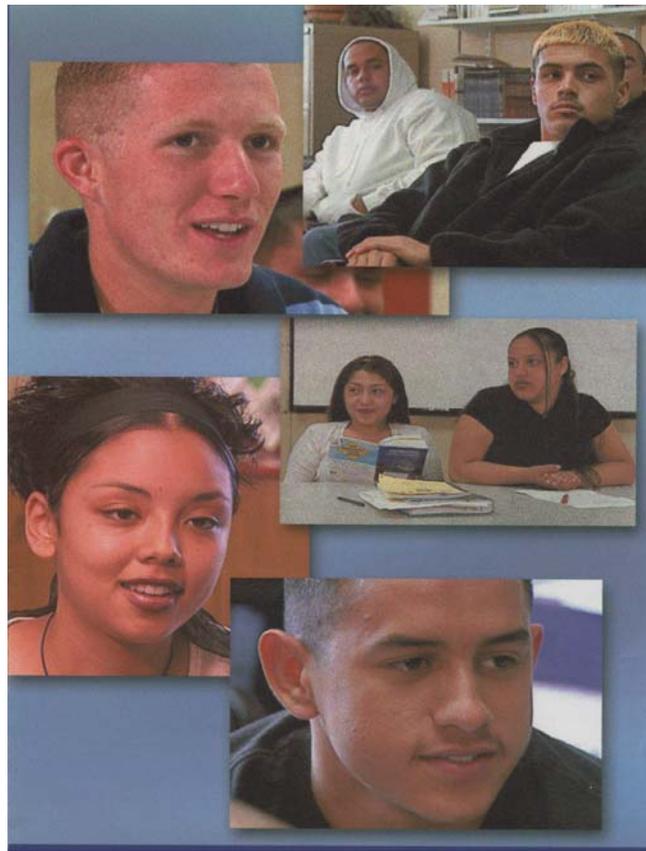


# Camden Community School



## 3 Principles Training Project

**The Camden Community School  
3 Principles Training Project**

**Spring 1998 – Summer 2002**

A joint project of  
the Santa Clara County Office of Education  
and the  
County of Santa Clara Department of Alcohol and Drug Services  
3 Principles/Health Realization Services Division

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## Introduction

In the Spring of 1998, at the request of Alternative Schools Principal Jim Baker, the Santa Clara County Office of Education (COE) contracted with the County Department of Alcohol and Drug Services (DADS) to provide a program based on the 3 Principles to Camden Community School staff and students. Camden was an alternative, continuation school for approximately 60 students at the junior to senior high school level. Located on a busy city street in Campbell, California, the Camden trailer complex was just a few blocks from two major freeways and the county children's shelter.

At any given time throughout the project, roughly 30 percent of the Camden students were displaced from their family homes, 30 to 40 percent were classified as "special education," and many were involved with gangs and/or criminal activity. Most were one step away from incarceration, and some were under house arrest while they attended school. From staff burnout to student fighting, drug use and vandalism, schools like Camden are considered "problematic" at best by educators and the general public. In Santa Clara County schools such as Camden face high turnovers in staff and student populations, as well as dwindling resources to grow or continue programs.

Jim Baker, Camden's principal, was first introduced to the Principles program when he attended a Department of Alcohol and Drug Services (DADS) 5-day training on the Principles. During the training he "saw the possibility available to our schools. . . So much of what we work with is what I call 'situational compliance,' he said. Where the kids do good for a bit at school, but then go out on the weekends and get locked up again ... I wanted to help [the students] access their wisdom and good judgment, not just at school, but in *life*. And I saw the relationship the teachers and staff had with the kids as intimate to that process."

Principal Baker's overall goal was to help both staff and students live in a more enjoyable and productive state of mind. "I wanted to see a change in the culture of the school, both between the kids and between kids and staff. I wanted students to see more value in school. Among the staff, I was hoping for less 'stuckness' in individual views, easier problem

solving and just having more fun together. After all, we spend a lot of time together.”

Before the project began teachers and staff from three COE alternative schools had attended a “Core Course,” a 30-hour training on the principles provided by the Health Realization Services Division (HRSD) specifically for them. This provided most of the staff who later ended up at Camden with some exposure to the principles-based understanding. Newer staff to Camden would also attend a five-day Core Course offered by DADS. While participation in the Core Courses was voluntary, it was strongly encouraged and supported by Principal Baker.

### **Summary**

The project was provided to staff, faculty and students at Camden for three-and-a-half years. Four DADS certified Health Realization trainers provided training. They were Carlos Hankins (who left the project after the first semester), Catherine Casey, Ami Chen Mills and Gabriela Maldonado, who came on in the second year of the project.

Subsequent to the 5-day training, staff and faculty participated in one- to two-hour training sessions twice a month, mostly on site and sometimes off-site at a local restaurant. Students received, on average, one weekly 45-minute session in the classrooms or in a voluntary “Leadership Group.” Despite a high turnover rate for faculty, staff and students (the average length of stay for students at Camden was three months), the impact of the program, based on interviews, evaluations and surveys with teachers and students, was reflected in the following outcomes:

- Improved attitudes of teachers toward students.
- Improved attitudes among staff toward each other.
- Improved attitudes among students toward each other.
- A dramatic positive shift in the overall culture of the school.
- Increased school attendance by rival gang members.
- A decrease in gang violence and tension at the school.
- A decrease in vandalism of school and staff property.
- Improved human relations, communication, understanding and efficiency at staff meetings; and
- Dramatic personal impacts for both students and teachers – reflected as increased well-being and self-confidence, and increased interpersonal and job and academic effectiveness.

