

Strategies for Helping High School Students with a History of  
Juvenile Delinquency Achieve their Postsecondary Goals:  
Recommendations for School Counselors

by

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**Abstract**

High school students with a history of juvenile delinquency are a unique subset of the student population that warrants additional attention from school counselors. As these students work toward meeting their postsecondary goals they encounter challenges that are different from those of their peers. Because of this school counselors must employ different strategies while working with this population throughout the implementation of their curriculum. This literature review addresses the postsecondary transitional needs of high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency in the academic, personal/social and career development domains.

The research highlighted in this literature review notes that students with this background are likely to benefit from additional academic interventions to help them meet high school graduation and postsecondary education admissions requirements.

These students may also benefit from interventions that help them to further develop their social skills as well as developing a more positive self-image. Career exploration and vocational training will be advantageous for these students as they strive toward meeting their goals. School counselors can work to create useful resources for these students where they may not already be present along with implementing school wide initiatives aimed toward enhancing a positive school climate that will help students thrive.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

School counselors working in high schools serve an important role in guiding students through the postsecondary transition phase. This transition to life after high school requires the presence of various elements if it is to result in optimal outcomes for students. Such elements include the students' explicit goal setting, knowledge of the breadth of postsecondary options available, understanding of what intrinsically motivates them, utilization of prosocial skills, and academic success (Lapan, Aoyagi, & Kayson, 2007). In addition, research has also found that high school students who receive support, both emotional and instrumental, from school counselors, teachers, and their family are more likely to successfully pursue postsecondary paths that are congruent with their established goals than those students who do not have such supports (Lapan et al., 2007). It is clear that the presence of the aforementioned factors will increase the likelihood that high school students will achieve their established postsecondary goals, but not all students have the same likelihood of having such protective elements present within their lives.

High school students with a history of juvenile delinquency face more obstacles than their non-delinquent peers to achieving their postsecondary goals. Juvenile delinquency is correlated with various risk factors that can impede the acquisition of protective elements. These risk factors include the absence of family support and involvement, a lack of prosocial skills (especially self-control), and both academic and social adverse school experiences (Agnew, 2005). Noyori-Cobett and Moon (2010) found that when family support and involvement is low this not only lowers the probability that a student will experience a successful postsecondary transition, but it also raises the probability that such a student receives minimal parental monitoring and will subsequently continue to be involved in delinquent behaviors.

Prosocial skills, such as self-control and decision making, are critical components of the postsecondary transition process that are predictive of success in academic and vocational settings in addition to serving as deterrents from delinquency involvement (Lapan et al., 2007). Adverse academic experiences at school tend to result from the higher than average occurrence of academic failure within high school students with a history of delinquency when compared to their non-delinquent peers (Katsiyannis, Ryan, Zhang, & Spann, 2008) as well as the fact that such students are generally behind their peers academically by at least one grade level (Mathur, Clark, & Schoenfeld, 2009). Adverse personal and social experiences at school for students from this background tend to result from being labeled with an objectionable reputation at the school (Kaplan & Johnson, 1991) and consequently having poor relationships with educators and classmates (Lee & Smith-Adcock, 2005).

School counselors should work toward acquiring the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to guide high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency through a successful postsecondary transition. This is important because unsuccessful postsecondary transitions have a long lasting negative impact on students' lives. Unsuccessful postsecondary transitions result in unmet goals which tend to yield subpar overall life satisfaction reported in adulthood (Lapan et al., 2007). When students with a history of juvenile delinquency are subject to an unsuccessful transition they are more likely than their peers to have difficulty securing employment and becoming financially independent (Simoes, Matos, & Batista-Foguet, 2008). It has been found by Agnew (2005) that unemployment will not only make it more likely that this population will require some form of social economic assistance (i.e. welfare) but also that without commitment to a steady job this population is more likely to continue to engage in antisocial or otherwise illegal behaviors as adults.

A majority of career paths require the attainment of a high school diploma, high school equivalency diploma (HSED) or a certificate of general education development (GED). This is especially true of career paths that require postsecondary education, since admittance to such institutions is dependent on first completing one of these academic options. Completion of one of these options is more challenging for high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency due to the fact that they typically have deficits in the areas of reading, writing, oral language and math (Foley, 2001). When school counselors advocate for this population effectively in the academic domain it is possible to initiate relevant interventions that will support these students as they strive to meet their postsecondary transitional goals.

The adequate advocacy of school counselors can be impactful in the personal/social and career development domains as well. Students in this population who are exposed to interventions designed to increase their social skills and personal growth will be more likely to gain access to the related protective factors that can help them achieve optimal postsecondary transition outcomes. In addition, when school counselors employ sufficient career development strategies that are targeted to the unique needs of high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency there is a greater possibility that these students will be more successful in either postsecondary education or immediate postsecondary employment (Lapan et al., 2007). When school counselors actively seek to obtain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for working with this population as part of their ongoing professional development and address the three domains designated by the American School Counselor Association (academic, career, and personal/social) in this manner then the profession will come closer to its goal of benefitting “every student, not just those who are motivated, supported and ready to learn” (American School Counselor Association, 2005, p. 14).

