

Title of Session: Alternative/Correctional Ed Forum - Create Now!

Moderator: BJ Berquist

Guest Speaker: Jill Gurr

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BJ: we usually start all the discussions in Tapped In with introductions.

BJ: I'm an art teacher in a male juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania

TaraTS: Hi, I'm Tara and I am a special education teacher in Wisconsin

JillGst5: I'm the Founder and President of CREATE NOW! - a non-profit organization in Los Angeles that helps troubled youth through creative arts mentoring

TaraTS: It would be helpful to describe the kids that you work with

JavierSa: I am a preservice teacher at University of Houston trying to know more about the topic.

JillGst5: We serve a wide range -- children ages 2-21 (mostly teens, though) who are abused, neglected, in detention camps and prisons, runaways, homeless -- any child in trouble.

TaraTS: I work with 5th and 6th graders that have many emotional disturbances. My students cannot not perform solely in a regular education room.

JillGst5: We did a one-time music program last year for a group of autistic children. The mentor is a classic pianist who teaches a unique interactive program of learning the classics, through cartoon music, etc. Some of the autistic children in this workshop really enjoyed it.

TaraTS: sounds very interesting Jill

BJ: how do you get your mentors, Jill?

JillGst5: They find us through word-of-mouth and our website. Tara, what kind of emotional disturbances do your students have?

TaraTS: Anger problems....students that want to fight other students...

JillGst5: Do you use the arts to give them an alternative outlet?

JavierSa: How many students do you have?

TaraTS: I find that many of my students have precious souls and those who have been in their prior to their life have torn them down.

JillGst5: We match the mentors with the facilities where the students live. There can be anywhere from a few up to 130 students present at our programs.

TaraTS: I have 19 studentsI offer positive attention and train my students how to receive the right kind of attention

JavierSa: When you say students, do you imply that they receive curriculum as well?

JillGst5: It sounds like you're on the right path. I know this is off subject, but some of our mentors have used meditation techniques to calm the kids down and it really works!

AnnE joined the room.

TaraTS: what are other techniques that you can use with kids to work on anger ??

JillGst5: Javier, it depends on each mentor and program. Some of the projects are one-time events, whereas many others are small workshops or one-to-one mentoring that last

indefinitely. Whenever possible, we try to structure the programs for 6 to 8 weeks, since there's a high transition rate with the students.

JillGst5: I personally have worked with youth in creating screenplays and video projects. If I have an angry child, I get them to express it as a character in a story we're working on. These could be group projects that everyone contributes to, or individual projects that the children share each week.

TaraTS: What are the components of the project Jill?

JillGst5: Again, I tailor each project to the mentor and youth. I give them a Mentor Training Manual that teaches the basics of working with institutionalized children with special needs, and this offers some samples of lesson plans that different mentors have contributed. I also work individually with the mentors, if they require it, to help them come up with a basic curriculum. I find that once the class is started, the kids steer it in the direction they want to go.

JavierSa: I was reading about your career, and it is interesting... when the children work in the project, do they participate doing the script, acting and handling equipment? (cameras, computers) ?

JillGst5: Thanks for the compliment. Absolutely, the kids do everything. Of course, they have guidance from their mentors.

JavierSa: Wow.... I do not want to sound shallow, but how do you manage anger with expensive equipment?

TaraTS: Jill does every student always want to participate? What do you do if a kid doesn't want to participate????

JillGst5: When our mentors are with the youth, there are always staff members from the facility present. Mentors are not involved if a student has an angry outburst. The staff take over.

JillGst5: The kids sign up because they choose to participate. For most of them, it's a reward and a joy to be able to escape from their dreary dorms and routines, especially to be involved in a fun, creative project. If they get bored or don't want to participate, then they drop out, which is another reason why there's a high transition (also because the kids are moved from one institution to another frequently, or go AWOL)

JavierSa: AWOL ?(Sorry, English is my second language...)

JillGst5: Absence Without Leave (Military term) means that they escaped.

JillGst5: Where are you located Javier and what do you do?

JavierSa: Thanks!

JavierSa: I am in Houston , TX (I am from Colombia, but I came to U.S to study education) I am interested in films as well, so you do the two things I love the most.

BJ: Jill, is your program national?

JillGst5: That's why I founded the organization. I started working with incarcerated youth on a screenplay and while they were illiterate and wouldn't read books, they loved to read their own script or screenplays of films they loved.

TaraTS: Jill-What types of disabilities do your kids have??

JillGst5: We're only in Los Angeles now. I did run the program in Orlando for a year or two, but our resources are extremely limited.

BJ: what would you suggest to someone who wanted to try and start a similar program?

JillGst5: We aren't working with Special Needs children yet. Most of the disabilities are emotional and mental disorders due to abuse and neglect. We just did a one-time

drumming concert for 80 teenage boys and girls who are incarcerated for crimes and they all have mental disorders: schizophrenia, bipolar, suicidal, etc.

AnnE: I can see where this would really be motivating. My students enjoy doing plays from Scope magazine. Many can't read well

JillGst5: I'm actually putting a book together that will address the issue of starting your own programs. To become non-profit is very difficult, but there are troubled children and youth in EVERY community and generally many local artists, writers, talented individuals who want to make a difference. It takes a lot of work to bring them together, though.

TaraTS: Sounds very interesting Jill

JillGst5: You can get screenplays online for free at <http://www.script-o-rama.com/> and several other sites, then print them up and distribute the whole script or just scenes for the kids to work on. Once they know the format, have them write their own.

