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Issue 2

# Insight:

## Correctional Rehabilitation Research Bulletin

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# **Insight:**

## **Correctional Rehabilitation**

### **Research Bulletin**

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## Foreword



Evidence-based practice is the cornerstone of internationally acclaimed correctional services. Our Department has been making significant strides in rehabilitative services by integrating local innovations with international research and practices, as well as continuously refining our programmes based on local research.

***“What Works: How Research Can Help in Offender Rehabilitation”*** continues to be the theme of this issue. We begin with insights from Professor Patrick LEUNG, our honourable Research Consultant and Research Professor of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, on the continuity and discontinuity of antisocial behaviours and what works to break the vicious cycle in human developmental science. Next, we explore “what works” in our newly launched educational programme, the Ethics College, the Rehabilitation Dog Service and the strength-based youth psychological programme. I am delighted to share these ***rehabilitative services not only support the life transformation of persons in custody but also enhance the well-being of correctional staff.***

I hope this research bulletin provides valuable insights to the field, and fosters professional exchanges and discussions within our Department and among correctional leaders and practitioners. Together, we are committed to establishing a safer and more effective rehabilitative system.

Dr. Yvonne LEE

Senior Clinical Psychologist

Coordinator of Correctional Rehabilitation Research Unit

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# **What Works?**

## **How Research Can Help in Offender Rehabilitation**

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## Article 1

# Continuity, Discontinuity and Turning Points: What Works for Positive Human Development

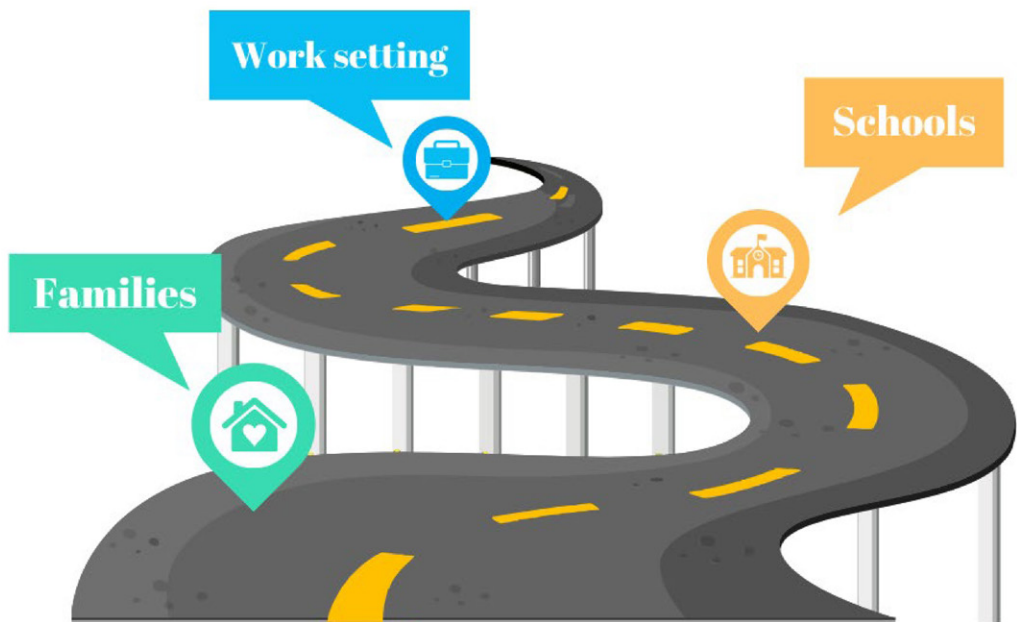


**Professor Patrick W. L. LEUNG**  
**Research Consultant,**  
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In the study of human behaviour development, we find a significant continuity of behaviour from childhood to adulthood. This is not entirely unexpected. Yet, what is intriguing is that we also find discontinuity and turning points in many life stages.

Traditional Chinese folklore wisdom says that our life path is determined to a significant degree very early in our life (i.e. “三歲定八十” which means the character of a person is shaped at a tender age). Empirical longitudinal studies have lent a great deal of support to this saying. Yet, discontinuity and turning points do manifest themselves in parallel. This is because the mechanism of continuity is not a direct impact of a distant past to a remote future. Instead, early past events set off a series of chained behaviour, moving in gradual steps toward a particular pathway of development. For instance, childhood adversities like poverty or an unhappy marriage between parents may disrupt normal parenting. The parents are either too stressed out by poverty or by their marital discord so that they are unable to provide their children with the guidance and affection required. This sets off a downward negative spiral. First, lacking affection from parents will leave the children feeling unhappy, bitter, and angry. Coupled with missing guidance from parents, the children will misbehave impulsively in reaction to their negative moods, including engagement in anti-social behaviour. Furthermore, one main developmental task for every child is schooling, learning both the academic skills to read and write, and the social skills to relate with others. Success with these tasks will give the children the much-needed life skills as well as the self-confidence and self-esteem to face the challenges of growing up. Once again, without parental guidance, including direct involvement and motivational support, it is not easy to cope with the keenly competitive school environment. School

failure may lead to both personal frustration and rejection from others. The children may play truancy, staying away from schools to avoid facing daily failure and rejection. Outside of the schools and homes, they easily fall prey to the triad societies, luring them with money, entertainment, companionship, and employment, etc. In other words, the triad societies are offering them an alternative pathway in life away from the mainstream society, namely, a criminal career. Continuity is thus the result of a series of steps, accentuating in each increasingly defined direction. Various factors intermingle to play a role, including, for example, truancy, cutting short of educational/vocational opportunities, falling out with peers and social support from schools, or impulsive co-habitation with deviant peers met outside of schools which makes marital discord/breakdown more likely, etc.