## **Statement of the Problem**

Students with a history of juvenile delinquency experience a more difficult postsecondary transition than do their peers who do not share this history. School counselors are capable of doing more to advocate for this specific population. Specifically, school counselors should employ research-based strategies for the purpose of helping these students to successfully progress through high school toward actualizing their postsecondary goals.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to review literature pertaining to postsecondary transitional guidance for high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency and to subsequently develop recommendations for school counselors outlining research-based strategies that have been shown to improve this population's chances of meeting their goals. This study will explore the unique academic, personal/social and career planning needs of high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency and address ways that school counselors can optimally attend to those needs. The literature review will be conducted throughout the fall semester of 2010 and the spring semester of 2011.

## **Objectives**

There are four objectives that this study will pursue. They are;

1. Determining the typical academic needs of high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency.
2. Determining the typical personal/social needs of high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency.
3. Determining the typical career planning needs of high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency.

4. Developing recommendations for school counselors to aid in helping this population reach their postsecondary goals that have been derived from research.

### **Definition of Terms**

There are five terms that need to be defined to aid in comprehension of this literature review.

**Academic Development**— the process that a student goes through as they gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will allow them to maximize their ability to learn in a school setting.

**Career Development**— the process that a student goes through as they gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for making a successful transition from secondary school to postsecondary employment, training and/or education.

**Juvenile Delinquent**— a youth aged 16 or younger who has engaged in illegal or otherwise antisocial behaviors.

**Personal/Social Development**— the process that a student goes through as they gain the interpersonal skills, knowledge and attitudes that will allow them to understand others as well as themselves and to engage in healthy personal and social growth throughout their lifespan.

**Postsecondary Transition**— the phase in which a high school student leaves secondary education and begins to pursue endeavors after high school. Such endeavors include but are not limited to: employment, college, military service, and family responsibilities. This transitional phase includes goal setting, planning, and action.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

It is assumed that all students engage in a postsecondary transition process and that high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency face additional obstacles during this

process. Limitations of this study include the fact that there is a great deal of variability within high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency and that these students will not each face the same obstacles.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The role of school counselors working with students at any age level is to work toward developing and executing curricula that will benefit all students as they develop within the academic, personal/social, and career domains. When examining strategies that research has shown to be effective in working with high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency it is important that these three domains are addressed if such strategies are to fit within school counseling curricula. This chapter will address relevant research as it is applicable to each of the three school counseling domains: academic, personal/social and career.

### **Academic**

Katsiyannis et al. (2008) have reported that poor behavior, such as that associated with juvenile delinquency, is positively correlated with poor academic performance. Experts have found that high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency tend to have significant deficits in the core subject areas, namely reading, writing and math (Foley, 2001; Mathur et al., 2009). The IQ scores of these students tend to be between 80 and 100 with their performance scores characteristically being reported as significantly higher than their verbal scores (Foley, 2001). Among students with a history of juvenile delinquency, those who have higher verbal IQ scores are less likely to reoffend (Foley, 2001). Approximately 40% of students in this population have been held back in school by at least one grade level and as a whole this population is overrepresented in special education programs (Foley, 2001).

The direction of the relationship between academic performance and delinquent behavior in youth is unclear, but research suggests that the connection does exist and that low achievement is a reliable predictor of delinquent behavior (Siegel, Welsch, & Senna, 2006). It is possible that

academic failure typically precedes engagement in delinquency or that it typically precedes mental and behavioral maladaptations that make participation in delinquency more likely. When students experience failure academically their self-esteem can be damaged, and low-self esteem has been correlated with higher engagement in delinquent behaviors (Gold, 1978). In Addition to these possibilities, it is also feasible that low academic performance and engagement in delinquent behaviors manifest simultaneously as a result of the influence of multiple factors in a student's life. McKinney (1998) proposes that such factors may include instability at home, a lower than average IQ, high impulsivity, substance abuse, mental illness (i.e. depression), inadequate nutrition across the lifespan, or a history of abuse. Any of these factors could contribute to both low academic performance and high involvement in delinquent behaviors.

High school is a setting where youth are frequently tested and expected to meet certain expectations. For students who cannot meet these academic expectations school becomes a threatening environment where they become wary of the possibility of impending failure. Being afraid of and, indeed, experiencing academic failure frequently can decrease students' self esteem, thereby contributing the belief that they are somehow inadequate (Siegel et al., 2006). Gold (1978) found that students from families of low socioeconomic status were more prone to this than their middle or high socioeconomic status peers. However, students from middle and high socioeconomic status backgrounds may feel more pressure to achieve levels of academic success that comply with society's expectations of them. If youth from either socioeconomic group do not meet their correspondingly prescribed academic standards then their self-esteem may be damaged and the likelihood of involvement with delinquent behaviors could increase. Agnew (1992) reports that this occurrence among middle and high socioeconomic status youth illustrates his General Strain Theory. The findings of both Gold (1978) and Agnew (1992)

indicate that all youth with a history of delinquent behaviors who struggle academically, regardless of their socioeconomic background, could benefit from relevant academic interventions and accommodations.