JavierSa: how many people from you organization are involve in the program? (at the facility)

TimothyR joined the room.

TimothyR: I made it

BJ: welcome, Tim.

JillGst5: Just the mentor. What we do is basically match them with the facility, then train them while they do most of the prep work with the Volunteer Coordinator at the institution. They have to go through security clearance, etc. Meanwhile, I offer them help, supplies and resources if they need them. I also trouble shoot problems that might arise.

JillGst5: Hi Tim.

TimothyR: Hello Jill

JillGst5: The point is that all of you can be using the media -- TV shows, film clips from DVDs or videos, etc. to relate more to the kids.

TimothyR: I am a Correctional Supervisor at Tipton Correctional Center in Missouri

JillGst5: Do you deal with adults or youth?

TimothyR: I deal more with Adults

JillGst5: Well, the same ideals work with them, especially since most of them never really had a childhood, I'm sure.

TimothyR: I do however work closely with the Functional Unit Managers

TimothyR: You are very right about that. If I had the same things to deal with as they did who knows

JillGst5: There is so much scientific proof out there based on studies that show the arts provide therapeutic release

TimothyR: The problem we have at our facility is not enough work for the inmates to do

TimothyR: Too much spare time.

JillGst5: Can you contact some of your local non-profits to see if they need help-, stuffing envelopes or doing mundane tasks that they can't afford to hire people to do for them?

AnnE: Giving back to the community is a form of restorative justice.

TimothyR: I work with a lot of closed minded people.

JavierSa: how many time the mentor goes to the facility

JavierSa: ?

JillGst5: Exactly. And you might also investigate to see if there's a simple arts-and-crafts project that can be done that might provide income when sold at crafts fairs or through the internet.

JillGst5: We ask the mentors to volunteer for an hour a week. But they make their own schedules. They might go for 4 hours in one visit, or two hours every week or every other week, etc.

AnnE: Do these mentors help with props etc?

TimothyR: Thank you for letting me join

TimothyR: I have to go again

JillGst5: If they're doing a video project, they usually find the necessary props at the facility. Since the kids are restricted (many can't even have paper clips or CDs because they can be used as weapons), the plays they write are generally dealing with things they can handle.

JillGst5: Nice meeting you Timothy.

TimothyR: Thanks

TimothyR: Bye BJB

TimothyR left the room (signed off).

JillGst5: Where do you work, AnnE?

AnnE: I teach reading and language. This would be an excellent way to develop soft skills and writing.

JavierSa: can they use pencils?

AnnE: I work at an adult all male correctional in Wisconsin

JillGst5: It's really effective, but just be careful what scripts you choose. I used popular films ("Menace II Society" and "American Me") that dealt with gangs and inner-city life, which they related to, but we had to get permission from the staff to let them use foul language.

BJ: most facilities permit the use of pencils, Javier. You just have to be accountable for all the pencils at the end of the class

JavierSa: nice tip... thanks

AnnE: In the general population, inmates can have pencils and pens. But if these inmates are placed in segregation, they are very restricted.

BJ: even using the foul language to make a word wall of 'alternative' ways to say the same thing would be a good activity

JillGst5: When dealing with the issue of using foul language, we compromised by having them substitute symbols for words, like s&*^ or "fricking" so the idea came across without actually using the word

AnnE: How long does it take to develop a play? Once it is complete, does this group ever present to others?

JavierSa: do you provide the editing equipment?

JillGst5: We find editors with access to equipment who work with the kids

JillGst5: It's very easy to edit projects if you have a decent Macintosh computer and software

JillGst5: We've had projects where the kids write their own play, generally in 2-4 weeks, then practice and perform it for the rest of the facility, and family members. It's very exhilarating for them.

BJ: Ann, you should talk with Curt Tofteland in Kentucky. He's done incredible things with Shakespeare productions in an adult male facility

JavierSa: I only have experience with Adobe pro.. do you recommend this for children?

AnnE: Thanks, BJ

JillGst5: We also did a project several years ago where a group of incarcerated youth wrote a sitcom episode of "That 70's Show." I arranged for the creator of the show, and two producers and one of the stars to attend the performance and it became an incredible experience for everyone involved.

BJ . o O (Curt is a member of Tapped In and a member of the Arts in Corrections group)

BJ: Javier, have you used Inspiration?

JillGst5: Most editing software is the same. Adobe is great software. Most of the kids are computer literate and can pick up the software quickly if you show them.

JavierSa: The inspiration I know is for web display.. not video.... I work with PC'S

BJ nods to Javier. Inspiration is a good way to develop a storyboard though

JavierSa: I will try to develop the activity first in a regular elementary school to observe how it works.

JavierSa: I agree BJ thanks

BJ: for elementary grades you could try Kidspiration

JavierSa: I agree.

BJ: we're getting toward the end of our hour. Any other questions for Jill?

BJ: Jill, this has been a wonderful discussion! I wish you could join us more often!

AnnE: No, but thanks for the ideas and keep of the great work.

JavierSa: when are you going to publish your book?

JillGst5: I'm just putting a proposal together right now for the book. No publisher yet. Glad I was able to help. If you ever have any other questions, please feel free to contact me at info@createnow.org. And good luck with your projects!

JavierSa: Thank you... keep up the good work!

JillGst5: You too, Javier. And good idea to start with the little ones... they're great teachers

JillGst5: Bye everyone!