*Figure 1. Major discontinuity and turning points in human behaviour development*

Yet, there is no absolute continuity or determinism. Each step in one's life, as described above, provides an opportunity for discontinuity and turning points. Let me cite two well-researched examples. After families, schools represent the second social institution which children spend a great deal of time year after year. Despite adversities at home with parents who are stressed out, physically unavailable or even behaviourally abusive, children can find alternative guidance and affection from good teachers at schools. Research has



demonstrated that the good fortune of meeting supportive teachers and peers at schools will introduce discontinuity and constitute a turning point for a different life path. After the school years, the third institution that one spends considerable time on is the work setting. Research has found a significant drop in anti-social behaviour including offending behaviour during early adulthood when an individual enters the job market. Once again, a good fortune entering a stable work setting with supportive bosses and colleagues plus timely on-the-job training constitutes another turning point for discontinuity.

Our current behaviour is an accumulation of our life experiences so far. There is considerable continuity since each step in life leads to the next pointing in a similar direction. Yet, once in a while, an individual has the good fortune entering an environment which offers some very different experiences can shape an alternative life course, bringing discontinuity and turning points. In



*Figure 2. Three broad categories of experiences potentially incur a turning point for positive human development*

As professionals in offender rehabilitation, we will not be passively waiting for the good fortune to bestow on our fellow human beings. Instead, we should proactively intervene to create turning points to re-chart a different life course for a law-abiding lifestyle. Each step in life, as described above, is a potential turning point which we can promote alternatives to effect changes. *Nothing is cast in stone.*

# *Insights*

## **1. Continuity, Discontinuity and Turning Points**

In the study of human behaviour development, empirical longitudinal studies find a significant continuity of behaviour from childhood to adulthood. Yet, what is intriguing is that we also find discontinuity and turning points in many life stages.

## **2. Learning Opportunities, New Network and Positive Self-Esteem**

Three broad categories of experiences potentially incur a turning point for positive human development: (1) those which open up new opportunities or learning such as those potentially encountered at schools or work settings; (2) those which lead to environmental changes bringing new social networks, including mentors, peers, or intimate partners; and (3) those which result in positive self-esteem, self-efficacy or views/expectations from others.

## **3. Create Turning Points for Offender Rehabilitation**

As professionals in offender rehabilitation, we should proactively intervene to create turning points to rechart a different life course for a law-abiding lifestyle.

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## Article 2

# What Works: Improvement in Rehabilitation-related Psychological Attributes among Participants of a Systematic and Recognised Post-tertiary Education Programme Provided in the Ethics College in Adult Correctional Institutions by the Hong Kong Correctional Services Department



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## Objective

The Ethics College provides a one-year full-time Diploma of Applied Education programme for voluntary enrolment by adult persons in custody (PICs). Life-wide learning activities covering career development, sports and arts and national education were carried out, with an aim to help them cultivate positive values and obtain accredited qualifications to prepare for their reintegration into society. This study examines whether the Ethics College would improve participants' psychological attributes in favour of rehabilitation among adult PICs. Measurement includes self-report, staff observations and institutional behaviour (i.e. number of disciplinary violations).

## Part I: Self- reported Psychological Attributes

Target variables were selected based on recent literature on offender rehabilitation, which include:

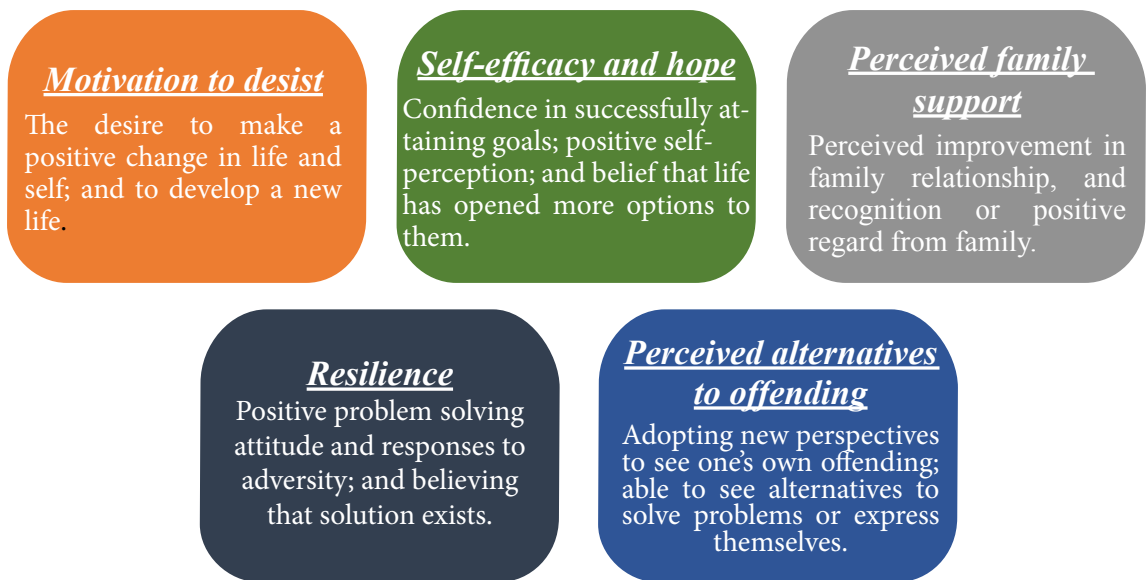


Figure 1. Variables of self-reported psychological attributes among participants

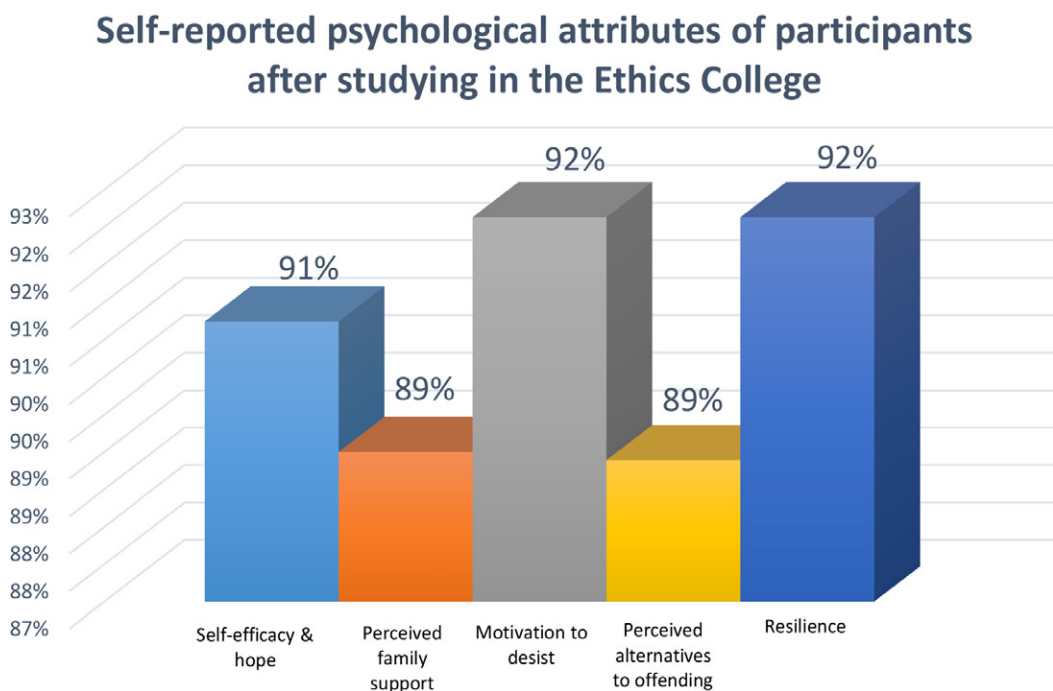
## **Methodology**

The survey form consists of 15 items tapping participants' subjective perception of whether there have been any changes in their psychological attributes after studying in the Ethics College. The responses were tapped with a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from point 1 (this does not describe me at all) to point 5 (this describes me well). Responses with 4 ("this describes me" representing "agree") or 5 ("this describes me well" representing "strongly agree") were classified as an orientation to positive changes.

The survey form was administered to all 72 participants of the Ethics College in Pak Sha Wan Correctional Institution and Lo Wu Correctional Institution. From the survey forms collected, one participant was found to have provided duplicating scores on one item, which was then treated as missing data and was replaced by the mean of other item scores to avoid influencing the results.

## **Results**

Among the 72 participants who completed the survey, there were 57 (79%) males and 15 (21%) females. The mean age was 30.3, ranging from 23 to 58. Simple frequency counts showed that a vast majority reported subjective improvement in all of the five psychological variables under measurement. Among them, 92% reported having a higher motivation to desist, 91% reported higher self-efficacy and hopefulness about the future, 92% reported improved resilience against adversity, 89% perceived higher positive regard and recognition from family, and 89% perceived more alternatives to offending.



*Figure 2. Subjective psychological attributes of participants after studying in the Ethics College*

## Part II: Staff’s Observations and Satisfaction

### Methodology

A total number of 13 correctional staff of the Correctional Services Department and educators from the Hong Kong Metropolitan University (HKMU) (“staff”) have completed a survey on staff’s observations on and satisfaction with participants’ improvement after studying the programme. The survey form, consisting of six items, was administered to three class-teachers, three deputy class-teachers, three disciplinary staff members and four educators from the HKMU. Among the 13 staff members, 9 (69%) of them were males and 4 (31%) were females. The responses were tapped with a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from point 1 (strongly disagree) to point 5 (strongly agree). Each item measures a different aspect of staff’s perceptions of:

- Participants' **learning attitudes** towards the curriculum of the Ethics College;
- Improvement in participants' **discipline and demeanour**;
- Participants' **gratefulness** for having the opportunity to enrol in the programme;
- Participants' aspiration for further **education and employment** in the future;
- **Staff's job satisfaction** in beholding participants' completion of the programme; and
- Improvement in participants' **connection with family**.

*Figure 3. Measures from staff's perspective in evaluating the Ethics College*

The point 4 ("agree") or point 5 ("strongly agree") given for the items were classified as an orientation to a positive impression of the programme.

## **Results**

Results showed that all (100%) staff agreed that the participants had an enthusiastic learning attitude and were more optimistic about their further education and employment opportunities. Besides, 92% agreed that the participants' discipline and conduct had been improved; and 92% agreed that there was improvement in participants' connection and relationship with their family members. Moreover, 92% agreed that the participants were grateful for having joined the programme, and all staff reported greater job satisfaction upon participants' successful graduation.