Foley (2001) has noted that while special education accommodations and programming should always be made available to these students (especially in instances where it has been determined to be the least restrictive environment) curriculum offerings should also be kept broad and challenging when appropriate. Students from this population have often become accustomed to academic failure (Katsiyannis et al., 2008) so it is particularly important to identify their least restrictive environment soon after potential academic concerns come to educators' attention (Foley, 2001) so that such students are spared from any undue additional frustration associated with their academic progress (Katsiyannis et al., 2008). When the least restrictive environment for a high school student with this history is special education Foley (2001) has found that it is important that their individualized education program (IEP) includes goals and objectives that are explicitly related to their postsecondary transition. The same expert adds that pre-IEP meetings with such students have proven to be valuable opportunities for them to discuss their future goals with educators who can help them to evaluate their progress and, at the very least, remind them of their established goals.

DuCloux (2003) found that regardless of whether or not special education options were to be utilized the most advantageous approach to scheduling classes for students with a history of juvenile delinquency was to maintain a balance between seeking to minimize their frustration related to schoolwork and challenging them to the greatest extent possible. The study also determined that challenging courses were found to have the best outcomes for the student when the subject matter was particularly interesting to them. Foley (2001) adds that when helping

these students to arrange their high school course schedules it is important for educators to assess their actual level of competency in specific subject areas rather than simply making course decisions based upon the last grade level that they completed.

The practice of making course selections for high school students based on academic tracking practices has been controversial (Siegel et al., 2006). Tracking can have a number of undesirable effects on students with a history of juvenile delinquency. For instance, being placed on an academic track that does not prepare students for admission into postsecondary education institutions can undermine their personal goals and remove potential incentives for raising their grades. These students can lose motivation once they realize that they have been labeled as not capable of postsecondary institution admittance and many options will become unattainable for them due to lack of academic preparation while in high school. Being placed on an academic track designed for low achieving students can also put these students in situations where they will be stigmatized by both school faculty and peers. Developing expectations of themselves and future goals that are not dependent on high school academic success is likely and self-fulfilling prophecies may emerge. Siegel et al. (2006) notes that when students believe that they cannot be successful academically they may begin to value participation in antisocial activities and seek to be admired among a delinquent subgroup of their peers within their school, thus perpetuating a lifestyle involving delinquent behaviors.

Increasing competency in reading and writing has been shown to reduce rates of reoffending among students who have engaged in antisocial or otherwise illegal behaviors (Katsiyannis et al., 2008). Direct instruction via tutoring has been reported by Foley (2001) as the most effective avenue for such literacy interventions with either teachers or peers serving in the tutoring role. Direct instruction curricula targeting literacy should be data-driven and based

on empirical research as well as provide many opportunities for the tutor to utilize positive reinforcement and offer praise to students (Katsiyannis et al., 2008). Significant gains in literacy skills can be achieved by students in this population through short term interventions (DuCloux, 2003). Specifically, summer reading programs have been shown to be effective in improving such students' reading accuracy, rate and comprehension (Foley, 2001). Giving students from this population opportunities to work in supervised groups with their peers has also been shown to be an effective learning strategy (Foley, 2001).

Lee and Smith-Adcock (2005) have confirmed that keeping the guardians of students with a history of juvenile delinquency informed of their children's academic successes and involved in the school is a protective factor that will decrease the likelihood that such students will reoffend. These researchers have also determined that parental involvement has the potential to encourage the students' efforts in enhancing their study habits. Outcomes for these students can be improved when guardians endorse the importance of maintaining consistent attendance at school in addition to striving to keep students from committing to an excess of part-time employment hours during the school week. Studies show that when high school students work over 20 hours a week during a school week their academic performance suffers (Apel, Bushway, Paternoster, Brame, & Sweeten, 2008).

Data show that 43% of incarcerated youth do not return to school immediately upon their release from a facility (Foley, 2001) and this could imply that successfully completing high school may not be an immediate priority for a significant portion of students with a history of juvenile delinquency. Foley (2001) has reported that more of these students tend to be successful with completing a GED program than with earning a high school diploma. Students

within this population may temporarily drop out of school and return later in their lives when they have become more intensely motivated (Apel et al., 2008).

### **Personal/Social**

A successful postsecondary transition is more likely to occur among high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency if school counselors pay special attention to helping them enhance both their social and life skills (Foley, 2001). Lee and Smith-Adcock (2005) have established that enhanced social and life skills will serve as a protective factor in helping these students to develop meaningful relationships with their family, school and community that will serve as a valuable support system for them during this phase. Within the same study the data indicated that having better relationships with these entities would entice students with this background to behave in pro-social ways in order to maintain these relationships, thus decreasing their chances of reoffending and increasing their chances of meeting their goals and transitioning successfully. Bouffard, Bergseth, and Ford (2009) added that it is typically ideal to include these students' guardians throughout the postsecondary transition process as much as they can be available. It was stated by these researchers that this invitation for involvement could be extended to any other members of a student's support system and could include activities such as IEP meetings or any other school events.

