Ethics Project Report – 2014
Executive Summary

We publically thank the **DANIELS FUND** for sponsoring this project and for its tremendous commitment to risk-laden youth in our society and to development of their personal values, ethics and character.

BACKGROUND

The **core belief** is that a healthy society evolves from the ethics, values and character of its people. **It's a fact** that today's youth and families are continually exposed to negative influences that undermine development of positive values, ethics and character. These influences tend to <u>over</u>-expose youth and families to unprincipled ethics and <u>under</u>-expose them to principled ethics. The result is a growing **"ethical confusion"** within our society about what is important, what is right and wrong and what to stand for in life.

The **purpose of the project** is to develop and provide a positive, principle-based Youth Ethics Program for highly risk-laden youth and families served by child welfare and juvenile justice systems; and to develop a customized curriculum with educational tools and techniques that include the Ten Principles to Live By from the Cowboy Code of the West.

PROJECT DESIGN

CBR used its unique relationships, reputation and special expertise to gain unusual access to **alternative schools, diversion programs, treatment centers and troubled homes** and offer services and curriculum about values, ethics and character. The project coordinator regularly went to each site and fit the ethics curriculum into the daily schedules and formats required for each entity and their requirements for educational credits.

New approaches were designed to overcome resistant attitudes, emotions and behaviors and to inspire and equip highly risk-laden youth to think about and adopt a set of personal principles and then have the courage to live by them. Youth were provided with the following but were not told what to believe.
- o Exposure to ethical principles and mentors
- o Guided reflection and exercises to establish a personal ethical code
- o Encouragement to act on the ethical principles

The design was also informed by the following:
- o Social/emotional learning concepts
- o Life Skills for Adolescents
- o The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACES) regarding trauma and resilience building
- o Multiple-intelligence learning theory
- o Cowboy Ethics: Ten Principles of the "Code of the West", TRY, Building Blocks for Success in Life

As the project evolved, a **"story telling"** approach took shape using small group methods customized to each setting. This approach fit the social media driven world in which these youth live and interact daily. Most small groups met once or twice per week. Through **creative iPad applications**; guest speakers; use of "what would you do?" videos; and guided discussion topics; youth were helped to discover they have the power to live their "best" story, no matter their personal circumstances and to ethically guide their own lives.

Each course ended with a **graduation/celebration session** where youth received certificates of completion, a copy of their iPad work products and a gift certificate.

DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRESSION
- Funds received December 2013
- Program coordinator hired January 2014
- Training and curriculum development (including a collaborative approach with CCSD)
- The STORY approach was developed
- iPad technology was purchased/leased
- Initial partners and program sites were established
- The STORY approach and curriculum was adapted to fit each setting
- On-going feedback and evaluation occurred
- More partners and sites were added
- Use of "live streaming" was added
- A "Family Resilience Training" approach was developed and Family Service Providers were trained

IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES
Evidenced by youth journal writing, comments and participation in group discussions, written principles and creative projects…..
- Youth gained new insights about their life, personal beliefs and potential
- Youth identified positive role models / mentors
- Youth produced a creative project expressing principle(s) in their personal code

MEASUREABLE OUTCOMES
- **90%** of youth (108 of 120) completed a multi-session course regarding principled ethics called "STORY"
- **90%** of youth (108 of 120) in community settings developed and put into writing or creative expression, a personal ethical code
- Four month follow-up reviews (in process – first cohort will be completed in March 2014)

BARRIERS OVERCOME
- Reluctance of publically funded youth entities to permit an outside agency (CBR) to offer a values/ethics oriented curriculum at their sites
- Reluctance of troubled youth to regularly participate in group sessions, share their personal stories, discuss sensitive issues related to their personal values/ethics and disclose their personal choices.

SITES AND LOCATIONS
In total, 5 organizations and 10 sites were involved in several Denver-Metro-counties. Each site serves at-risk and high-risk youth who are likely to drop out; unlikely to graduate from college; and who have higher rates of suicide, homelessness, unemployment and teen pregnancy. They are experiencing "ethical confusion" with limited exposure to healthy and stable role models who have a positive ethical framework to guide their lives. In a recent state study, the high school graduation rate of this population is less than 30%.