Jim Baker also oversaw a number of alternative schools during the project period. One of the other schools, Calero, had a student population that closely mirrored that of Camden. As the DADS project progressed, what Jim “saw was that the Camden teachers and staff members had more compassion with each other, even when they were dealing with personal issues.

“That was phenomenal to me,” he said. “Alternative school teachers are famous for – when push comes to shove – modeling the same behavior as their kids...Camden and Calero both faced challenging populations, but Calero always stayed in a state of flux, there was always tension – it never shifted. However, Camden would settle down and come back to a calmer place [after some incident.] I could feel the difference when I would go to Camden ... Even when we closed the school [due to funding cuts and restructuring], given the magnitude of that, people on staff were pretty much at ease.”

For Principal Baker, the project at Camden was “the single most valuable ongoing program for staff and students at [the] site.”

It is hoped that this report will reflect the tremendous value of sharing in a school setting the understanding of the Principles of Mind, Thought and Consciousness. The Principles are the basis for what is taught in a Health Realization Services Division program. The program operated from an unshakeable trust in the innate mental health and universal learning potential for students *and* school staff. We hope this report will serve as an inspiration and guide for future school-based programs and research. Both positive outcomes and areas of possible improvement will be covered.

### **Background of the 3 Principles in Santa Clara County**

Approximately 25-years old, a new approach for working with individuals and organizations was introduced to the field of human services. This principle-based psychological approach is based on the understanding all people have innate mental health and that wisdom is available to everyone. This program is based on three fundamental principles that explain all human feelings, behavior and experiences. These principles are called Mind, Thought and Consciousness.

This principle-based psychology goes by different names internationally, but the use of the title “Health Realization” has become widespread in the United States and especially the San Francisco Bay Area. Santa Clara County’s Department of Alcohol and Drug Services was first introduced to the Principles in 1994 and expanded its participation through a series of comprehensive 30-hour trainings and a training-of-trainers program led by Roger Mills, Ph.D., of the Health Realization Institute.

In 1996, DADS formed its own “Health Realization Services Division” (HRSD) to provide Principles-based services to clients and to train drug and alcohol professionals and others both within county government and in the human services community in the Principles. Since then, the division has expanded rapidly – with the support of the County Board of Supervisors, enthusiastic clients and staff . Today, there are three full-time staff positions and DADS contracts with 11 individuals certified by DADS as Principles based trainers. They provide the many principles-based classes and training programs throughout the human services system in Santa Clara County.

In 2003, this county program dedicated to teaching the Principles provided upwards of 44 classes per week to clients, the public and professionals in corrections, education, juvenile justice, and drug and alcohol recovery and community settings. In addition, the Division is providing professional development programs for individuals working in community and clinical settings who want to teach an understanding of the Principles to their clients.

### **What is a 3 Principles Training**

This approach is based on the understanding that all human beings operate from 3 basic principles of Mind, Thought and Consciousness. We all have access to a state of mind that is insightful, creative, productive, wise and healthy. This state of mind is the “background” or “default setting” for all human minds, a resource each person is born with and can never lose. We call this state of mind “innate mental health.”

On a practical basis, innate health is the human mind at its most relaxed, a condition some might call a “quiet mind,” “being in the flow,” or “presence.” From innate health come solutions to life’s problems, higher overall functioning, unconditional love, innate self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, well being and gratitude.

If nothing were “added” to the human mind, human beings would operate from innate health and healthy psychological functioning throughout their lives. However, because humanity has been gifted with the three psychological principles of Mind, Consciousness and Thought, humans create their own personal, or separate realities and the full range of human feelings, emotions, reactions and behaviors.

The Principle of “Mind” is defined as the formless, creative intelligence and energy of, and behind, life. “Consciousness” is our ability to be aware of a reality (awareness) and also our potential to understand how reality is created via our thoughts. “Thought” is *all* mental activity, and the source of all feelings and actions. “Thought” is what human beings use to create reality. It is the paintbrush of life, which we as artists use to determine what we create.

When people begin to understand the Principles, they begin to understand that what they are experiencing moment to moment is simply being brought to them by what they are thinking in the moment. They begin to understand that what they are feeling and experiencing is simply Thought.

From this understanding, people become less overwhelmed by negative emotions because “understanding” is a naturally wiser state of mind. Thus, a person shifts from thinking the world is “out to get” them, to understanding that they have simply created a mood in the moment from Thought – from their personal judgments and perceptions of life.

Unlike cognitive psychology, principles-based teachers do not “work” with people’s thinking. There is no attempt to either change, analyze, or “re-frame” it. Rather, the goal is to help people understand the *function* of Thought or how the Principles of Mind, Thought and Consciousness operate to create our every experience. The more people understand the function of the Principles in life, and the more they understand how *everyone* is operating from Thought, the less reactive they are to their own thoughts. Understanding or insights about the source of one’s experience as coming from Thought creates change in the individual. No one can predict when or how this will happen. Insights cannot be made to happen. They occur when we are relaxed and reflective.