Another potential source of support for students with a history of delinquency that has shown promising outcomes has been mentoring programs (Bouffard et al., 2009; Mathur et al., 2009). These programs can be combined with a myriad of other community resources that can bolster students' efforts to work toward their postsecondary goals. Such resources may include speakers from the community who come to address groups at the students' high schools,

vocational rehabilitation counselors, job coaches, tutors, or substance abuse counselors (Mathur et al., 2009).

Support system resources will help students with this history to overcome various obstacles that may include issues with finding reliable transportation to school or securing a part-time job (Abrams, 2006). Abrams (2006) noted that building a support system is especially important for youth who have been incarcerated within the first few months of their return to high school as this is an important predictor of their outcomes. This study also found that it is beneficial for members of a student's support system to encourage only selective involvement with influences that have contributed to the occurrence of their delinquent behavior in the past. This practice of selective involvement encourages the use of advantageous decision making skills and is more realistic than the expectation that a student with this history would completely avoid all influences (including certain friends or family members) that have contributed to the occurrence of their prior delinquent behavior.

Mathur et al. (2009) have suggested that those who work with this population can be better prepared for serving them if they include maintaining a current understanding of relevant laws as a portion of their ongoing professional development plan. In addition to juvenile crime laws, helping professionals will also want to be aware of any other laws pertaining to students of this background. Such relevant laws may include those pertaining to aging-out of the foster care system. Care should be taken to determine if these students will be prepared to live independently and what resources will be available to them, specifically regarding housing and insurance options (Hollander, Budd, Petulla, & Staley, 2007).

Another area of legal concern includes helping students with a delinquency background that also have disabilities to transition out of high school successfully (Unruh & Bullis, 2005).

This is true for both students with emotional/behavioral disabilities and physical disabilities. Optimal support systems for these students may include community entities that are related to vocational rehabilitation or workforce investment (Brown, 2009). To help ensure the best outcomes for populations of this complex background (i.e. having a history of juvenile delinquency as well as a form of disability) these students should be informed of their rights in the workplace and/or postsecondary education settings. These students will also benefit from having developed coping skills to help them manage themselves effectively in these settings (Unruh & Bullis, 2005).

Prior to entering any postsecondary setting a student with a history of delinquent behavior will benefit from school counselors including a discussion about the student's perceived labels and reputation into their individual counseling sessions with the student (Lee & Smith-Adcock, 2005). School counselors should give these students the opportunity to explore their own perceptions of their reputation among their peers and their school's staff. The researchers Kaplan and Johnson (1991) and Lee and Smith-Adcock (2005) agree that it is important that these students do not perceive their prior delinquency as a core portion of their identity or reputation. It is also advantageous to include explicit goal setting in counseling sessions that addresses these students' postsecondary plans and, if their transition is to be successful, their conscious decision not to reoffend (Abrams, 2006).

Interventions should aim to deter the development of a self-fulfilling prophecy (Matsueda, 1992). When students with a history of juvenile delinquency internalize the labels that they are subject to they are at risk of adopting such labels as part of their self-concept. Once youth in this population accept an imposed label as valid they may begin to act in ways that conform to the label. Rather than attempting to rid themselves of the label, hopelessness may

ensue and they will fall into a pattern of acting out what they perceive as their role expectations (Adams, Robertson, Grey-Ray, & Ray, 2003). Following this series of events, self-rejection can follow (Harris, Milich, Corbitt, Hoover, & Brady, 1992). If the youth had established personal values in place, adherence to those values is likely to decline once self-rejection sets in and self-image is damaged. After personal values are abandoned the occurrence of deviation from social norms tends to increase (Adams et al., 2003). Young people subject to this often begin to seek out peers who also engage in behaviors indicative of deviation from societal norms and, as a result, their peer group becomes labeled as deviant. Association with a peer group labeled as deviant can confirm authority figures' assumptions and expectations regarding the youth and, thus, any associated labels are further reinforced. One way of preventing any damaging labels from developing among a student's peers and authority figures may be to avoid public damage to the student's identity and reputation (Garfinkel, 1956).

Encouraging these students to build positive relationships with the school as an institution, as well as with their peers, can help facilitate a successful transition out of high school. Lee and Smith-Adcock (2005) found that building positive relationships with both classmates and teachers within the school and becoming involved in extracurricular activities increased the probability that a student would transition out of this setting and toward their goals successfully. This process of building positive relationships within the school has been named "school bonding" by Lee and Smith-Adcock (2005). Foley (2001) stated that over half of high school students surveyed with a history of juvenile delinquency reported generally liking their teachers, classmates, and school. This may indicate that just under half, then, would require additional attention to school bonding practices and the formation of positive relationships within the school that would serve as a protective factor in their postsecondary transition.

Restorative justice is a method of addressing delinquent behaviors that can help to facilitate the creation of an offending student's positive relationships with teachers and peers within a school setting. The goal of restorative justice is to resolve any conflict between the offender and the victim (i.e. a peer or an authority figure) in a manner that emphasizes restoration and healing as opposed to punishment (Strang, Sherman, Angel, Woods, Bennett, Newbury-Birch, & Inkpen, 2006). Conflict resolution between the offender and victim involves a mediation process where the offender, ideally, comes to understand the damage that they have caused to the victim and accepts responsibility for her or his actions. If the relationship between the offender and victim is restored then the offender is better able to learn from their mistakes (Strang et al., 2006). Moreover, the offender is not as likely to feel rejected by any of the stakeholders involved and will be better able to develop bonds within their school that will serve as a protective factor against continued delinquent behaviors.