- **Denver Public Schools**
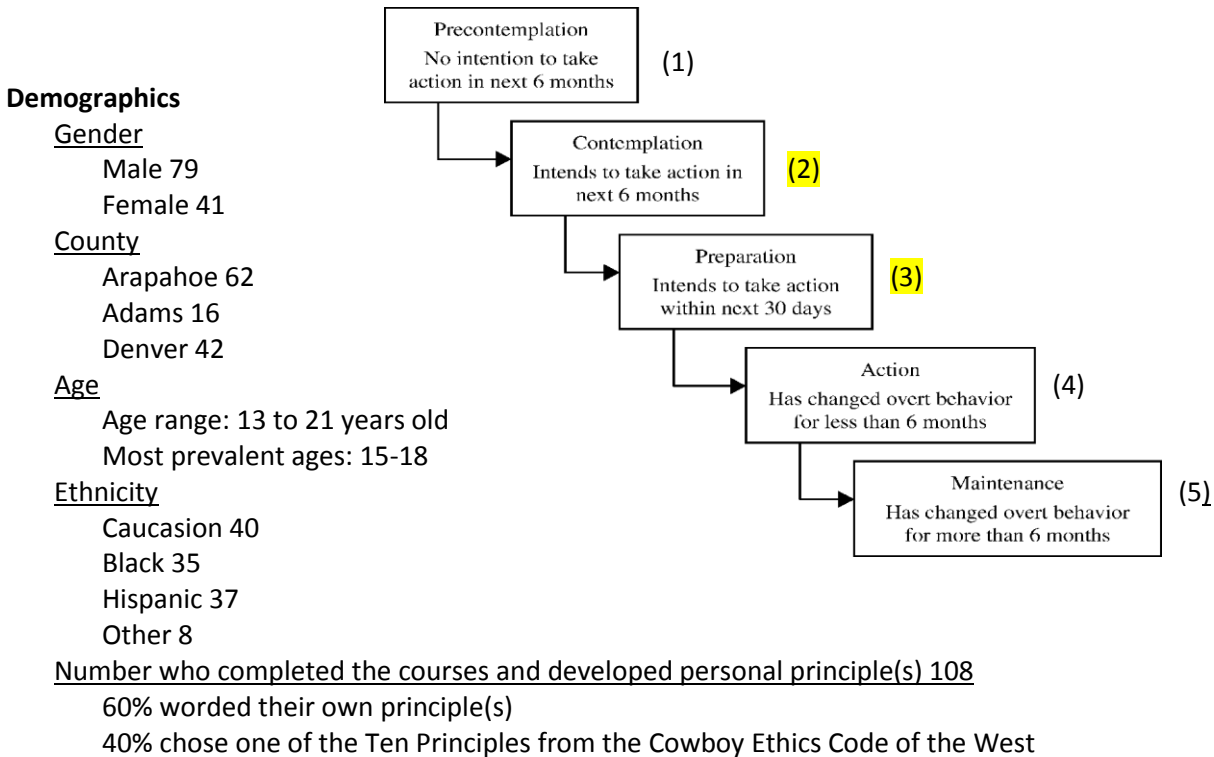 **Compassion Road Academy**
  The most risk-laden youth in the Denver Public Schools system; interfaces with the Denver juvenile detention center; works with youth to avert school drop-out and achievement of a high school diploma or equivalent.

- o **Cherry Creek Schools**
  Multiple Sites (The Manor/ The Estate / The Ranch)
  Alternative school sites with education programs designed to meet the needs of middle school and high school students with significant emotional and behavioral disabilities

- o **Denver District Attorney's Office**
  Juvenile Diversion Program
  The Juvenile Diversion Program works with eligible first-time juvenile offenders as an alternative to formal court proceedings. These youth are referred to as clients, and participate in Diversion with their parent or guardian.

- o **GOAL Academy**
  Multiple Sites (Aurora, Brighton/Westminster, Lakewood, Denver)
  Youth at high risk of dropping-out of school including students with children and those who are no longer attending a mainstream school.

- o **Community Reach Center**
  Day Treatment Program
  Youth with diagnosed mental health, behavioral and emotional issues that interfere with home life and school environments.

DIRECT EVIDENCE OF EFFECT
Regarding "motivation and change", Stages 2 and 3 were the targets for this project.

Precontemplation
No intention to take action in next 6 months (1)

Contemplation
Intends to take action in next 6 months (2)

Preparation
Intends to take action within next 30 days (3)

Action
Has changed overt behavior for less than 6 months (4)

Maintenance
Has changed overt behavior for more than 6 months (5)

Demographics
Gender
    Male 79
    Female 41
County
    Arapahoe 62
    Adams 16
    Denver 42
Age
    Age range: 13 to 21 years old
    Most prevalent ages: 15-18
Ethnicity
    Caucasion 40
    Black 35
    Hispanic 37
    Other 8
Number who completed the courses and developed personal principle(s) 108
    60% worded their own principle(s)
    40% chose one of the Ten Principles from the Cowboy Ethics Code of the West

Immediate Impact / Youth
100% of the youth indicated (pre) they had not considered participating in an "ethics" class or having a personal code of ethics yet 90% of the youth actively participated, thought about and adopted at least one ethical principle to guide their lives.

Immediate Impact / Partnering Youth Agencies
Each participating organization provided a letter describing the value of the project and desire for continued participation.

Student Work Products
The journals, vision maps, music, art and other work products regarding positive ethical principles are selectively available.

Curriculum Development (Youth)
Full curriculum plus flexible course structures with lessons were developed to fit a variety of settings and circumstances.

Curriculum Development (Family)
Family oriented curriculum, entitled _Family Resilience Training,_ was developed for in-home use

Communication Technology
An inventory of mini-iPads is now available with all the needed applications (apps).

