

Council for Insight, Compassion and Resilience



Fidelity Report

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July 2022

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Introduction

Center for Council provides training and support for incarcerated individuals in the practice of council, which fosters respectful, authentic and nonjudgmental communication and encourages self-regulation, tolerance, accountability and compassion. Participants are trained to facilitate council sessions for their peers, empowering them to become positive agents of change, first on the prison yard, and then in other areas of their lives.

Center for Council first implemented the Council for Insight, Compassion, and Resilience (CICR) program, formerly known as the Inmate Council Program, at Salinas Valley State Prison in October 2013. Since then, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) has funded the replication of the CICR at 28 additional prisons in California. The CICR is a mindfulness-based intervention where inmates meet weekly to facilitate the practice of council. Sometimes referred to as a “listening circle,” council utilizes a center, a circle and a talking piece to create an intentional space in which to share stories. The practice of deep listening without judgment fosters an

atmosphere of respect for oneself and for others and promotes empathy, dissolving barriers to cooperation, understanding and community. The program equips participants with tools for self-awareness and self-regulation, so as to develop accountability for their past behavior and its impact on others, and to support successful re-entry and re-integration into their communities upon release. Findings from a previous outcome evaluation of this program has shown it to be associated with a reduction in anger/aggression and increases in empathy, resilience, and social connectedness among participants who completed the program.



Process Evaluation Overview

In March 2022, Center for Council implemented their CICR program at Chuckawalla Valley State Prison. The

purpose of this report is to present findings from a process evaluation of the CICR program that was conducted for the period covering March 2022 to June 2022. A process evaluation is designed to assess whether program activities have been implemented as designed. It is distinct from an outcome evaluation, which measures the effects of a program. As part of the process evaluation, the following fidelity dimension/indices were assessed: dosage, adherence, and quality of delivery. Dosage was determined based on participant attendance. Adherence to the curriculum was determined based on scores calculated from a fidelity assessment form completed by CICR facilitators after each session and collected by staff. Quality of delivery was determined based on feedback provided during a focus group session and CDCR feedback forms.

Dosage

Figure 1 presents the number of participants who participated in the first five sessions following the CICR training workshop. The findings indicate that there was high attendance for these group sessions, with 100% in attendance for three of the sessions and 92% in attendance for two of the sessions.

Adherence

Adherence to the program was assessed for 11 sessions that were conducted following the completion of the CICR training workshop. A fidelity assessment was created for CICR facilitators to indicate whether nine core elements were included in each group session. A raw fidelity adherence score was calculated for each group session, with scores ranging from 0 (low adherence) to 9 (high adherence). A percentage score was also calculated for each session based on the total number of elements present during the group session. A percentage score between 85% to 100% indicated high adherence to the program, a percentage score between 70% to 84% indicated moderate adherence, a percentage score below 70% indicated low adherence.

Table 1 presents the percentage of sessions that included each of the nine core elements. The findings indicate that all core elements were included in each of the 11 group sessions. The mean fidelity score across sessions was 9, which indicates that the CICR group sessions at Chuckawalla Valley State Prison were being facilitated with a high degree of adherence to the program.

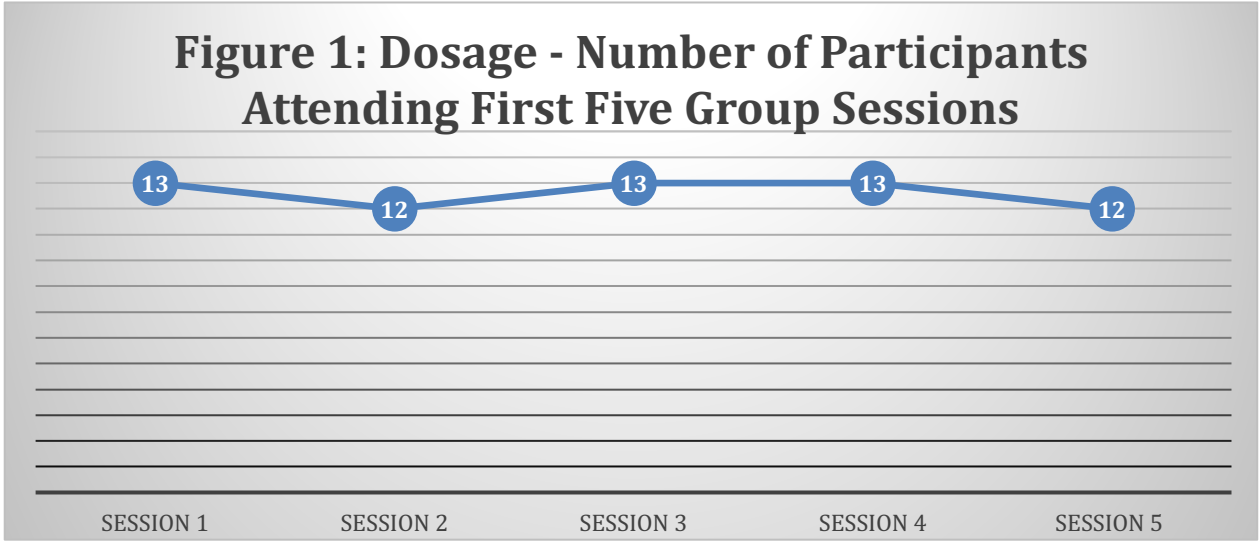


Table 1: Percentage of Sessions that Included Each Element (N=11)