If delinquent behaviors are continuous and various intervention attempts seem ineffective a disruptive behavior disorder may be a factor. One type of disruptive behavior disorder is oppositional defiant disorder (Maughan, Rowe, Messer, Goodman, & Meltzer, 2004). Symptoms of oppositional defiant disorder include frequent loss of temper, incessant defiance of authority and the intentional performance of actions that annoy others. These symptoms may be accompanied by low self-image, substance abuse and the recurrent inappropriate use of profanity. When symptoms are more severe and include instances of weapon possession, brutality toward animals and lack of remorse for harm done then the second type of disruptive behavior disorder, conduct disorder, may be a contributing factor. Parent training courses for the parents of youth displaying the aforementioned disruptive behavior disorder symptoms have been shown to be effective in indirectly treating both versions of this psychological condition.

Similarly, family therapy has also been reported as effective. Successful individual treatment options for the youth experiencing either of these conditions include psychotherapy, anger management and cognitive-behavioral therapy (Burke, Loeber, & Birmaher, 2002).

### **Career**

It is assumed by school counselors and other educators that the successful completion of high school is necessary in order for students to reach their career goals and Foley (2001) has found that a majority of high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency agree and acknowledge this. Individualized career planning while within the high school setting is of particular importance to these students and the occurrence of such serves as an additional protective element that will promote their successful transition into postsecondary roles (Mathur et al., 2009). Assessments of the students' vocational aptitudes, values and interests have been established as useful elements of a school counselor's career counseling practices with this population (Foley, 2001).

In addition, successful postsecondary transitions for this population also tend to include pre-employment training. Foley (2001) has noted that it is advantageous for school counselors to begin connecting high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency with relevant community agencies that offer such pre-employment training at the age of sixteen. Relevant agencies may already be a part of the student's aforementioned community support system. Pre-employment training for adolescents in this population has been observed as a factor that yields increased employment in conventional settings in adulthood (McCord, Widom, & Crowell, 2001). Thus, these adolescents are less likely to pursue unconventional, illegal methods of obtaining income as adults.

Pre-employment training programs that have been shown to be effective in transitioning youth with a history of juvenile delinquency into the workforce include Job Corps (Schochet, Burghardt, & Glazerman, 2001) and YouthBuild U.S.A. (Cross & Wright, 2004). Job Corps is a federal program that targets at-risk youth. The program has been effective in reducing rates of juvenile delinquency. In addition to vocational training this program also provides its participants with education aimed at facilitating GED completion and health care benefits. Similarly, YouthBuild U.S.A. also targets at-risk youth. YouthBuild U.S.A. participants take part in building affordable housing in communities across the nation. As part of this process participants learn vocational skills related to construction and carpentry. The program has been effective in helping its participants to become employed in jobs related to construction as well as helping participants become enrolled in postsecondary education (Hernandez, 2001).

School-based pre-employment training has also been effective in facilitating successful postsecondary transitions (Hawkins & Lishner, 1987). Vocational training in a high school classroom setting can help the students in this population to clearly see the connection between education and career success. Such school-based vocational training was observed as particularly effective when an emphasis was placed on serving the community (Hawkins & Lishner, 1987). Increasing a sense of attachment to the surrounding community has been found to decrease rates of juvenile crime and community service is one way creating opportunities for such attachment to occur.

While pre-employment training and engaging in work orientated toward service are advantageous, it is also prudent to ensure that students are not impeding their academic performance by working in any setting in excess of 20 hours within the school week as recommended by Apel et al. (2008). Similarly, the same researchers found that the number of

hours worked by a high school student within the school week has been positively correlated with instances of delinquency and, thus, would hinder students' ability to transition effectively and to ultimately meet their postsecondary goals. When part-time employment during high school has been obtained, regardless of whether or not it is for the purposes of pre-employment training, these researchers have found that there is a risk that the student may begin to perceive any successes at their job site as being more significant than their academic successes. School counselors should work to detect such perceptions early on during individual career counseling sessions and help the student to process such notions realistically and in a manner that would allow for the best possible outcomes for that student during their postsecondary transition.

McGahey (1986) has noted that special consideration may be necessary if a student has parents that are chronically unemployed, particularly if the student does not have any role model that is conventionally employed. In cases such as these the student may begin seeking out role models that are obtaining income by unconventional, illegal means. This researcher also found that the impact of this situation can be even more devastating if the student's own parents are among those obtaining income by illegal means. This speaks to the importance of positive parental involvement throughout the postsecondary transition process and parents' awareness of how their own decisions impact those of their children.

To ensure the best possible outcomes for students in this population it is also necessary for parents and guardians to maintain an awareness of what the student's working conditions are like and how they are managing their money (Ploeger, 1997). Many part-time jobs for adolescents provide little direct adult supervision and, subsequently, more autonomy than some young people are prepared to handle appropriately. Rather than learning to manage responsibility, some adolescents may actually be learning how to evade it. Similarly, students

with a history of juvenile delinquency may not be learning money management skills by earning a paycheck at a part-time job. They may actually be learning how to use their personal income to purchase items without their parents' consent, such as alcohol or drugs (Paternoster, Bushway, Brame, & Apel, 2003). Careful monitoring of these elements can help young people, particularly those at-risk for delinquent behavior, get the most out of a part-time work experience.