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS IMPACTING THE PROJECT
Passage of Marijuana Laws
Based on youth comments, this topic significantly contributes to their "ethical confusion" and negatively impacts their personal and family lives

Political Election Cycle 2014
Youth were exposed to on-going media blasts from candidates asserting the "negative ethics" of opponents.

High-Profile National Events
Likewise, the NFL Ray Rice incident, Ferguson, Denver area jail lawsuits, CIA investigation and several other major news items occurred regarding ethical behavior and choices.

LESSONS LEARNED
Youth are eager to have meaningful conversations about values and ethics
Participating youth had a deep desire to explore ethical principles -- far greater than anticipated.
In most sites, being in the STORY class was optional.

Youth are hungry for more positive, ethical role models and mentors
They liked hearing stories about others yet were cautious about accepting someone as truly ethical and trustworthy. A majority of youth indicated they do NOT watch a lot of TV or movies, but play lots of video games, stay online (FACEBOOK and social media specifically) and trust very few leadership figures.

Very few youth have been part of a group with a written code of ethics.
This void makes them very susceptible to the influence of negative ethics in our culture.

Youth desperately want a better lifestyle and a more hopeful future
Many youth expressed lack of hope about their lives and circumstances saying their "generation sucks"; that adults can't solve their own problems; and that the world is getting more "messed up". Youth consistently listed greed, internet addiction and marijuana/drug use as things their generation values but is seen as a negative influence. They also consistently listed love, honor, respect, and morals as things their generation is lacking and needs to value.

Youth like and respond well to the STORY approach
The concept of "story telling" fits with their world of social media, selfies, texting and TV reality shows. The youth wanted to tell their own personal story and put personal principles into their own words and use communication technology to express themselves.

Youth are willing to risk telling their personal story and express their ethical thinking when communication technology (i-Pad) is involved
Use of communication technology became a powerful tool for motivation, engagement and self-expression.

Youth are truly struggling with ethical confusion
When asked about their influence, at least 75% of the students said their generation is "no good". Several students said "our generation sucks". This message was conveyed by every location and by every demographic.

Money and marijuana were consistently mentioned as important things in the student's life, but also said to be the things that were the worse for them. Social media (Facebook specifically) was also said to be a bad thing for their generation, but also something they could not live without. Several students mentioned Facebook as the reason that they were depressed or "screwed up".

Each site and location required customization
Facilities, staffing, behavioral structure and academic credit requirements varied at each setting.

STRATEGIC DECISIONS
A Shift in Emphasis
Due to the logistics above, we spent more time than anticipated on the youth development portion of the grant and less time on the family portion. However, a new approach was designed for families called *Family Resilience Training*. Staff was trained and pilots are underway. The family design involves a five-session, 10 hour approach provided by our Family Service Providers with cases from metro-county child welfare departments.

Use of Communication Technology (mini-iPads)
A strategic decision was made to invest in mini iPad technology instead of hiring additional staff. The decision made a huge impact on motivation levels, accelerated the learning process and put the infrastructure in place for future growth.

WAYS TO IMPROVE
- o Add more "real world" role models who can tell their personal story; articulate ethical principles they live by; and give examples of how those principles carried them through challenging times.
- o Introduce more examples of ethical codes including ones that are culturally sensitive, represent their local communities and show how groups of people adopt ethical principles and band together to do good for others.
- o Continue to focus youth on what they can do with their own lives, especially when they can't change the people around them
- o Search for more "What would you do" videos. Search for more of these type of resources.
- o There needs to be a good balance between instruction and allowing the participants to learn some of the iPad apps on their own. There are also several protocols for use of mini iPad equipment that need to be developed. And, it is important to keep developing and adjusting the iPad projects as students give feedback. As the amount of data (student work products) increases, it needs to be backed up and stored on the Cloud.

FUTURE PLANS
Sustainable Funding
The project is part of our on-going Ethics Initiative" to develop more mutually beneficial partnerships of like-minded individuals, non-profit and for-profit corporations. The following are in place:
- o   Annual income from our "Bust'n Clays for Kids" Sporting Clay Event
- o   Sponsorship opportunities coupled with a promotional plan
- o   A resource group of like-minded individuals who are willing to help influence funding

Program Expansion
Building blocks for expansion are in place to accomplish the following…..
- o   Expand from 120 youth to approximately 200 youth in year two without additional staff or equipment.
- o   Add more agency partners and program sites
- o   Add more adult models sharing their personal stories
- o   Increase use of "livestreaming" capabilities
- o   Extend the STORY approach into home-based services via *Family Resilience Training*
- o   Launch the "Standing-Up in a Knock-Down World" program for the general public
- o   Develop "on-line" internet capability to encourage youth to continue to live by their personal ethical code
- o   Staff additions

COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS / LESSONS LEARNED
Results and lessons-learned are being combined with additional research for production of a professional WHITE PAPER to be shared in professional forums, public speaking presentation, donor education and website materials.

MISSION:
To achieve excellence providing troubled youth with the means to become hopeful and productive citizens.

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