



TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2009
OREGON YOUTH AUTHORITY
LISTENING FORUM WITH MACLAREN YOUTH

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|---|---|---|--|---|---|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Youth #1
age 21
{Since 09/05} | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Youth #2
age 21
{2 years} | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Youth #3
age 21
{4 years} | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Youth #4
age 18
{1 year} | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Youth #5
age 23
{8 years} | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Youth #6
age 20
{3 years} | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Youth #7
age 22
{5 years, 3
months} | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Youth #8
age 19
{Since 2006} |
|---|---|---|--|---|---|--|--|

Mike explained that OYA is in transition right now. These youth were chosen to participate in the listening forum, partly, because they will be honest in their responses. Since we are unable to interview all youth at MacLaren, this group will be a sampling.

Fariborz asked, based on their experience, how do the various treatment programs here at MacLaren help them, or not?

COB was a good program because he started it right away, and his criminal behavior was definitely different that it is now. His anger was reduced a lot and he's learned to cope which made his relationship with his family better. It's a good program.

As far as the treatment, he has seen a lot of different treatment. He is not as fond of COB—he prefers more of a hands-on type treatment. Instead of one group focusing solely on one topic, such as critical thinking, lots of different areas were addressed in the other treatment—you learn things more as you go along.

All the treatment is pretty much based around the same thing. Each group just repeats the same thing over and over. Most groups are on too similar of things—such as learning to greet a person, etc.

COG and ART doesn't work. It's all out of a book. You just read a book and write down the answer. You don't have to learn to understand what caused you to commit the crime. It's a waste of time, it doesn't really help. If someone in the group actually speaks out, you might learn something. He doesn't need to learn how to introduce himself. If very young kids take this, it might help them. Having to look back to understand why you committed a crime is more helpful. In the SITP violent offender treatment group he learned a lot—and learned a lot from other kids too.

The treatment that is currently being used is very repetitive. He got something out of it, although others didn't.

COG was basic, easy. Write down what you have to write down. Practice it, and hopefully you catch onto it.

The whole COB situation starts off way too elementary. It's like doing a group at school. The 2nd book is a little better. It's all simple, basic, elementary, common-sense stuff.

He agrees that doing treatment the old way was much better. He doesn't like COG very much.

Fariborz asked how MacLaren has changed?

It has gone downhill. It no longer has a family atmosphere as it used to. The education provides youth the opportunity to get their high school diploma. The support groups are not what they used to be either. It's not as much hands on as it used to be.

It definitely seems, overall, to have gone downhill. Back then, in Geer 2, there were only 16 guys on the unit. There was a lot of time to be around the same people. You were the same core group, you could see changes that others were making. In the past, if something had happened, you could give them a hug or pat on the back—but now you're not allowed to do any of that. You used to be able to interact with staff on a human basis, but you can't do that any more either. Now, people want to be left alone. There is a lot more violence. There used to be months without an incident report. Youth would try to solve problems amongst themselves. Now if you do something, you get a consequence and don't have a chance to talk about it to anyone.

The trust level has gone down also. You have to beware of staff. If you had an issue in the past, such as a family issue, you would know that they would keep it confidential—that is no longer true.

He feels that the youth has changed MacLaren. If youth are not willing to behave on a positive level, MacLaren will not get back to a positive level. A lot of staff don't pay attention to what is going on—such as gang issues. If they would pay attention to gang issues, they would learn who not to put together. MacLaren is the best place to do time—they keep you in contact with your family. The kids also like the people around them to care about them. Oftentimes, the PO will say that a youth is getting out in 2 weeks, but then they don't get out, so they feel that it's all hopeless and they don't have anyone in their corner. There are not many youth left who have been through the original kind of treatment that taught them to help others.

Mike asked, with regard to the type of juveniles committed, is it a different type of youth now than it was three years ago?

A lot of staff don't understand the difference between youth who have been here for years and youth who just got here. The new youth's mentality is still from the street, they have not yet learned the rules. If a youth is having problems, another youth can usually help more than a staff member. If staff comes in and threatens CIU, it just makes the youth more upset. It works much better for another youth to talk to the one having the difficulty. You will never be able to change them until they learn something different—you have to show him, you can't just expect him to learn it on his own.