Hollander et al. (2007) add that another career related concern for high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency is the very fact that they have such a history on record. If a student has established a criminal record by the time that they have transitioned out of high school and begin to seek out postsecondary education or employment options they may find that this record of their past mistakes puts limitations on the actual availability of these options.

Hollander et al. (2007) remind those that work with these youth that having their juvenile criminal records expunged may be a viable option that can reduce the impact that any of their past transgressions may have on their future opportunities.

Once young people with a history of juvenile delinquency are able to obtain steady full-time employment after high school these new circumstances create an environment where their prior delinquency patterns are difficult to maintain (Sampson & Laub, 1993). As a result, instances of anti-social delinquent behaviors decrease. Beginning a career yields a new environment where it becomes more beneficial for young people from this population to maintain positive relationships with institutions in society, such as their place of employment, as well as with authority figures, such as their work supervisor. Facilitating a student's transition into a successful career can be an important factor in facilitating their transition out of patterns of delinquency.

## **Chapter III: Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

Much of what a school counselor can do in regards to helping high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency to successfully transition into postsecondary life involves advocating for them and helping them make connections with relevant resources. There are likely already relevant school or community resources in place to help students from this population to take steps toward reaching their potential in the academic, personal/social and career realms. In cases where there are not relevant resources in place that are able to effectively fulfill the needs of these students the school counselor has the responsibility of learning more about any unmet needs and consulting with stakeholders in an effort to formulate ways for such needs to be met in accordance with school counseling curricula. New programs or multilevel methods of intervention may need to be created and collaboration with community entities outside of the school district may be necessary.

### **Academic**

Because of the documented negative correlation between engagement in delinquent behaviors and academic performance (Katsiyannis et al., 2008) it is important that academic support is readily available to the students in this population. Ideally, these students will establish academic goals that are based on their postsecondary goals (admittance to a university, technical school, work training program, military service, etc...) and the school counselor will provide advocacy by way of providing the student with access to the resources to reach those goals. Collaboration with the school's special education department may be necessary, particularly if a student is already receiving special education services or if it is suspected that they may benefit from such services. Similarly, consulting with the school psychologist on staff

can provide some insight into the students' academic needs and help school counselors learn about any available assessments that may help them understand those needs more clearly.

Although special education resources should always be made available to these students it should not be assumed that every student from this population will be in need of them (Foley, 2001).

When school counselors help students from this background with class scheduling it should be noted that not all students with a history of delinquency have difficulty performing academically. In fact, some may benefit from experiencing more challenges academically (Foley, 2001; DuCloux, 2003). Careful consideration should be given to the student's actual capabilities, interests and postsecondary goals. If it is determined that a student is capable of performing at a higher level, then they should not be deterred from pursuing advanced courses. Likewise, if a student could benefit from taking a prior course over again or enrolling in a remedial course then those opportunities should be available to them as well. Taking the observations of the students' prior classroom teachers into account may help the counselor-student team to make course scheduling decisions that are informed and realistic as well as advantageous. Approaching course scheduling in this way is likely to be more beneficial to these students than placing the students on an academic track. Tracking provides students with little flexibility in meeting their goals and could potentially block low performing students from some postsecondary options (Siegel et al., 2006). Placing high school students on a non-college bound track could make the school an environment where these students feel that they are not expected to succeed and do not feel supported.

Gaining an understanding of the student's home environment will provide additional insight regarding the student's ability to complete coursework effectively (Lee & Smith-Adcock, 2005). There are a variety of factors stemming from the qualities of the student's home

environment that could potentially impact their academic performance. Working with the families of these students could help to both identify and remedy any concerns. It is important to keep in mind that students from any family background, regardless of socioeconomic status, can face issues in their home life that can impact their academic performance (Agnew, 1992; Gold, 1978).

Considering the environment at school is also important when helping a student with a history of juvenile delinquency to take steps toward improving their academic performance. Identifying stressors in the school setting, particularly those related to testing (Siegel et al., 2006), can be helpful. Working with the student's teachers to create a classroom environment where the student does not feel threatened by a perceived high risk of failure is also likely to be beneficial. In order to achieve best outcomes for the student it will be necessary for educators to be supportive of the student's efforts regardless of their past low performance or objectionable behaviors.

School counselors and educators can work together toward effectively supporting the students in this population by making academic help outside of regular classroom time (i.e. before school, during study halls, after school, school breaks, etc...) readily available, particularly in the core areas of reading and writing (Foley, 2001; Mathur et al., 2009). Free tutoring opportunities and direct instruction could be offered by educators, peers or community volunteers. Tutors should be encouraged to use data-driven techniques and to offer plenty of verbal praise and encouragement to the students that they are serving. One tutor may be able to support a small group of students and help to increase their competency in a number of subject areas.