Core Elements	%
LIMINALITY: Created a “special sense” of time and space that set the time apart for council to occur.	100
CONTAINER: Council was created mindfully, with a good circle, an intentional center, and room for everyone.	100
FOCUS: Intention for the session was a clear invitation to drop into the practice of council offered.	100
GROUNDING: The group was offered a chance to settle and pay attention to breath, body, and thoughts.	100
THRESHOLD: The beginning was marked and clarified with dedications as the group stepped into council.	100
PROCESS: The council form used was clarified and talking pieces were used to indicate who’s turn it was.	100
PROMPTS: The invitation to share was clear and unforced and understandable prompts were offered.	100
WITNESSING: There was a chance for participants to reflect with a word or more on what they heard and observed.	100
CLOSURE: The ending was made clear, and the council closed in a way that all could participate.	100

Quality of the Delivery

As part of the CARE contract, CIRC participants were asked to rate the program in five domains: learning experience, instructor knowledge, program length, program recommendation, and overall experience. Table 2 presents the mean participant feedback scores for each of the domains, with scores for each domain ranging from 1 (low agreement) to 5 (high agreement).

Table 2: Mean Participant Feedback Rating (N=12)

Program Areas	<i>M(SD)</i>
Program has been a learning experience.	<i>4.7 (0.5)</i>
The program instructor was knowledgeable in the subject.	<i>4.8 (0.4)</i>
The length of the program was sufficient.	<i>4.5 (0.7)</i>
Would recommend this program to others.	<i>4.9 (0.3)</i>
Overall program experience was positive.	<i>4.8 (0.4)</i>

The mean ratings for each domain indicate that participants had a very positive experience in the program. With regards to the learning experience, participants reported on their forms that this program really helped to improve their communication skills through the process of sharing and speaking from the heart. Participants also generally felt that the CIRC trainers were very knowledgeable in Council practice and provided them with the support they needed. Program length had the lowest mean rating, largely because they were rating two components of the CIRC program that includes the 16-hour training workshop and individual group sessions that they facilitate on their own. Generally, participants felt that the length of the training workshop was sufficient. With regard to the group sessions, the participants noted that the individual group sessions will continue even after the contract ends, so the program is still ongoing. However, one participant expressed sadness that the visits from the CIRC trainers would end because he liked the mentorship that the trainers provide. Program recommendation had the highest mean rating with many participants indicating that they have already started recommending this program to others. Overall, the participants feel they have gotten a lot out of this program.

Participant Quote

This program encourages compassionate communication, mindfulness and life altering potential.

A focus group was conducted during the last month of the contract with 12 of the program participants. Findings from the focus group provide further confirmation of the positive impact that the program had on participants at Chuckawalla Valley State Prison. Specifically, focus group participants mentioned that they have seen positive improvement in the following areas:

- Communication (especially active listening)
- Self-expression
- Empathy
- Social connection
- Interpersonal relationships

Participants really appreciated the ability to share freely without feeling judged. While one participant would have liked to have gone deeper with more bidirectional communication that allows for follow-up questions, the other participants thought

that the way the program was set up was just fine. In fact, the majority of participants preferred to share their experiences without follow-up questioning because it allows them to feel heard. One participant emphasized that this group teaches them how to listen, which he believed was the most important element of this group and what separates this group from the other groups offered at the prison.

One issue that was brought up had to do with the scheduling of the program. The time for the group was changed to an earlier time that conflicted with the schedules of a few group members. So those participants were no longer able to attend the groups. Nevertheless, the majority of the participants remained in the group and had plans to continue to do so even after the contract has ended.

Conclusion

Center for Council received funding to implement CICR at Chuckawalla Valley State Prison. In line with CDCR's mission to enhance public safety through rehabilitative strategies that can help incarcerated individuals to successfully reintegrate back into their communities, the program's pedagogy is based on restorative justice principles, requiring participants to take responsibility for their past behavior and the harm caused to their victims, as well as to others impacted (friends, family, community). The sequencing of exercises, activities and prompts expand opportunities to develop participants' emotional intelligence and literacy and offer opportunities for reflecting on accountability. The intention of this format is to develop a deeper awareness of the pain (physical, emotional, psychosocial, and so on) experienced by the participants, as well as all whom they have impacted.

This project was designed as a process evaluation of the CICR program to assess three dimensions of fidelity. The findings from this evaluation indicate that the CICR groups were being delivered with a high degree of adherence to the program and with high rates of attendance. Overall, the findings from the feedback surveys and the focus group session indicate that participants found this program to be very valuable and believed that it has helped them in several areas that are important to facilitating their success in the community. While scheduling conflicts resulted in some participants having to leave the program, the majority have stayed in the program since the beginning and have plans to continue if the institution will allow it. They also hope to be able to train other men on the yard in the practice of council.

Participant Quote

This program has allowed me to share with others, learn about how others feel about a range of issues related to their behavior. It has encouraged me to reflect on a range of rehabilitative issues that are crucial to my becoming a productive citizen upon release.