Mike asked whether, a few years ago, the cottages were changed with regard to the types of youth housed in each one?

Hall Cottage was supposed to be 18 and older DOC youth; but they still get the younger youth. But that's okay because the younger youth are more apt to listen to the older youth. They sit them down and let them know that if they show a willingness to change and progress in their life, they won't have to be here for 10 years. And, you have to learn so that you practice when you get out.

He felt that he was invincible, untouchable. When he first got here, he felt like he had something to prove to people. OYA forced him to mature. Except, a lot of kids really young who come here never grow up—they come here at age 13 and are now 23 and still act the same.

Fariborz asked what we can do better to help the youth?

A lot of it depends on who the staff are. Can the youth relate to them? There needs to be staff who don't treat them like inmates. The best thing he sees is confidence with the staff—if you tell them something, they won't pass it on. Youth solving issues with each other works best.

The only OYA transitioning is either RiverBend or Camp Florence. DOC youth need to experience transition before they go back into the community.

Two of the youth will be going on to a DOC institution. None of the youth present would rather be at DOC.

Fariborz asked how staff has changed over the years?

Recently, it is becoming better. The people coming in are more youthful, so they know how to interact with the youth. The older staff don't know how to interact as well as the younger staff; but then the younger and older staff have issues between themselves. The staff are at each other's throats, more than the youth. The newer staff are more willing to sit down and talk with you, explaining why you received a consequence—to talk about your problem. The older staff just give the consequence and won't talk to you about it.

It fluctuates between how long the staff have been here and how strict they are. Treatment was different in the past, staff were involved—it was more like a family situation. At any point in time, there would be someone there who you could talk to and they would help you work through your problem. It used to be encouraged to talk about things. Although you weren't obligated to do so, it was expected that you would help out youth before involving staff. Recently, there have been a lot of problems knowing where the staff are coming from—whether they are trying to help them or get back at them. If you bring up an incident with a staff, you have to watch your back.

Mike paraphrased what that he heard: that the older staff were more like family, the younger staff are easier to talk to, and the middle group treat youth more like inmates. The youth verified that this was accurate.

Even though the youth do something wrong, they are still human. Sometimes it helps to just sit down and play a game. If staff do that now—especially female staff—they get written up. The middle staff are more like DOC correction staff. Before, it was all about communication—you talk about it, don't forget it, but learn and move on. Now, the communication is gone. He has been doing COG for two years. When he hears it's time for COG, it makes him want to turn and run away. He has a huge binder of skill cards. They have the same skills over and over. His cottage came up with a 3-step process: what are we doing, why are we doing it, make a change to do it a different way. There is no talking through anything now with COG.

Priscilla asked what they have learned from their experiences? What did you learn? How did you learn it?

For the most part, they learned from themselves and being around peers. Family plays a key role in it also. Coming here, he was around people that did the same thing as him—others being consequenced for the same thing he did. Here, you see others changing and it makes you want to change also. Meanwhile, you see your family and how they're progressing but you're at a standstill—it makes you yearn to move on.

He came to MacLaren at age 15 with no self-esteem. One of the things that made him want to change was to have people here who would step forward and say they would help him—just come to them, and they will help him. He learned to play guitar here. Having those experiences and

having people give praise helps him. He has earned his high school diploma. And having people who support him and willing to sit and talk and learn with you, not because they are told to but because they want to help. Making the connection between the head and the heart. He knew what he was doing was wrong—but now he feels it is wrong. Not just knowing, but feeling is the connection that is needed—which is what he learned here.

Biggest experience was learning how to keep himself busy. His life plan used to be military. Now he has learned talents: welding, wordworking, etc. It gave him a place to start with his life. He now has experience to get a job. It gave him a good place to start when he goes back into the community. He gave an example of immersion in a language class—and that's what it will be like when he leaves MacLaren. A lot of people cannot handle this, and will tend to go back to their old way of life. A transition program would be the best thing for MacLaren. For an SO, RiverBend is the only transition program available.

Three in the group are mentoring other youth. They sometimes see themselves in the younger youth that come here.

