

Over and Above From the Call of Regular Probation Duty Women As Co-Facilitators of Adolescent Sex Offender Groups

By Darlene Humeniuk

What I Do: I have been the co-facilitator of an offence specific treatment group for low-functioning adolescent males over the past eight years. Through literature research, workshop participation and much networking on my own time I have developed skills and ability to feel confident in using honest and genuine techniques. It requires a different type of comfort level whether discussing terminology such as deviant arousal, frottage, maintenance behaviours, masturbation, relapse prevention plan or bestiality just to name a few.

Why do I do this work? I participate in this type of work with a satisfaction knowing that fewer victims will be subject to sexual abuse. I enjoy seeing the perpetrators work through their issues with our guidance and direction. Assisting them to alleviate some of their pain, grief, anger and frustration provides us with the satisfaction that they are changing. It is a form of prevention, which parallels with the POAO code of ethics and mission statement.

How does the group operate? The weekly outpatient group, operated at a children's mental health center uses an open-ended format allowing members to join anytime or graduate when criteria are met. All members must admit to committing the offence whether charged, sentenced, in custody or without any criminal intervention. The group format is an effective tool because members communicate with each other by example, confrontation or explanation more effectively than through individual counseling. Attentiveness is required to non-verbal reactions, aside from unraveling complex issues including their own victimization, poor coping skills, cognitive distortions through discussion. For example, youths who are aroused or have obvious erections to disclosures or material being discussed should be confronted, using a delicate balance of sensitive interrogation and firm impulse control. We use creative alternatives to talk therapy through techniques using flash cards, theatrical masks, treasure chests and music.

Where are the Challenges for Women as Co-facilitators? In my opinion female co-facilitators should be aware of the following challenges:

- be cognizant of the youth's feelings either positive or negative towards females and towards their female caretakers.
- have an awareness of one's own reactions to continuous exposure to sexual abusive material and images
- have an acceptance of internal conflicts that arise when hearing reports of new offences while the youth is in treatment
- be resistant to adopting the same thinking errors youth use to minimize their attitudes, thoughts and behaviour
- utilize opportunities for supervision and debriefing
- be conscious of the dynamics between male and female co-facilitators and perceptions the youth have about relationships
- advocate for the prevention of sexist, racist and offensive jokes and be aware of the values which they present.