In instances where students are unable to increase their academic performance to a level that would make it possible for them to fulfill their high school's graduation requirements the school counselor should discuss all of the student's possible options with them. School counselors should work with students and their families to help them fully understand all of their education options whether they be alternative high schools, GED or HSED programs or other opportunities. When discussing all possible options with the relevant stakeholders school counselors should also discuss the student's postsecondary goals and how the various options will impact their availability. While a student's decision to drop out of school entirely may be unfortunate, it may also be an indication that the student merely does not currently have the motivation to perform at the academic level required to succeed at the present time and that they may find that motivation at a later point in time (Apel et al., 2008). These students should be advised that the opportunity for them to obtain their high school diploma by alternative means will always be available to them. School counselors should tell them about the venues offering these means as well as how to go about becoming enrolled should they ever decide to pursue such opportunities in the future.

### **Personal/Social**

In addition to academic support, high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency will also need personal and social support from their school counselors. Incorporating attention to social and life skills into guidance curriculum can be beneficial to all high school students and can help them in facilitating a positive school environment and feeling a sense of connectedness with their school (Lee & Smith-Adcock, 2005). The same researchers noted that working toward creating a positive environment and connectedness within the school can serve as a protective factor in preventing students from engaging in delinquent behaviors

(whether it is for the first time or repetitively). This is especially effective when students recognize that engaging in such antisocial behaviors could put their valued relationships with peers and educators within the school in jeopardy (Lee & Smith-Adcock, 2005). The development of sufficient social skills and the ability to form meaningful relationships with the people around them, in particular with authority figures, will be invaluable to students who have engaged in delinquent activities in the past as they transition into postsecondary life.

The ability to maintain personal relationships, feel connected to the community and resolve conflicts in a healthy way can be promoted through a high school's utilization of a restorative justice program. When a student engages in a delinquent behavior it is likely that their relationship with any victims involved will be damaged and conflict will ensue. When a restorative justice system is in place the conflict is mediated and the student is able to see how personal relationships can be maintained even in the face of conflict (Strang et al., 2006). When the student discusses the altercation with the victim they are able to truly learn from the damage that their offense has caused. Conflict resolution skills are modeled and learned throughout the process and the student does not leave the process feeling alienated from their school or community (Strang et al., 2006). The student is given the opportunity to learn and practice valuable social skills that will benefit them in the present and in postsecondary life as they forge positive relationships with others that serve as a protective factor from recidivism.

Developing positive relationships with authority figures and peers within the school will be difficult if a student with this background feels as if they have been negatively labeled. While working with these students in individual counseling sessions school counselors should prompt them to explore how they perceive their own reputation and how any labels that have been bestowed upon them may impact their ability to change their maladaptive behaviors. Once

negative labels become internalized they can be difficult to break and have the potential to yield self-fulfilling prophecies (Kaplan & Johnson, 1991; Matsueda, 1992); counseling interventions should aim toward dissolving this pattern. Helping these students to break away from any damaging labels that they may have acquired can decrease the likelihood that the student will become comfortable with conforming to the expectations that the labels imply (Adams et al., 2003). Counselors can help these students to develop clear perceptions of their own identities that are not dependent on their prior delinquency involvement and, instead, incorporate the students' own personal morals and values. The process of establishing morals and values that are conducive to a law-abiding lifestyle can benefit from the inclusion of the student's family and any other elements of their support system.

Helping students with a history of engagement in delinquent behaviors to forge positive personal relationships within their own families will also add to the likelihood that they will experience a successful transition into life after high school (Lee & Smith-Adcock, 2005). Ideally, students' families will be involved throughout the transition process and school counselors can encourage this by inviting families to postsecondary planning meetings, IEP meetings, or any other school events along with the students. School counselors can include goal setting related to the student's postsecondary transition into these meetings and prompt discussions with students and their families about how all stakeholders can work together in supporting the student to reach these goals.

Arranging access to mentoring programs can also help to support students personally and socially as they complete high school (Bouffard et al, 2009; Mathur et al., 2009). School counselors can work with community agencies that already have mentoring programs in place. If local mentoring programs are not available for high school students then perhaps a viable

program can be created through the school itself. School counselors should familiarize themselves with any community resources that could potentially be part of students' support systems. Having a support system in place that includes family, friends, the school and the community can help students with a history of juvenile delinquency through any of the various transitions that they may encounter including transitions from incarceration to school or from school to postsecondary roles (Abrams, 2006).

Helping students with this background to begin making positive choices can be difficult if a student's support system consists of friends or family who engage in illegal behaviors themselves (Abrams, 2006). It may be unrealistic for school counselors to expect that these students will completely dissolve their personal relationships with people in their lives that are a negative influence. Encouraging these students to be selective about their involvement with them may be the best way of approaching this issue (Abrams, 2006). School counselors can advise students that although these relationships may be important to them it is in their best interest to avoid putting themselves in situations with these people that will make it difficult for them to avoid reoffending. Working with these students as a counselor can help them make changes to their social interaction and thought patterns that will make it easier for them to maintain their important personal relationships while resisting the pressure or temptation to participate in any delinquent activities that could accompany these relationships.