## Staff's feedback on participants of Ethics College

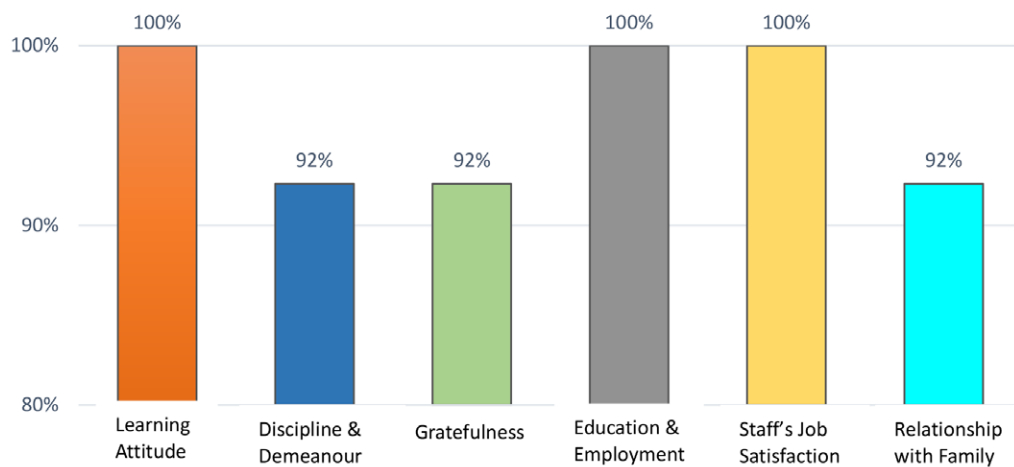


Figure 4. Subjective psychological attributes of participants after attending the Ethics College





# Part III: Institutional Behaviour

## Methodology

Disciplinary records of the 72 participants prior to their participation in the programme (i.e. February 2023 to November 2023) and during the programme (i.e. December 2023 to August 2024) were retrieved from the iCRMS and were compared against each other.

Given that the collected data was not normally distributed, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, a non-parametric statistical test, was used.

## Results

Statistical analysis revealed that the frequency of disciplinary violations was significantly lower during the programme in comparison to that before they joined the programme ( $Z = -2.858$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). The median scores of such frequencies before and during the programme were .28 and .093 respectively.

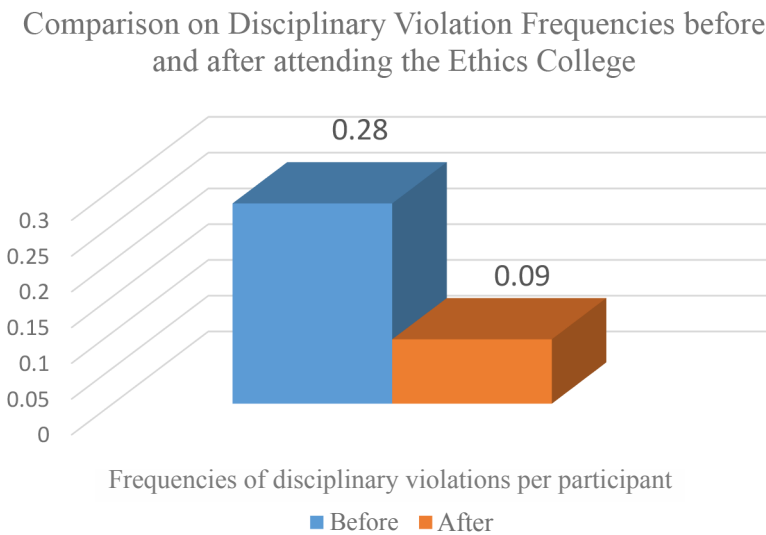


Figure 5. Comparison on disciplinary violation frequencies before and after attending Ethics College



## **Summary and conclusion**

The present survey indicated that the Ethics College was well received by the participants who considered it favourable to their psychological condition. A vast majority of them agreed to its positive effects on their motivation to desist from offending, self-efficacy and hopefulness about future success in desistance, resilience against future adversity, perceived family support and perceived alternatives to offending. Almost all staff involved in the programme reported observing positive changes in the participants' attitude and behaviour, which in turn produced job satisfaction in staff. The significant reduction in overall disciplinary violations suggested that the improvement in their psychological condition had also been manifested in the participants' institutional behaviour.

As the five selected psychological attributes are regarded as having face validity in predicting the rehabilitation potential of PICs in general, the perceived improvement in these attributes was important for anticipation of success in their path to desistance according to recent literature on offender rehabilitation. A survey on the staff's observations and comparison of the numbers of disciplinary violations before and after implementing the programme confirmed that the participants' self-rated positive changes in their psychological

condition are highly likely to be a reliable reflection of their real improvement.

In conclusion, the Ethics College, apart from its important educational value and provision of a chance of upward mobility in conventional career pursuit, was also effective in enhancing the rehabilitation potential of its participants through improving the rehabilitation-relevant psychological characteristics in the participants.

## ***Insights***

### **1. Recognition from Staffs and educators**

An accredited tertiary educational programme, the Ethics College, is unanimously agreed among staffs involved to have induced positive changes in adult PICs, including enthusiasm towards learning, optimism about future, discipline and behaviour, and connectedness to family.