Finally, as an educational approach, one of the primary tenets is the importance of what is called “the health of the helper.” Counselors and teachers are often struggling with their own personal insecure, frustrating and judgmental thinking about clients, students or themselves. Therefore, the first job of the “helper” is to gain some degree of understanding about the Principles for him/herself. The degree to which a helper or teacher is able recognize and drop personal, non-constructive and insecure thinking, is the degree to which that “helper” will impact his/her students or clients.

### **Connecting With Others**

Two key terms used in this report are “rapport” and “listening.” Rapport is a feeling state that is warm, caring and connected, and in which both teacher and student are accessing their calmer, wiser state of mind. It is a pre-requisite for effective teaching.

Listening serves to increase rapport and helps students settle down and feel safe. Listening is done from a quiet, clear mind that is not busy with relating, assuming, judging, labeling, distraction or trying to remember good listening skills! “Quiet listening” is another term for listening, and is “slipped into” rather than worked for. In this calmer state of mind, students can hear what is being said or taught. In this calmer state of mind, both students and teacher can hear his/her own wisdom.

This type of listening also enables the teacher to understand how a student sees life. The teacher can begin to understand the student’s “reality.” This helps a teacher understand the student’s behavior because the teacher can now see why it makes sense for the student to do what she does. It allows the teacher to teach in a laser like fashion focusing in on what will be most meaningful for the student.

### **The Trainers**

The trainers, Cathy, Ami, Carlos and Gabriela were selected for their understanding of and experience teaching the Principles as well as for their experience working with teenagers and educators. Despite what has been written previously about personal understanding, these trainers, as human beings, also had much to learn at Camden. Overall, each trainer’s absolute conviction in the innate health and wisdom within themselves,

within the teachers, staff, and students, indeed within *all* human beings, laid the foundation for the success of the project.

## **Camden School**

At the outset of the program in 1998, Camden staff and teachers demonstrated a great deal of sarcasm, negativity and hopelessness about their students. According to the lead teacher on site, the school was “a hostile environment. There were gang activities, fighting, tagging, destruction of the classrooms and bathrooms, disrespect toward staff, tardiness and absenteeism, drug use and drug dealing.”

Alternative schools can develop insular cultures, in which teachers and staff see their sites as “war zones.” According to Jim Baker, even police officers involved in gang intervention programs had “given up” on working at the school saying they were not given enough respect by students

The trainers were warned that students would steal our belongings, and hassle us at home if we gave out our numbers or told them where we lived. Teachers and staff shared dramatic stories illustrating how “bad” the kids were. It was generally believed we would not be able to make much of a difference for the kids or even for staff. While attitudes varied from teacher to teacher, burnout was obviously encroaching. One of the more optimistic teachers swore that if we could make a difference for his students, he would crawl on his knees from San Jose to Santa Barbara.

The Camden student body was comprised of youth that had been expelled from mainstream schools. Many had criminal convictions or faced criminal charges. A large proportion (about one third) of students had been removed from their birth families by social services or law enforcement agencies, and were sometimes hundreds of miles from their hometowns. They lived in group homes, foster homes or at the county children’s shelter. Thirty to 40 percent of the population was classified as “special education,” and faced severe learning challenges. Because of their court cases, their family situations and/or their own emotional difficulties, the student population at alternative schools is very transient. This had a negative impact on the overall stability at the school.

The first day of our project at the school, Fall 1998, as Cathy and Ami walked onto campus, a student peered at us from under the hood of his sweatshirt and told us to “get out of my school!” That was our introduction to the kids that year! Later in the year, we would get to know this student as “Fish,” a shy, troubled kid with a heart of gold.

### **Project Goals**

Our goal as trainers was to help staff and students recognize the common sense and goodness (“innate mental health”) they each had within them, and recognize the same resource in each other. Our “strategy” was to share the Principles so that each person would begin to understand that he or she created a unique personal reality from Thought that comprised how they viewed themselves and the world – and, as a result, how they behaved in the world.

This understanding would then create more compassion for others. Staff and students would begin to understand more clearly that people around them were not “out to get to them.” They would begin to understand that everyone is simply reacting to their own version of reality based on past beliefs and habits of thought. Additionally, they would begin to understand that any reaction another student or staff member had to some situation was simply created *by that person’s own thoughts*. Thus they would not take things as personally, or react with hostility. As people calmed down, the overall school climate would become more calm, positive and conducive to learning.

### **Phase One: Listening (Intake) and Learning**

The first year, the trainers at Camden were Cathy Casey and Ami Mills. We scheduled twice weekly classes for all students at the school. These classes were held in regular classrooms during normal class time. Staff sessions were scheduled every other week for an hour-and-a-half after school, during minimum days. Cathy and I conducted all of the classes the first year. There was minimal teaching as we spent most of the time listening to and learning about their worlds. This “strategy” was not planned but was just how things happened at Camden.

We observed the problems and difficulties students and faculty faced in their day-to-day school and personal lives. We were impacted by the culture of the school; we were able to see areas in which teachers and staff

truly wanted to change and also where they got caught up in judgmental thinking about students and each other.