When working with students who have engaged in delinquent activities it is important that school counselors are familiar with laws and community policies relevant to the students in this population (Mathur et al., 2009). Such laws consist of not only those that pertain to youth crime but also those that address any additional issues that these students may be facing as they transition into postsecondary life. Relevant issues may include aging out of the foster care

system or guardianship for young people with severe emotional/behavioral disabilities (Unruh & Bullis, 2005). As students with complicated backgrounds transition into postsecondary life it will be increasingly important to them to have a multi-element personal support system.

An additional complication could be the existence of a disruptive behavior disorder, such as conduct disorder or oppositional defiant disorder (Maughan et al., 2004). When a student's interactions with authority figures are perpetually hostile and difficult across multiple settings (i.e. school, home, work, etc...) it will be beneficial to collaborate with the school's school psychologist and consider any psychological assessments that could potentially clarify the issue. It will be advantageous for these students to learn how to manage their thought and behavior patterns in a way that will not interfere with their ability to successfully function in adult roles in postsecondary life. School counselors can most effectively work with these students in a counseling relationship that incorporates cognitive-behavioral techniques and anger management training (Burke et al., 2002). In addition, school counselors can also notify these students' families of any available resources that may benefit them including family therapy and parenting classes. When all of these options are used in congruence it is more likely to provide the best outcomes for a student from this background as they leave the high school setting and prepare to work toward their postsecondary goals.

### **Career**

Students with a history of involvement in delinquent activities may benefit from vocational training that is consistent with their postsecondary goals both during and after high school (Foley, 2001). School counselors should be knowledgeable of federal job training programs for youth such as Job Corps and YouthBuild U.S.A. (Cross & Wright, 2004; Schochet et al., 2001) and make themselves available to students who may need assistance with the

application process. Collaboration with school administration and faculty will help school counselors provide advocacy for students who could benefit from school-based vocational training. Advocacy may include refining existing school-based vocational training programs or working with administrators to create a new program of this kind that will meet students' needs.

Throughout a school-based vocational training program school counselors can work with students with a history of juvenile delinquency to process their experience. It is important that these students see the connection between education and vocational success (Hawkins & Lishner, 1987). In addition, school counselors should also encourage involvement in vocational training activities that would enhance these students' sense of connectedness to their community. Community service is a valuable way for students to gain pre-employment skills that serves the dual purpose of increasing students' attachment to their community which is a protective element against recidivism (Hawkins & Lishner, 1987).

Although gaining pre-employment skills is important, school counselors should encourage students not to devote more than 20 hours a week to work outside of school (Apel et al., 2008). The same student reported that students with a history of juvenile delinquency may feel a sense of achievement from their work outside of school that is greater than any sense of achievement that they may feel regarding their academic work. School counselors can work with these students to help them process these feelings in a way that will help them to see the continued value in striving for academic success and devoting adequate time outside of classes to meeting their academic goals. This is particularly important if a student's parents are chronically unemployed or are gaining income by illegal means because this indicates that the student may not have a role model that has demonstrated for them how to maintain a conventional career or earn income by socially acceptable means (McGahey, 1986).

Keeping parents or guardians involved in the career counseling process is important for students with a history of involvement in illegal activities. Guardians should be made aware of the potential for their student to engage in illegal activities while at their place of part-time work, particularly if the work site provides little adult supervision to the student (Paternoster et al., 2003). Ideally, high school students will seek part-time employment at work sites that will offer them ample adult supervision. Adequate adult supervision will not only deter illegal activity but it will also ensure that the student is being sufficiently trained and learning valuable vocational skills. School counselors should also inform students' guardians of the importance of helping their child manage their money responsibly (Ploeger, 1997). Guardians should be encouraged to help their child open a savings account and to give their child real financial responsibilities, such as paying for their own car insurance or cell phone bill. When high school students are encouraged to save their money and are given real financial responsibilities they will learn valuable money management skills and be less likely to spend their money on objectionable possessions (i.e. alcohol, drug paraphernalia, etc...) that may contribute to repeated delinquency involvement.

When high school students have delinquent acts on their record they may find it more difficult for themselves to obtain postsecondary employment. If viable, school counselors can help these youth look into the process of having their record expunged (Hollander et al., 2007). Sampson and Laub (1993) found that when students with this background do gain full-time postsecondary employment they tend to find that continued success in their vocation is not congruent with recidivism, especially if they are genuinely interested in their work and it is connected to the goals that they set for themselves prior. It may be assumed that this would be the case for students from this background who pursue postsecondary education as well.

## **Summary**

A successful postsecondary transition for high school students with a history of juvenile delinquency is one that does not involve continued illegal activity and that prepares them to meet their goals. School counselors should work with these students to instill any protective factors against recidivism and to help them establish their postsecondary goals. Once these goals are established it is the role of the school counselor to educate these students about the options that exist to reach these goals and what it will take for them to get there. Helping these students get access to resources that can help them achieve success academically, socially and vocationally is paramount. If resources don't exist then school counselors ought to work toward creating them. Throughout the process of advocating for these students their families should be encouraged to be involved. Students' support systems are important and these students must realize that they are valued and that their character is based on more than their past mistakes. Success for these students is possible and school counselors can help them actualize their potential.

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