### **2. Power of Education on Psychological Attributes of PICs**

An over-whelming majority of participants reported that they have got higher motivation to desist, greater hope and self-efficacy to succeed, more resilience against adversities, perceived having more alternatives to offending, and received greater recognition from family after they have completed the programme.

### **3. Rules Compliance and Developing a Pro-social Character**

Behavioural indicators have testified the above subjective reports from staff and participants, as there is statistically significant reduction in disciplinary violations among the participants after the programme in comparison with before.

## Article 3

# A Professional Dialogue with Dr. Amanda Cheung on Rehabilitation Dog Services: What Works in Fostering a Rehabilitative Culture



**Dr. Vivian W. M. MAK<sup>1</sup>, Ms. Kristy H. T. HO<sup>2</sup>**

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## Introduction of our Honorary Advisor Dr. Amanda Cheung

Dr. Amanda Kingsze Cheung, a research assistant professor at The University of Hong Kong, a registered clinical psychologist in Hong Kong and a licensed psychologist in the United States, is particularly interested in studying areas of emotional, behavioural and cognitive vulnerabilities. In July 2024, Dr. Cheung was invited to be the honorary advisor of the Rehabilitation Dog Services of the Correctional Services Department (CSD). Our Senior Clinical Psychologist, Dr. Vivian Mak, had the chance to conduct an exclusive interview with this prominent expert on the subjects of the development of a rehabilitative culture and the provision of Rehabilitation Dog Services.

**Dr. Mak:** Thank you for being our honorary advisor. Rehabilitation work has significant meaning in recovery and overcoming. Can you tell us what works in persons in custody's rehabilitation? What are **the key components that contribute to the success of rehabilitation?**

**Dr. Cheung:** This is perhaps the core question of any kind of rehabilitation services. All of us want to know how we can best rehabilitate persons in custody (PICs). What work(s)? To work with individual PICs on intrapersonal changes (e.g. cognitive skills programmes; Hollin et al., 2013), it is equally important to foster a supportive environment to facilitate rehabilitation. This brings us closer to **the idea of a rehabilitative culture.**

**Dr. Mak:** Recognising the importance of a rehabilitative culture, can you tell us how to foster such a culture?

**Dr. Cheung:** Building a rehabilitative culture is an ongoing journey about developing and refining approaches to promoting support and healing. It is the philosophical basis in a successful rehabilitation programme. **Programmes that work the best are not only about what to do** but also depend on how they are implemented. An **environment that promotes growth** definitely helps enhance the effectiveness of the rehabilitation efforts. We know that there is a huge need for psychological interventions among PICs. The prevalence of life challenges (Neupert et al., 2017); mental health conditions, such as

trauma related disorders (Baranyi et al., 2018) and substance use disorders (Fazel et al., 2017) are much higher among PICs than in the general population. Specific programmes may target individual changes, and a supportive rehabilitative culture offers PICs the **environment to grow their skills and a sense of agency**. Having heard that the CSD has recently implemented the Rehabilitation Dog Services, I am curious about how these rehabilitation dogs can contribute to a supportive environment in a correctional setting. How can we best implement the Rehabilitation Dog Services to maximise PICs' growth and transformation while they are serving their time behind bars?

### Rehabilitation Dog Services

Interactions with animals can help create meaningful relationships for both the animals and the persons involved (Wilson, 2023). Dogs are able to recognise emotions in humans and respond to them (Albuquerque et al., 2016). A variety of prison-based animal programmes have been found beneficial to PICs' health by promoting a sense of safety in prisons (Jalongo, 2019). Recognising the unique benefits of interacting with animals, both Animal-assisted Therapy and Animal-assisted Activity have been implemented in various prison settings worldwide (Villafaina-Dominguez et al., 2020)



In August 2023, the CSD launched an animal-assisted programme to address the psychological needs of PICs. The programme initially targeted female PICs who showed depression, anxiety and stress symptoms as measured by clinical assessment instruments. It began with providing education on dog-caring principles and training practices that involved command-giving, walking and hugging in the indoor gymnasium area or the exercise yard. The programme was first implemented as a small-scale pilot programme and positive results were achieved. PICs generally found the programme **purposeful, stress-reducing, motivating and compassion-promoting**.

With these encouraging outcomes, the programme was further expanded in early 2024. Over 300 female PICs have participated in the programme with **results indicating that participants' psychological distress, including depression, anxiety and stress, was significantly reduced**.





*Figure 1. Types of distress that show a significant decrease as a result of participation in the Rehabilitation Dog Services*

**Dr. Mak:** You've said that **building a rehabilitative culture in CSD facilities could start with the implementation of the Rehabilitation Dog Services**. I wonder how our rehabilitation dogs Gina and Echo can take part in promoting a rehabilitative culture?

**Dr. Cheung:** Animal-assisted Intervention (AAI) has a **unique strength**, as PICs may find **dogs particularly genuine and trustworthy**. With the high prevalence of traumatic experience among PICs, they often lose their trust and confidence in humans. AAI, however, provides PICs with an **alternative source of healthy social interactions**. When PICs interact with rehabilitation dogs, they may find the

process comforting and relieving with no worries about being betrayed or set up.