While discipline issues are mostly non-existent in working with adults, they are a major concern for schools. Teens often test adults to see where the limits are with classroom behavior. Teens also are in a naturally energetic, rebellious phase of life, in which they are feeling out the boundaries of society's restrictions versus their individual thoughts and impulses. The desire to impress peers with humor or acts of rebellion is also common among teens. "At risk" youth often are involved in the most extreme phases of all these natural teenage impulses.

By not judging or reacting to what the kids were doing, by establishing rapport and listening quietly we were able to "slip into" profound moments with the teenagers which enabled us to make points about Thought. It was always about being patient and waiting for "teachable moments," when the students' thinking had "played itself out," and calmed down as a result of not being judged or reacted to.

Cathy was very clear about not wanting to "manage" students' behavior, knowing that when the feeling in the room was right, the kids' innate ability to listen and pay attention would surface. Ami came from a background of working with teenagers in classroom settings, and her sense was that students needed some boundaries. It was therefore a time for the trainers to learn about each other and how to work together.

This first year, working with students was about gaining rapport, listening to the kids and also learning how to "do discipline," and draw boundaries in an impersonal way. Because the kids would act out in ways that were often very negative or confrontational, we saw how our own personal thinking was sometimes in fear of how the kids would *react* to discipline.

However, *there are no set rules in a Principles based class* except to listen for wisdom in the moment. Sometimes discipline is appropriate, needed and even *wanted* by a student; and sometimes what a student needs instead is more listening, a chance to blow off steam. What worked above all was maintaining a neutral and loving stance toward all students, no matter what their behaviors, even if we were enforcing a school rule. After a few months of teaching, one morning we walked in to the class to hear a student say, "These are the ones that care about us."

The first year our most successful teaching occurred in the classroom in which the teacher had already established a high level of rapport and positive discipline with his students. This teacher had a lot of interest in our work and in seeing that his students learned what we were sharing. He stayed in the classroom while we conducted our sessions and reinforced what we taught when we were gone from the classroom. As a result, teaching and learning went into great depth in this class and discipline issues were minimal.

One student in particular saw Thought so deeply, she transformed from school bully to the school peer counselor for our program. This girl, "Angie" had been involved in gangs and fought all the time. At the end of the year, she had applied to and was accepted to a junior college. Contacted two years later, Angie is in college and doing well.

"I got sent to Camden when I was doing crank. I was dysfunctional! I was mean. I was cold-hearted," she recalls. "Nothing else had worked for me. I was in anger management and gang intervention, and all that stuff, but it was at Camden that I changed. You shook me up and I started to think. In the class, we were talking about how it's just in our minds and how we can accomplish things, but *we* are our own barriers. We grew up in a certain way, but we can change by changing our minds. Now I get along with my mom ... My whole perspective in life changed after I got my mind together."

The level of rapport teachers shared with their students greatly impacted the overall feeling in the room and the impact of *our* teaching. Not surprisingly, a teacher's interest in and support for our program also impacted our ability to connect with students. In classrooms with less supportive environments, teaching came along more slowly. It was obvious that everyone in the classroom was important to the project.

Toward the end of the first year, we organized a separate "Leadership" class for students, away from their regular classes. This group became very large quickly. Though the class was rambunctious at times, we were able to gain a great deal of rapport with this group and really start to learn how to work with this population.

## Approach toward Students

As trainers, our approach with the students was totally reliant on our grounding in the Principles and our faith in their innate health. Being human, we did, at times, get into judgmental thinking about the kids and their behavior (as well as about our *own* behavior). However, most of the time we could look past their actions and behaviors and stay connected to our certainty that each child had access to a resource that was not ours to give or control or “make happen.”

Similarly, we had no “agenda” for the kids in terms of behavioral improvement, goals or objectives. We were not there to get them out of gangs, get them to stop doing drugs, get better grades or stay “in their programs.” Our goal was simply to connect with them on a human-to-human level and re-assure them that they did have wisdom, the ability to learn common sense and love within them. What they did with that was certainly up to them. When we could, we taught.

We tried to avoid what trainer Cathy Casey called “urgency managing urgency,” – or reacting to students’ personal thinking with our own personal thinking!

“It was all about not making meaning about how they were presenting,” said Cathy. “It’s about not trying to control and manage the kids even though we had a lot pressure to do that [from staff]. We had to really see past all the traditional ways of being with students. Kids have innate self-control, innate wisdom. To stick by that knowing took a lot of trust and faith ... Then, the kids finally started to relax and stop doing all the bizarre things.”

Most effective was giving the kids respect as human beings, listening, being curious about their lives and worlds, *liking* them, and holding them up to certain positive expectations in a loving, sometimes firm, and unafraid manner.

One day in one of our most challenging classes, I walked in and the atmosphere was quiet. This did not mean that the students were ready to sit and listen, however! This population in particular can go into a lot of negative, personal thinking when there is a sense they are “being taught” or are expected to learn something.

