IRB Synopsis

1. The source of my potential subjects is the post-adjudicated juvenile population at the Hays County Juvenile Center here in San Marcos, Texas. These juveniles are both male and female ranging in age from 13 to 17 years. They come from all over the state and cover all ranges of ethnicities. They are medically cleared before being accepted at the facility so are reasonably healthy. All have been sentenced to incarceration for a variety of crimes ranging from sexual offenses, to property crimes, drug offenses, violation of probation, to violent crimes. They come from small rural towns and urban areas. I have chosen this population because I want to try and determine our effectiveness as a facility at rehabilitating our clients. I believe the most effective way to do this is to attempt to measure the change they experience as they move through our program. I want to take these measurements now, while they are at the facility to ease the problems associated with trying to locate individuals after they have left our program as well as get their feedback while the program is still fresh in their memory. We typically have about 20 intakes per month and I hope to measure 3 months' worth of intakes putting the study population around 60 participants. Participants' inclusion will rely upon their intake date and whether they choose to participate.
2. Recruitment of the subjects will be done by myself, the researcher. If their intake date corresponds with my research window then I will pull them out of program within a week of their arrival at the facility and ask them if they choose to participate in the study. In no way will I make this invitation intimidating or insinuate that there will be negative consequences for choosing to participate or favorable treatment from myself or my staff members for choosing to participate. An assent form will be read to them and signed by the cadet should they choose to participate. I will ensure to inform them of the purpose of the research, that their participation is voluntary, meaning that they can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time with no rewards or punishment hinging on their participation, and that all information will remain strictly confidential. Consent has already been granted by Brett Littlejohn, the facility administrator, via a signed letter of consent on Hays County letterhead. Since these juveniles are incarcerated, the facility is the acting guardian. A consent form for each juvenile participating will be also be signed by the facility administrator. The consent and assent forms will be kept for one year after completion of the study then will be destroyed after that time.
3. My methodology for this research project is to measure a variety of rehabilitation variables on a sample of the juveniles participating in the Hays County Juvenile Center post adjudication program. These measurements will be based off of responses to three different self-report surveys, the TCU Client Evaluation of Self and Treatment - intake version (CEST intake), TCU Client Evaluation of Self and Treatment (CEST), and TCU Criminal Thinking Scales (CTS). The responses are based on the Likert scale and range from 1 to 5. These responses will be record on data collection sheets. Only the question number from the survey and the corresponding response number will be recorded on the data collection sheets and not the actual question and response. Additional demographic information to include the juvenile's gender and age will also be recorded on the data collection sheets. Each participating juvenile will be assigned a numerical code and this code will be used in place of their name during the study. This code sheet will remain locked in Dr. Eichler's office at Texas State University and will be destroyed upon completion of the data collection process of the study. Testing will be done at up to three testing intervals. Testing will be done within one week of intake into the program, once again when the juvenile reaches "phase 2" of the program, and once again shortly before release. If a juvenile never reaches "phase 2" but exits the program before hand, then just the intake and release tests will be completed. During the first testing period the juveniles will be asked to complete the CEST-intake and the CTS. For the next two testing periods the juveniles will be asked to complete the CEST and CTS. Each testing interval should take about an hour to complete. Once all data is collected I will run T-tests using SPSS to look for significant levels of change between the variables. The demographic information may be used for later studies to look for correlations between demographic variables and rehabilitation variables of interest. This is the only reason that the demographic information is being recorded. It will not be used for the purposes of this study.
4. The risks associated with this study are minimal. It is possible that answering the questions on the surveys may lead some of the clients to think about painful memories in their past. This could cause slight psychological or emotional distress. The other risk that is maybe more likely is compromise in confidentiality. The likelihood of one of these things happening is relatively slight. The juveniles will be required to remember and discuss events and circumstances in their pasts during the counseling component of the program regardless so the questions I will be asking should not be any more intrusive than those sessions. The difference of course is that those counseling sessions will be conducted under the supervision of a licensed professional, which I am not. The risk of a compromise in confidentiality is minor during the data collection process itself, but highly unlikely after the data collection process is complete. The potential damage that a confidentiality compromise could pose would be minimal as well.
5. During the data collection process the juveniles will be assigned a numerical code in place of their name and this code will be recorded on the top of the data collection sheets. The code sheet will remain locked in Dr. Eichler's office at Texas State University until the data collection process is complete. At the end of the data collection process these code sheets will be destroyed and it will then be impossible to link any of the juveniles back to the study or link any survey responses back to the individual. During the data collection process the data sheets will be secured in a locked file at my personal residence. Should answering the questions on the surveys cause psychological or emotional distress I will refer the youth to their assigned counselor.
6. The direct potential benefits to the juveniles participating in the study is likely fairly minimal. The potential benefits to society I hope are quite high. My vision is that the same program evaluation could be conducted at multiple rehabilitation/incarceration programs and the direct comparison between programs could highlight the more effective programs. Further research could then be conducted to try and determine why some programs may be working better than others. This research could be very helpful to the facility as well. It should demonstrate to administrators and staff how effective we are at promoting change in our clients. Future research looking at correlations between demographic variables and rehabilitation variables of interest could also show administrators what client attributes tend to predict more success in the program. This could be used to determine who is most suitable to take into the program and which type of youth may not benefit from this particular program. This would ensure that we are targeting the populations most likely to be helped by our services.
7. There is no incentive for the juveniles to participate in the study. They will receive no type of extra credit nor any favorable treatment from myself or my staff. Being out of the dorms during the data collection process itself may be the only benefit they will receive as a result of their participation.
8. The risk posed to the research participants is low. The benefit to the research participants is low. The potential benefit to society and the Hays County Juvenile Center hopefully is relatively high.
9. The agency involved with this research will be the Hays County Juvenile Center. No other agencies will be involved. Agency approval has been granted by Brett Littlejohn, the facility administrator.
10. I am a graduate student pursuing a Master's of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies. My studies consist of Criminal Justice, Curriculum and Instruction, and Sociology. This research is directly related with my professional as well as academic interests. My supervising faculty member is Dr. Mathew Eichler.
11. Dr. Eichler approved this research project in the fall of 2010 through OCED 5300.
12. This study has not been reviewed/approved by any other IRB.
13. During the research process Dr. Eichler will have access to my research as well as my independent evaluator, Dr. Wivagg. Once the project is complete I will share my results with some of the faculty of the OCED department as well as with a few of my fellow graduate students. I may also share the results with the HCJC facility administrators, counselors, and/or security staff depending on how significant the findings are. I have no plans to publish my results at this time.