I also believe that rehabilitation dogs may **promote a trustworthiness perception** in PICs through the **baby face effect**. Research has found that infant-like facial features such as large eyes and small noses tend to **draw human attention, elicit positive emotions and help establish attachment**. Rapport and trust building usually take time, which facilitate reciprocal understanding between a therapist and a client. Baby-like facial features of rehabilitation dogs **highlight their innocence and harmlessness** from the very first minute of their encounters, thereby helping PICs **let their guard down**. Interactions with rehabilitation dogs under therapeutic guidance also help PICs develop the capacity necessary for healthier interactions, thereby enabling them to truly gain from therapeutic interventions, achieve personal growth in a healthier direction and make positive changes

AAI **can benefit not only PICs but also correctional staff** by creating a supportive and humanistic culture. Such climate helps **mitigate the level of stress** among correctional staff, who work extensively in a highly disciplined and confined environment. AAI can **facilitate the communication between PICs and correctional staff**, as rehabilitation dogs can **act as a bridge** between them by breaking down barriers and lowering their defensiveness.

**Dr. Mak:** I wholeheartedly agree that our Rehabilitation Dog Services benefit not only PICs but also correctional staff and the entire institution. By fostering a therapeutic environment, these services can **enhance staff-inmate relationships and improve the overall prison dynamics**. I'm thinking whether you have any suggestions on the future development of the Rehabilitation Dog Services?

**Dr. Cheung:** The implementation of the Rehabilitation Dog Services is an **ongoing journey**. I suggest **expanding the services** to serve more PICs, **particularly those with mental illnesses**. Many of these individuals have experienced stigmas and prejudice from others. PICs requiring psychiatric care may have **less mental capacity and need more preparation or guidance** to better manage their illnesses. The Rehabilitation Dog Services offer these individuals a **non-threatening and more manageable alternative** that helps them to do so. Innocent appearances of rehabilitation dogs and gentle interactions with them provide PICs under psychiatric care a **positive social-emotional experience**. These PICs may feel less judged and more welcomed by the rehabilitation dogs than their human peers. The unique bond with the rehabilitation dogs is likely to provide them with **extra support and facilitates their healing**.



By providing the Rehabilitation Dog Services to PICs, we can study the relative effectiveness of the services **across different groups** and the primary mechanism(s) of change in each group.

**Dr. Mak:** Thank you for your sharing today. I completely agree that the Rehabilitation Dog Services can foster a positive atmosphere within a correctional institution. When our dogs serve as “**animal staff**”, they can create a significant impact on the rehabilitative culture. Is there anything that you would like to tell our readers before ending the interview?

**Dr. Cheung:** The initial trial on the Rehabilitation Dog Services has proved highly successful. The potential returns are not limited to short-term results. Long-term gains such as **better reintegration** and **lower recidivism** may be achievable. Expanding and refining the Rehabilitation Dog Services is certainly worthwhile, as it can bring lasting positive changes **within and beyond the prison walls**. It is imperative for service planners to consider investing in the services and strategically map out the future development.

The Rehabilitation Dog Services not only benefit PICs but also **improve workplace well-being** in correctional facilities. Rehabilitation dogs can help alleviate staff members’ stress from working in a highly disciplined setting, thereby **reducing the risks of burnout or ineffective communication**. The Rehabilitation Dog Services can help **cultivate a positive rehabilitative culture across CSD facilities**. **Rigorous and well-planned research strategies** are crucial to guiding the evolution of the services. It’s my honour to work alongside with such an enthusiastic and passionate team. I look forward to taking on this journey and promoting a rehabilitative culture together.

# Insights

## 1. “Baby Face Effect” of dogs

The “baby face effect” refers to the phenomenon where certain facial features—such as large eyes, a round face, and a small nose—are perceived as youthful and innocent. This effect can easily be observed in dogs. Breeds with juvenile traits elicit caring and nurturing responses from people.

## 2. Rehabilitation Dogs as Non-Human Staff

Rehabilitation dogs act as non-human staff members that help lower PICs’ defences, as PICs often feel more guarded around people. Their gentle and approachable nature fosters a sense of safety and comfort, encouraging positive interactions between PICs and staffs.

## 3. Rehabilitation Dogs Improve Overall Prison Dynamics

The presence of Rehabilitation Dogs can foster a more positive and engaging work environment, leading to increased job satisfaction and stress reduction among correctional staffs.