Rather than stand at the front of the room, I sat down at one of the desks, and started chatting with some of the students about where my husband was from (Israel) and where that was. Pretty soon, the kids were up at the map, picking out countries, talking about Antarctica and penguins and past family trips (some had missed out on because of their court cases). In the midst of all this, I asked them about learning and a number of them jumped in with comments about how they couldn't learn certain subjects, or how they had been told they were bad learners.

I then pointed out to them how they had just learned some geography, how they were learning all the time: either from their friends (how to do bong hits, how to tag) or from a teacher (math, English). I talked about all they had learned before they got to school: how to talk, how to walk, how to get dressed. Therefore by just simply "hanging out" with the kids and allowing them to remain relaxed and open up, we had created a teachable moment. In that moment I was able to share some facts about their natural capacity for constant learning, their innate mental health, and how they innocently got in the way of that process by "thinking" learning was hard.

"Our *hope* about the kids was unshakable," said trainer Gabriela Maldonado, "and I think that's what caused them to gravitate to us. We perceived them as okay and capable and so they could start to believe that about themselves."

### **Working with Staff**

While our certainty in the psychological innocence and health of the students was quite clear for us, that certainty sometimes wavered in the face of some *faculty* behaviors. "The teachers, actually, were harder than the kids for me," said Cathy. "The key was my own grounding and seeing the innocence in them [when they were complaining about students.]"

What was clear to us about the students at Camden was not as clear, at first, to most teachers and staff. Over time the teachers had innocently built up a lot of thinking about their charges. Incidents from the past, as well as their attachment to their role as teachers and to certain expectations regarding outcomes for the students made them seem at times resigned, "hardened" and without compassion.

Staff members did care a great deal for some students while mentally writing off others. We saw that just as with the students, it would not have been helpful to hammer on staff thinking or behavior and how they were “wrong” about the kids. Rather than make staff feel wrong, we pointed to their positives and tried to help them connect with their own well being and an understanding of the Principles.

“They had a lot of judgment about kids and they didn’t connect that their experience of the kids was coming from them [from their own thinking]. Until they could see that piece, they were constantly in judgment and reaction,” Cathy recalled.

It took almost two years for the staff to come out of reactive thinking about the kids and to start to understand how the Principles work. Our approach, led by Cathy, was to not address student issues at first. The teachers had too much on it. Rather we would point teachers back to the very simple fact that each of them created their reality from Thought. Slowly, the focus went off of re-hashing problems and into learning more about the Principles.

“They first saw it in their personal lives. They saw they had less stress. They started to slowly shift ... One day, I showed up and there was no talk about the kids! They wanted to talk about the principles. They actually requested that, and I knew the tide had turned.”

The going was slow and involved a great deal of rapport and listening with staff. “I had to keep clearing my mind to see where my personal thinking was about how they were with the kids,” Cathy said.

All the program trainers found that judgment and blame came up much more around teachers and staff than kids. Our remedy for this was to do a self-check and to take a look at how we had started to judge the teachers versus seeing their behaviors from neutral. We were compassionate with ourselves in this, simply noticing and not judging our *own* thoughts. Little by little, our thinking would clear.

Above all, we worked to maintain rapport with every member of the staff, offering observations only when we were coming from “neutral.” The added payoff at the end of the program was a connection and friendship with staff and faculty that continues to this day. It is interesting to note that adults are just as resistant to “forced learning” as are teenagers. Our

approach toward both staff and students at Camden was essentially the same as we found resistance in both groups!

### **Phase Two: Teaching**

Our second year at Camden saw a continuation of the Leadership Class, which we separated into a girls and boys group, and kept much smaller than the original group. The second year Gabriela Maldonado, Principles trainer on staff with DADS came to work with Ami with the students, and Cathy Casey took over as sole trainer for teachers and no longer worked with students.

While we were still doing a great deal of intake, this year we were also to do more teaching. We talked about how Thought also creates emotions. This was particularly helpful when new students came to the campus and all kinds of rumors, suspicions and conflicts arose. In one case, a “new girl” and one of the senior girls exchanged words over a burrito at the lunch truck. Tensions ran so high that the girls – along with their respective “camps” – would not come to the class at the same time. At the suggestion of a teacher, we brought the girls and their friends together and asked them to share their perceptions of the situation and to engage in quiet listening as each spoke in turn.

Based on the very different views each girl and each of her friends shared about the situation, we were able to teach about the principle of Thought and how we each construct a separate reality: how we each can see a situation differently and how for each of us the way we see it looks real. The two girls stayed together in the room when everyone else left and continued to share and listen. Their troubles were then laid to rest.

This kind of facilitated conversation occurred spontaneously from time to time at Camden and was helpful in moving students past obstacles with one another, and even with teachers. In one classroom one day, the tension between the students and the teacher was so great nothing could move forward until such a conversation, sensitively orchestrated, with some coaching about listening, took place.

In the boys leadership group, conversations often became very profound. One boy, “Mark,” whose claim to fame was burning down several acres of grassland near his hometown, started to see how his partially self-imposed label of “pyromaniac” was Thought. Toward the end of a one-

on-one session with Mark, he became very quiet and tears began to well in his eyes. When asked if anything was wrong, he said, "I haven't felt connected to anyone like this in a long, long time."

