthening social support - Working out feelings of ambivalence towards new direction 	Bolles - Life Story #7 - completion of skills keys
PM DR RON / ANDREA	PM DR RON / ANDREA	PM PAT	PM ANDREA / DR RON	PM ANDREA / DR RON PAT / JIM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - implementing a plan to achieve valued outcomes - Commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reviewing individual action plan - Group support 	- GED Bolles - Life Story #6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planning and preparing for future obstacles - individual interviews to determine student progress and action plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - catered lunch - Certificates of Achievement CLOSURE

APPENDIX C

Student Questionnaire

Before Course Taken	After Course Completion
(1) Self-Esteem (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)	(1) Self-Esteem (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
(2) Personal Development Issues (Personal Counselling, Group) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)	(2) Personal Development Issues (Personal Counselling, Group) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
(3) Personal Counselling, Individual (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)	(3) Personal Counselling, Individual (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
(4) Life Management Skills (e.g. Budgeting, Wardrobe Planning, Nutrition) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)	(4) Life Management Skills (e.g. Budgeting, Wardrobe Planning, Nutrition) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
(5) Career Goals (Myers Briggs, Holland CHOICES and Bolles) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)	(5) Career Goals (Myers Briggs, Holland CHOICES and Bolles) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
(6) Conflict Resolution Skills (Getting along with difficult people) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)	(6) Conflict Resolution Skills (Getting along with difficult people) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
(7) Team Work Skills (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)	(7) Team Work Skills (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
(8) Job Search Skills (Résumé's, interviews) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)	(8) Job Search Skills (Résumé's, interviews) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
(9) Local Labor Market Information (Guest Speakers) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)	(9) Local Labor Market Information Information (Guest Speakers) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
(10) Specific Skills Training Certificates (Check here) () WHIMIS () Superhost () Cashier () Computer Skills () Food Safe () Serve it right () First Aid () GED	(10) Specific Skills Training Certificates (Check Here) () WHIMIS () Superhost () Cashier () Computer Skills () Food Safe () Serve it right () First Aid () GED

Having Successfully completed Positive Life/Work Planning my next step is:

APPENDIX D

Letters From Students

Feb. 24/97

Since the first time I came to Positive Life work planning. I was surprised that I was accepted, I felt really good. As the weeks went by I got to know some of the girls, (oh this is an all woman program). There are 9 girls here. I enjoy the afternoon counselling. I feel like some of the girls aren't taking this course too seriously because some of the girls have a beer at lunch time and that bothered me a lot, but I realized that I don't have to focus on what their doing but what I can get out of this program. So far I feel like I'm juggling with my GED. I just can't get into my GED and that really bugs me. Because nobody can do it for me.

I feel I can get my GED, with a lot of work. This program has given me a purpose to get motivated everyday. I enjoy coming to this program. Thanks to all the staff. I hope this program will continue for other women to gain confidence and self respect.

April 14/97

My opinion of Bridging with Pat, Andrea, Jim & Ron has been very beneficial for me. Counselling with Ron has been touch & go. We hit in some areas in my life where I felt like giving up & review on my decision about the program. But over all I made the right choice & struggled with myself to be here.

I enjoyed the cashier training program, Super Host & Food Safe. Hopefully it will come in handy in the future. Looking forward to WHMIS & First Aide. I would also like to add the instuctors & staff have been wonderful to me. Thanks a million.

02/2/97

Exercise

Before I came into this program, I was feeling very sad, lonely, very hurt (physically too) and depressed. I was going nuts without a job and I was isolated in my pain and disappointment.

At the beginning of this program, I felt confused, unfocused, not knowing what to do to deal effectively with painful issues.

So I started attending "school" every day. I decided to open up and share my stories and my feelings with the other women in the group.

I started feeling better. I was very tired - (emotionally, mentally) - after every counselling session we had. But I kept on coming and continued to gain insight into myself. During the program I saw more of a routine for me - I like that - knowing what was to come gave me direction and structure.

I made friends through "school" and some have become part of my support network. I am doing much better today. I feel a sense of purpose. I feel hopeful, I feel more "up" than not, and I'm not too depressed. All in all I feel I'm well on my way to recovery.