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## Article 4

# What Works for Young Persons in Custody: Seven Characteristics of Effective Rehabilitation Programmes



**Dr. Yvonne K. S. LEE<sup>1</sup>, Ms. Candy N. K. HUI<sup>2</sup>**

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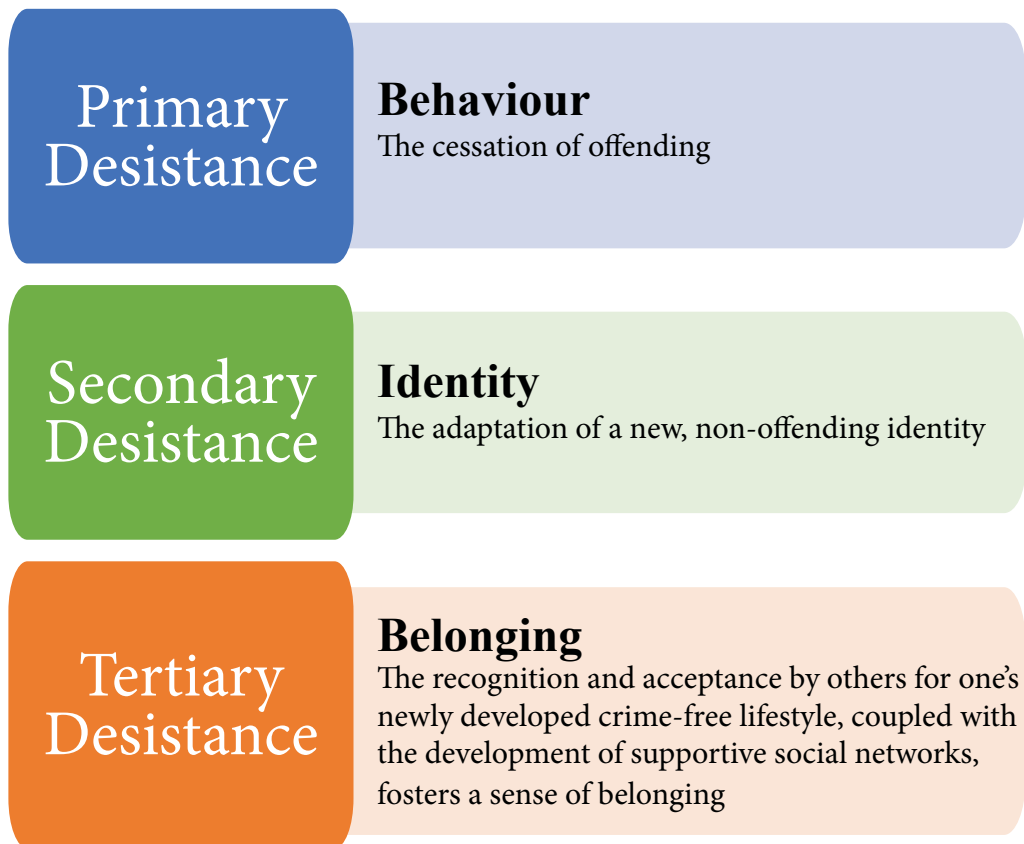
Young people are our future. “Hong Kong will prosper only when its young people thrive”. Regarding helping young persons in custody (PICs) desist from crime and unleash their full potential, the following passages summarise the seven key evidence-based characteristics of effective youth rehabilitation programmes drawn from a systematic review of 44 studies across 41 jurisdictions (Pooley, 2020) and the meta reviews synthesising meta-analyses with quantitative effect sizes (Farrington, Gaffney & White, 2022; Papas & Dent, 2021). These characteristics serve as the indispensable guideposts to design, deliver and implement programmes for local young PICs.

### **1. Why is Programme Theory Important?**

A rehabilitation programme grounded in a robust theory of change and supported by evidence-based change mechanisms that explain how to achieve the intended outcome can significantly reduce re-offending rates. *Cognitive-behavioural programmes*, which drill *stop-and-think skills to identify and modify distorted criminal attitudes leading to criminal behaviour*, have proved to contribute to a 27-35% reduction in youth re-offending. Conversely, research has consistently indicated that purely punitive interventions do not yield positive outcomes, and shock incarceration even associates with a non-significant 3-5% increase in re-offending. There is theoretical consensus that punitive, fear-arousing interventions do not deter or bring behavioural changes. Nevertheless, the boot camp military regime, when combined with rehabilitation programmes or counselling, was effective in reducing re-offending over a ten-year period with a benefit-to-cost ratio of 3.9 to 1.

## 2. What is the Latest Theory of Change in Offender Rehabilitation?

*Desistance theories* (Maruna & Farrall, 2004; McNeill, 2014) which explain *the process of ceasing criminal or antisocial behaviour over an extended period of time*, have emerged as a predominant framework in contemporary correctional literature. By adopting a broader, holistic perspective and leveraging an individual's strengths and potential for sustainable personal transformation, desistance theories go beyond the traditional risk-needs-responsivity approach in offender rehabilitation. The gradual and ongoing process in long-term desistance as illustrated by the “success stories” of desisters encompasses the following three key dimensions:



*Figure 1. Three key dimensions of desistance from crime*

### 3. Who, What and How to Treat?

There was a significant difference in the re-offending rate of 17% among juvenile offenders who have participated in interventions compared to those who have not. The most substantial reductions were observed in sexual offenders, followed by serious or violent offenders, general offenders, non-serious offenders and drug offenders. Programmes adhering to the globally recognised ***Risk-Needs-Responsivity model of offender rehabilitation*** (Bonta & Andrews, 2017) implement the following objective and replicable principles to effectively reduce re-offending:

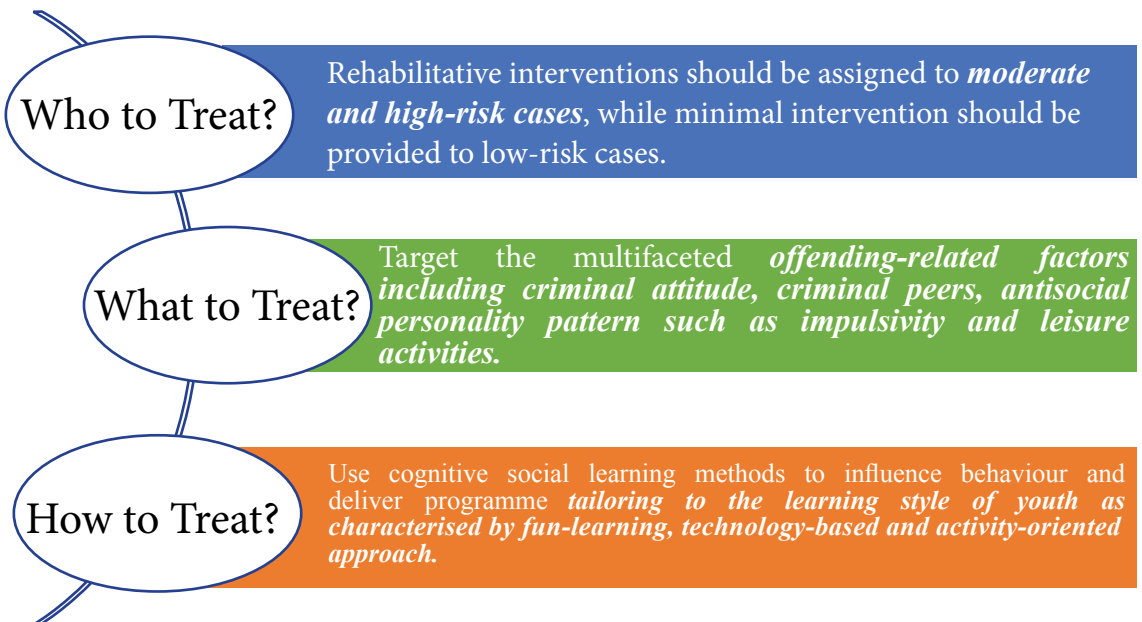


Figure 2. Risk-Need-Responsivity principles of effective offender rehabilitation

#### **4. What Should the Staff-Youth Relationship Entail?**

A positive and collaborative professional working alliance between the programme staff and the young PICs is essential for programme effectiveness, which enhances the likelihood to reduce re-offending, improves responsiveness to the programme and increases programme completion rates. An *encouraging, open and non-judgemental relationship in which the youth feel that the programme and correctional staff believe in them, empathise with them and recognise their strengths* is crucial. On the contrary, the youth are less likely to engage in the rehabilitation programme if the staff do not respect them, focus on their failures and apply undue pressure.

#### **5. Does Parent Training Help?**

Family-based treatment, Multi-Systematic Therapy (Henggeler & Schaeffer, 2016) and Functional Family Therapy (Sexton & James, 2002) contribute to an 18-25% reduction in delinquency and a 31-40% decrease in adolescent problem behaviour. These family-based interventions provide *services to families and/or the youth to address the risk and protective factors associated with offending behaviours as well as parent training on positive communication, effective parenting and conflict resolution skills to improve family functioning*. Of note, effective parenting must be timely and developmentally appropriate. Parenting adolescents requires the provision of adequate opportunities for identity development while parenting young adults should allow room for independent decision-making.

#### **6. How Important is Multi-Disciplinary, Multi-Agency Throughcare?**

Given the multi-faceted needs of young PICs, it is crucial to providing them with opportunities for a wide range of services, including education, job skills training, mental health services and wilderness therapy, to help build a more positive future. Co-ordinated efforts to ensure the young PICs receive comprehensive support that is tailored to their needs from various agencies and disciplines both within institutions and upon return to the community are essential. Effective co-ordination should facilitate proper sharing of information, resources and values across different disciplines and agencies.

## 7. What is the Role of Programme Evaluation?

Research indicates that well-planned, ongoing evaluation mechanisms contribute to enhanced programme effectiveness, provide valuable information for continuous programme development or refinement as well as support adaptation to the changing needs of stakeholders and the evolving conditions within which the programme operates. While the *re-offending rate* is often perceived as the benchmark for evaluating offender programmes, other measures such as *programme completion, readiness to change, psychological and behavioural changes, education, employment, relationships and prosocial engagements* serve as more sensitive and comprehensive indicators of the progress of young offenders on their desistance journey.



### *Update on Youth Psychological Services: Hong Kong Correctional Services*

In Youth Lab, the continuous refinement of youth psychological services aims to help young PICs cultivate a prosocial lifestyle and become thriving individuals. The **core PREP programme adopting a cognitive-behavioural**

**approach** has its major focus on identifying and rectifying distorted criminal attitudes. Local research evidence demonstrates that criminal attitude-based intervention significantly reduced criminal attitudes which in turn lowered the likelihood of re-offending (Leung, Hung, Chan & Kwong, 2019). **The new initiative, “MindSport”, adopts a strength-based desistance perspective by integrating character strength intervention into sports activities** conducted by a partnering non-governmental organisation. Clinical psychologists guide young PICs to recognise and utilise character strengths such as perseverance and teamwork during bodyweight training and in daily life. During recent staff training at Sha Tsui Correctional Institution (STCI), **correctional staff shared their vision for the personal growth of young PICs, use of encouragement, active listening, instilling hope in daily interactions, as well as their job satisfaction from witnessing improved family relationships and positive changes among young PICs.**



# *Insights*

## **1. Characteristics of Effective Youth Programmes**

Youth programmes grounded in cognitive-behavioural therapy and desistance theories, which incorporate throughcare from institution to community, allocate resources according to the risk-needs-responsivity model, and ensure robust multi-disciplinary and multi-agency coordination, have proved to be effective in reducing re-offending.

## **2. Encouraging, Open and Non-judgmental Relationship**

A key element is to foster an encouraging, open and non-judgemental relationship in which the youth feel that the programme and correctional staff believe in them, empathise with them and recognise their strengths.

## **3. Importance of Family-based Interventions**

Family-based interventions should address the risk and protective factors associated with offending behaviours, and focus on training parents in positive communication, effective parenting and conflict resolution skills to improve family functioning.



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