Gabriela had a similar experience with this student. During one leadership class, he started going into detail about his pyromania and cruelty to animals, attempting to freak everyone out. "But after he heard the Principles, he started listening more and more," said Gabriela. When they met one on one, Gabriela got curious about this boy's logic. Why did he constantly talk about his pyromania and strange behaviors?

"He explained how he had created the pyromania and the 'crazy' act because he had been in and out of so many institutions with so many dysfunctional people around him that he felt he would be protected by this façade. However, he was now seeing how it was his own thinking that did this – it wasn't real."

"It was amazing for me to see that he could articulate that so well. The lesson for me was you just never know why a behavior happens or how it makes sense [to someone] ... You can't judge it. His health surprised me in a way I could not imagine, which gives me hope even in extreme cases."

We noticed that Mark would gravitate to us whenever we were around because we saw and trusted something in him, behind the mask. This felt good and safe to him. As he spent more time with us, he started to let go of the thinking that had actually been making his life harder.

Another student who constantly referred to himself as "bad," and as having done "bad things," also gravitated to us. Although as far as we know, this student did not graduate, he did two more remarkable things. He severed his connection to gangs and got a job: two things he had told us time and time again that he could not do. He still phones from time to time to check in and say hello.

Our whole approach with him was to remain convinced of his innate health and wisdom – something he did not believe in and argued against at first. Neither did we "push" for a certain course of action for him other than to support his own efforts.

“Each kid’s success is different and might not be what we expect, but it is totally great [for them.] You don’t have to shame them. You don’t have to be the conscience of the kid. Deep inside they know what’s right and what’s right for *them*,” says Gabriela. “From the outside, it can look so hopeless and sometimes I would think, ‘This isn’t working,’ But there’s a greater wisdom beyond our own thoughts ... We need to be attentive to that.”

Some students at Camden simply needed to hear about their own health and goodness and potential. Almost *all* needed to be listened to. Other students were able to learn a lot about the Principles and see how they shifted in and out of a quiet state of mind into agitated “personal Thought.” Some kids, like Angie, really took off with what they were learning about Thought, and were able to share what they had learned with others.

After two years, we were hearing things from the student class evaluation, such as:

- \* “It helped me deal with stress problems.”
- \* “It helped me to pay more attention and not joke around.”
- \* “You can learn a lot about yourself and your thoughts.”
- \* “When I am about to get mad, I don’t let it get to me as much as before ... The way you *take* a rude gesture is how you’re going to react.”
- \* “It helps you clear your head.”
- \* “It helped me look at life differently ... I actually do my work by looking at it from a different angle.”
- \* “I would talk about my problems and they understood exactly where I was coming from ... They were really open, and that’s a good thing.”
- \* “It helped me with family problems at home. . . This class made me speak up in class and everywhere ... I do more work in class because they showed me I could be something better. They inspired me.”
- \* “I was really mean to other girls [and this helped me] ... I can do my work without worry.”
- \* “It got me out of a very big problem ... [What was most meaningful to me was:] The way Gabby and Ami treated me ... It’s cool to know people care that much about you when they really don’t have to.”

### **Training Teachers**

In the third year of the project, Gabriela and I moved back into the regular classrooms at the request of teachers who felt all the kids should participate in the program. Camden staff and the program trainers also decided jointly that the teachers would begin to help us teach in their classrooms. The idea was to move the trainers out of the school at the end of the year, having “planted a seed” that would grow on its own. The bi-monthly staff sessions with Cathy continued.

This year saw the most dramatic shifts in staff view toward the students. It also saw a shift in their abilities to work together with minimal conflict. “I always had a tendency to put meaning into other people’s actions,” one aide said, “but with the classes, [I learned] to stop and think: ‘You know what? I don’t really know what’s going on with them ...’ So I was able to not take things so personally ... I was able to communicate better.”

As weekly visitors to the school, we noticed that teachers were much less sarcastic about the kids and seemed less burnt out and more positive about their jobs. Classroom atmospheres were calmer and overall, the school campus had become a more pleasant environment for everyone.

“The atmosphere was a lot calmer, everybody was calmer. It made everything smoother, and we were able to work together easier, to give each other space or help each other along. There were less incidents, less tension.”

In a Principles based program, it is expected that some individuals will naturally see the Principles more quickly or more deeply than others. Everyone starts at a different place and has his or her own journey. This was true at Camden. Out of six staff members who regularly attended the staff sessions, probably five seemed to really get something, if not a great deal, out of the program – some of those more profoundly than others. Nonetheless, there was a correlation between the level of understanding a teacher or staff member had about the Principles and their ability to function from a neutral and compassionate stance toward themselves and others.

“There was a lot of depression, and distress [at the beginning of the project]. A one shot deal wouldn’t have done the trick,” recalled Cathy. However, “toward the end [of the project], the feeling of cooperation, the overall feeling in the room [with staff at HR sessions] was almost indescribable.”

As their understanding deepened, some staff were able to help teach about the Principles both directly in the classroom, and indirectly in one-on-one conversations with students. “When students were getting into distractions,” said one staff member, “we were able to direct them to their thinking and help them stop thinking about something, or at least realize that their thinking is too ‘way out there’ at the moment, in a place where they can’t turn it off, and then we can help them to take a time out.”