His experiences are mostly school. He hasn't graduated yet, but he will. He's learned welding. MacLaren has a lot of opportunities like school, groups, multi-cultural groups.

He was in Project Pooch. It helps to learn consistency.

MacLaren has been pretty good. He doesn't want to go to DOC, but has to for almost a year. He'll be starting college soon. The work program is kind of slow, but they are still skills to learn when he gets out. He likes it here.

Fariborz asked if they ever think about where they'll be 10 years from now?

I know where I hope I'll be in 10 years. I want to be a lineman. You have to go through an apprenticeship program for 5 years first.

I have plans to open my own business. I want to take college classes to get into networking. He plans to get certified to be a network technician. He hopes to eventually open a business in the future building guitars. He plans on calling his guitars "PhatMatt"—a nickname that he learned, after his self esteem grew, was not all bad.

Fariborz commented about the youth gain self esteem. He asked: How important is it? How do we help other youth? Do you remember when the turning point was for you to gain self confidence?

A lot of the kids in his unit are special needs and already struggle with that. Was not active in a lot of sports due to lack of self esteem issues. It stopped him from doing a lot of things. There was a treatment group that did marathon sessions; the group was secluded; in a dark room on mattresses. Everyone would have to talk about their offense—he talked for 4 hours. They are separated from everyone else, it's very emotional. But afterward, one of the guys that was in his program sat down when it was over and put his arm around him—didn't say a word—but the arm around his shoulder helped him acknowledge that it was good to get it out, and now it was time to move on. Also, learning to play guitar has been very helpful. It's also a way to let out feelings. He likes being able to share with others. Knowing that there are people willing to support him because he wants to make changes is helpful.

When he first came to JDH in 2003, sitting by himself, not wanting to be around anyone, gave him time to think about how he could change. The person who helped him the most is his daughter, she was 8 months old when he went to JDH. He started thinking about everything he would risk losing—especially his daughter—if he didn't change. When he first came to OYA, he wasn't around people who were trying to change at Hillcrest. Then he was sent to MacLaren, he was sent to SITP and was angry about that. But when he looks back now, he knows he was sent there because there was a person there who helped him change. In the group, the people running the group made him feel like they were there as an investment for him—and he didn't want to let them down. He feels like jail saved him, and MacLaren has made him a better person.

When he got to Hall Cottage, was his turning point. Prior to that, in the tents, there was an African-American support group that started a relationship with him—at first he didn't care whether he stayed here or went to DOC. However, that group helped him settle down. Then, when he got to Hall, he noticed changes but the changes were in other. He found out why others weren't interacting—it was because he wasn't changing. So, after that he began changing.

Priscilla asked what kind of fathers they would like to be?

A father that is always there. He saw his dad only about 4 times. He wants to be there, and wants to teach his kids. Give him a life. There is only so much a mom can do, especially with a son. He wants to be there, regardless of whether he's still with the mom or not. He will make sure he stays there and be there—whether they're getting into trouble or being good.

To be a supportive father. He's seen a lot of people who don't get any support from their family. His parents have changed since he's been here. They are now able to talk about things. Prior to coming here, although his stepdad taught him a lot of things, he never had "difficult" conversations with him. Now he is able to talk with him about anything. His parents are very supportive.

"I don't plan on having kids." He doesn't really have a 10-year plan, but wants it to be that he doesn't go back to jail.

Fariborz asked if there was anything else they would like to share. Was the time worthwhile?

The group agreed that it was.

He appreciates that the people who control their lives take some interest in their lives.

You get a different perspective on things by meeting with other people that they don't normally interact with.

Fariborz explained that most staff are here because they want to help the youth. He went on to say that the youth, in a way, run the organization. To the extent that youth can help to make this a better place, it will be a better place. The key point Fariborz wanted to leave the youth with was: Do what you need to do to build your self-confidence. This is not about never ever making a mistake again—you will. You learn through your mistakes and, at one point, you realize that you can teach other people and help them. Fariborz continued, by saying that he has sat down with a number of kids and a number of staff, but everyone—including the work that Mike Riggan does every day—are focused on helping you. You are the future. To the extent you are successful, we can be successful—and know that we've done something that works. Allow yourself to make mistakes—and learn from them.