

Our Youth Service Model:

Our model for working with youth combines cognitive behavioral therapy, youth entrepreneurial development and service learning opportunities as our youth grow food for needy families.

North Carolina is one of the last two states in which youth are adjudicated as adults for all charges at age 16. By the time some 16 year-olds arrive in the courts they are permanently limited in their employment due to their 'adult' criminal record. We will help break this cycle by offering the courts, schools and communities ways of diverting youth from the criminal justice system, for example, giving a vice-principal and a high school student in trouble the option of setting a contract to work off some time at the farm. Or, youth who are completing court-required community service hours at our site will be provided free clinical programming and job training - at times mentored by the veterans living on the campus. The youth can voluntarily choose to continue working, while earning a stipend, if they attend mediated sessions with their victim (where appropriate), take responsibility for their crime and form an ongoing success plan to direct their goals. In this moment, community restitution becomes restorative justice. We can compete on the street with the gang structures as we will offer youth specific employment that provides stipends, improved resumes and a sense of belonging. Finally, we will help focus the local, state and national criminal justice community on the new opportunity that closing state prisons offer. In 2011, we began laying the groundwork for this vision.

Our Clinical Pilot Program:

On July 8, 2011, I fielded a unique pilot program combining intensive therapy, service learning and a youth entrepreneurial focus in sustainable agriculture to work with twelve youth who had been placed out of home, out of school and on probation. These youth had been headed to lockup, but instead (through this program) reversed their future, 'flipped their prisons.' Measured over a three-year period, the program has been 92% effective in preventing recidivism with these high-risk youth. Older youth now mentor younger recruits as they attend group therapy, grow food for needy families, build compost bins, tend to their beehives, launch their own businesses, speak at universities and train adults around the state. Coming from rival gangs, our African American, Native American, Caucasian and Latino youth now connect historical trauma of their people to their personal trauma even connecting how their current behavior continues or breaks those cycles. On Dec. 9th, 2013, standing on the 14th floor of Raleigh's Archdale building, our youth co-leaders helped explain our plan to 'flip' actual prisons to the Department of Public Safety's Executive Leadership Team (DPS). These two African American and Native American youth who were on probation two years earlier are now leading DPS in making a replicable model that will help guide the reuse of 'field camp prison sites' around NC.