Participation of the teachers in helping to teach the Principles varied widely. In one classroom, the teacher was so enthused he conducted most of the classes with little assistance from us. In another, the teacher would “jump in” from time to time and help teach but otherwise stayed in the room to help mainly with class discipline. In a third, the teacher seemed less enthusiastic about the program and mostly let the trainers run the show, often leaving the classroom.

We found the most successful forum to be the one in which the teacher supported the trainers by helping to maintain a learning atmosphere and “jumped in” occasionally to teach. Here, the students’ learning was very profound, and rapport between trainers and kids was highest. On a hand-written evaluation, one of the kids in this class wrote, “[This program] made me feel good about myself, and [I learned] to be nicer to other people ... This program is just perfect.”

### **Student Evaluations**

At the end of our third year, we gave evaluation forms to *all* the students at the school. Generally, more consistent contact with the program and trainers meant more learning for and enthusiasm from students. Our highest evaluations came from students who had been at the school consistently for a while. They also came from the two classes in which teachers were most supportive of the program.

Students were asked how much the class had helped them with friends, parents, teachers, grades ... and what they felt of the class overall. They were asked to circle numbers from 1-5 to indicate how much they felt “helped” by or enjoyed the class. Of 35 total completed surveys, roughly 34 percent were almost entirely positive in both number rankings and comments. Another 34 percent were “medium,” in rankings. About 31 percent were more negative in rankings.

Surveys with this population are somewhat problematic, as literacy skills are very low for some students. Often, low number rankings did not coincide with positive written comments. A more accurate picture of the impact of the program might come from standardized Friedman well-being scales administered to students before, and at the end of the third year of the project. These have not yet been analyzed. Unfortunately, because of the transitory and far-flung nature of the student population, it is difficult to measure impacts for this group. The need for a well-designed and administered research project is glaring.

Among the students' evaluation comments from year three:

- "It helps me catch myself when I get angry ... [I learned] how I can change my thinking and feelings."
- "[The trainers] are really nice people and they help you with a lot of problems you have."
- "It made me open up, because back then I was shy and quiet. [This program] made me think about everything and I thank you guys ... I hope you liked working with us."
- "It helped me realize I can control how I feel and how I act by my thoughts ... keep going and doing just what you are doing."
- "This was cool and it wasn't boring."
- "It helped me to see the good side of myself ... [The most meaningful part to me] was *love*."
- "Now I can breathe and realize that being angry is nothing but a thought ... It helped me stay focused on school work [and] now I'm a student. The most meaningful thing to me was it [made] me think about positive stuff ... You guys are the best."
- "I think real good before I act on things."
- "I [used to get] mad and really crazy, but now I really don't get mad."
- "I learned to deal with my mind for [illegible] way of thinking, and to be in control of my actions."
- "It's good to know that I could control my thoughts."
- "It helped me control my thoughts ... It helped me deal with my school problems."
- "It helped me and taught me things I didn't know ... It teaches you good information."
- "This class is interesting conversations that help [you] understand ... [It helped me with school] because it didn't make me so mad to hear anything."

- “This class showed me how to use my mind.”
- “It helped me be more open.”
- “This class was good and fun.”
- “It helped me with my thoughts ... We could talk about anything.”
- “It helped me understand my thoughts.”
- “[What was most meaningful to me was] when you told us that if you are blue, change your thinking in some way. It’s all in your mind.”
- “It helped me to relax ... It calms you down and relaxes you.”

### **Staff Evaluations and Comments**

Written evaluations and comments by staff members reported that for most of them the program made a dramatic impact both personally and professionally. Almost all of the staff reported that they had reduced or eliminated “taking work home” in their thinking, which reduced their feelings of frustration, stress and burnout.

One teacher experienced the death of a parent very differently than he had before. “I was just kind of amazed ... I was a lot calmer about the whole thing.” Another staff member said, “It changed my outlook on life. . . I found myself getting more relaxed, more mellow ... “

Other staff comments included:

“It helped me to look at and deal with situations in different ways ... not to take things so personally and be able to leave the daily drama at work and not take it home and hash it over.”

“Before, I could get pretty hung up on their [the students’] energy. At the end of the day, I could just feel totally burned. I got better at letting the day go, letting go of anxiety. I really noticed the days I was in a good state of mind, the kids would be in a good state of mind, and the opposite was also true ... it made me more open to their side of things.”

“It helped me not take my thoughts so seriously.”

“This class helped me become more aware of how much I over-invested in my thinking, which, in turn, helped me conserve some of that energy ... I view my relationships with other people differently, as I tend to judge people less. “

“[What was most meaningful to me was:] not to take things so personally.”

“I have more fun ... It has helped me not take my thoughts so seriously. The Principles give me a level of compassion (if I’m not totally gripped) when staff or students do not act responsibly.”

Almost all of the staff reported that the classes helped them to “lighten up” around interpersonal conflict. One staff member wrote: “This class enabled me to work more cooperatively with others, as I was able to communicate more effectively.” One teacher who has since been placed in a new school said: “I’m noticing how wired the other teachers are around here ... so I’m requesting meetings now for [this school.]”

“It brought a calmness to the staff, and more understanding about thinking and feeling,” this teacher continued, “As a result, the staff [shifted] into a higher level of understanding, and as a group we were able to deal with situations more effectively.”