May 7, 1997

ANDIE BENNISON:

I loved this course and found it very beneficial to me, because I added more certificates to my resume. I am fairly new to Prince George, after raising my daughter at home for two years I needed to network and get going again. With all the new training and networking, I have a clear understanding of my goals and the confidence to achieve them. The guest speakers that came in (including yourself) were very helpful and I found out many things I otherwise would have not known without this class. I've realized how important it is to have a support network around me. Developing an action plan is the first step to success and for years I hummed and hawed about what I was going to do. Goal setting, support and positive reinforcement is very important to me now, to stay on track. In the job placements, I gained experience and knowledge of who is hiring and when. The teachers are supportive and understanding, which made them easy to talk to and get the help I needed. Pat and Jim left room for flexibility in the classroom which each and everyone of us needed because we were all working on different levels.

Yours sincerely,

Last January, I entered the program Positive Life Changes that Transitions Career Consulting Agency was running for women on assistance or unemployed. When I started, I was suffering from Clinical Depression, I was in an unhealthy relationship, I had just taken off a cast I had on a broken leg, and I was feeling quite overwhelmed by the very traumatic and recent experiences I had gone through. In the beginning, I felt a bit anxious, but as soon as I figured out how understanding everybody was, I felt relaxed and able to start trusting again-perhaps because there were more females working with us than there were men. As time passed, I took part in Computers classes, Cashiers course, Super Host by Tourism, Serving It Right, etc. I started to feel more confident in my abilities and I felt hopeful too. Having a chance to have a professional Psychologist come in and facilitate a counseling group was an invaluable addition to the program, because it gave us a chance to talk about our most pressing issues in a safe environment.

Today, I feel more positive, more assertive, and I have a better outlook on life thanks to the program and to the people facilitating it. I think that more women will benefit tremendously from taking part in a similar program and I would recommend it very highly.

I take this opportunity to thank the Government of British Columbia for offering this program, and for having the insight to identify barriers to employment other than just lack of skills.

Sincerely yours

When I started this course I wasn't sure of what I was going to accomplish, if it was going to be another course that was just a waste of my time. As it turned out, it has helped me more than I have realized. I am getting closer to completing my education, I am not blaming myself for the things that happened to me when I was little.

Most of my life I have blamed myself because it was drilled in my head that "this is your fault why this happened to you." I wanted to just end my life, didn't feel wanted, there are times I still wish I had killed myself, then everyone would be happy. No more worry's, it feels like they are making it out to be a big deal if I would of. What for, they didn't seem to care before, with me out of the way they wouldn't have anyone to blame there bullshit and lies on. I want to better my life and just disappear, I want to be free to live my life, I want to live at being happy instead of sad.

I have found someone who makes me happy but I can't seem to make him happy. I feel like I have to always look over my shoulder because he doesn't TRUST ME and it hurts more than anything in the world even though he can't understand I don't know what to say or do. He has changed my outlook on life so much that he doesn't even realize it.

I sometimes wonder if I am really what he wants or just a rebound or something. I want to get my schooling done but I want to get married to him soon (hopefully) and have his children.

Ever since I was little that is what I wanted to do, find the man I love, have children and be happy. Give the love that I never got. I do not want to be like my mother, don't get me wrong, if

it wasn't for her I wouldn't be here but I want things done differently. Who knows, maybe, I am grasping at straws, it is a nice fantasy, though, but I know it won't happen. Wishes don't come true, not for me anyway. Maybe this will be a new start and change for my life, who knows, maybe, dreams will come true.

APPENDIX E

Student Letter

Regarding Addition of Job Readiness

Group to Bridging

How I feel about the program:

How I feel about the program. I feel that there's too many people not enough time. We don't spend enough time on GED. I wish that you would of finished with us before bringing more people in, but that's too late. When is Ron coming back? I hope to get back to counselling. I hope you don't bring new people to our group counselling if we're still continuing with it. I have enjoyed all the programs given to us. Keep up the good work. Don't target the small group # one.

Can't wait for more computer training

Love always
big mouth