Teachers noticed that as their states of mind improved, so did their class atmospheres. “It’s this huge thing of osmosis. It gets into your blood. If it gets into you, it gets into them too . . . Kids feed off the attitude of the staff, as the staff calmed down, the students calmed down. Then, when the kids started getting it (the ideas and concepts), it really calmed the atmosphere down.”

Teachers noticed changes in the students as well. In some classrooms, the changes were more apparent. “There was a lot less conflict in those classes. Those kids were more consistent and more open ... They noticed what was causing conflict and were wanting to make it better.”

“If [the students] listened at all, they left with some kind of understanding,” said one teacher. This teacher, at his new site, is teaching the Principles every day to his new students using a booklet produced for teenagers toward the end of the Camden project, “They come in real wired, and it helps calm them down.”

Almost unanimously, the staff wanted the program to come to the new schools and sites where they were re-assigned at the end of the school year.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Over all the program at Camden was both a challenge and a joy. From the students to the staff, it would have been easy to be intimidated and fooled by the negativity we first encountered. There were definitely days in which each of the trainers wondered if their efforts were worthwhile. But then, just as we were getting frustrated, the staff and students would step up and teach us a thing or two about innate health and the nature of wisdom.

Given everything described so far, as well as comments from students, teachers and staff, there are a number of ways a program on the Principles at a new school might be designed differently for greater impact.

First, before moving into the classrooms, it would be beneficial to take more time with intake and rapport building with faculty to get them “on board” with the program. It seems intrusive to go into someone’s classroom to teach when he or she is ambivalent about the program. Some of the teachers said they initially felt pressured into both attending the Core Courses and the on-site staff sessions, although both were voluntary. One suggestion was to “be invited” into teachers’ classrooms by the teachers themselves once they have been exposed to the program. Principal Baker suggested the Core Course be offered after staff has some exposure to the program on site and may then be more personally enthused to participate.

It also would have been helpful to provide an orientation for the trainers to learn about the school rules and disciplinary procedures as well as the culture and informal climate of the school. This would have helped to maintain consistency for students between Camden staff and the project trainers. In years two and three, the trainers came to participate in some official student disciplinary procedures. The incidents helped the students see that their safety and a good learning atmosphere was a concern of everyone at the school.

Another issue was the “disconnect” between the trainers who were working with students and the trainer working with the staff. It would have been helpful to have them participate in each other’s sessions so trainers could be connected with both groups.

Program trainers are accustomed to teaching in the moment without much, if any preparation. However, it would have been better to spend more time with the teachers to help them prepare for the class and not expect them to be able to immediately know how to teach in the moment. The experience for the teachers would have been more positive. Without this kind of support, they at times floundered with the material, or, if we were not in the class, skipped the piece on the Principles altogether. "I could have used more of a transition between me observing you two, and then me just going in and teaching," said one teacher.

Similarly, we found that one-on-one sessions with students were *invaluable* in helping us connect with "problem" kids, or to help a curious student go deeper with her learning. This time was more "found" than actually built in to the program. Future programs should include a fair amount of this kind of time. It would also be helpful to provide more time for planning and meetings among the trainers outside of school. Meeting monthly or even every other month would have been helpful.

Teachers also felt that having written materials would have been helpful. "Educate the staff first, give them materials and they'll have a better understanding of where you're coming from and where you're going." Materials in general would have been helpful in the classrooms, too, where students who are not ready to pay attention to lectures or discussions might be willing to settle down and read something. Kids like games and activities, and a handbook of suggested activities and exercises might be helpful as well.

Another issue arose when DADS announced plans to pull out of the school during the second year. The project was intended to become self-sustaining. However, the announcement caught staff off guard and was upsetting. One staff member said he and his co-workers felt that were being abandoned just as they were starting to catch on to the understanding. However, even after staying a third year, only one teacher had become comfortable teaching the Principles (and he has gone on to continue to do so). Whether this points to the need for longer programs, or simply *better tailored* programs in the future remains to be seen.

### **Other Issues**

A short-lived parenting class implemented the second year was aborted when not enough parents were showing up to make it worthwhile.

Although the few parents and guardians who did come benefited a great deal from the class, a new approach to a parenting class might be to hold it during the day, as suggested by Jim Baker, since many of the parents of these kids do not have jobs. However, the experience of most schools in general is that it is very hard to get parents to come to parenting classes. Gabriela suggested once-a-quarter parent meetings with a specific focus and topic.

Because a number of the students lived in group homes, a missing piece was contact with group home staff members. The attitudes and actions of group home counselors have a huge impact on students that often carries over onto school grounds. As with parents, attempts to talk with group home program staff during the third year of our project were not successful. This could have been in part because there is a tremendous turnover rate among group home staff.

Overall the experience of the project at Camden was gratifying for almost everyone involved. It is impossible to place a value on increased peace of mind, even for just one human being. According to the evidence in this report, the project had wide-reaching impacts for everyone from the school principal to the most "difficult" of both faculty and youth. The joy of working at Camden was in the sense that seeds planted there, for teachers, staff and students would flower in unpredictable, but beautiful ways further down the road. It is hoped this report might help that to happen.