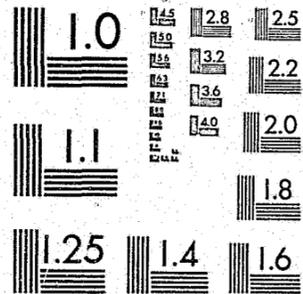


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RECREATION PLANNING for ELDERLY and MENTALLY  
RETARDED INMATES

by Delpaneaux V. Walakafra-Wills, Ph.D.

Most Jail Recreation Programs are struggling to provide optimal, if not, minimal service to as many inmates as possible, while at the same time trying to keep inmates busy with the usual popular activities; basketball, handball, weight lifting and etc., while under-staffed.

While we, as Recreation Service Providers rush to keep up with a majority of the needs and activities programming most inmates' participate in, we neglect to provide the same attention to a minority of inmates we generally try to ignore on purpose. We generally ignore the physically handicap, blind, mentally retarded and elderly and their needs to receive the same quality we give to the majority of inmates. This exclusion from the general recreation dynamics is partially due to our inability to take the time to administer some form of intervention and our general lack of knowledge in what to do for these groups of inmates.

We assume, since they can not do some thing or don't want to participate in an activity, that they are not interested. Well the assumption is wrong. Regardless of what form of handicapism or age, all inmates are bored in jail and need to constructively participate in some form of activity in their leisure time availability. In most jails, elderly inmates who are unable to play the more active sports like a majority of the inmates do, usually find themselves sitting down and participating in recreation as a spectator. The same is for a jails' mentally retarded inmate, in so much as, we do not consider why in many cases the retarded inmate is introverted and refuses to interact, because we either expect that from him or he is being alienated by other inmates and forced into his own recreation world, again as a spectator.

Most jail recreation programs are not equipped with the staff, expertise and time it takes to provide individual attention to these cohort classifications. But, as demonstrated at the Sacramento County Main Jail, you can provide both attention and time through using the Positive Indirect Recreation Approach; (PIRA). The model of Human Systems Recreation Dynamics (HSRD), provides to any jail or prison a system by which inmate needs are met through an assessment measurement application. Once applied and analyzed, the results will guide and formulate a course of action to design a viable, responsive and comprehensive recreation program for that inmate or group of inmates.

With this as a problem, the Recreation Staff used PIRA to design an effective

recreation and physical fitness program for its inmates who were over 55 years old, blind, handicapped and mentally retarded. The activities isolated from the mainstream activities proved highly successful and provided structured time to the inmates who once just sat during their 2 hour recreation period, 3 times a week. By isolating the inmates through staff interaction only, continued to foster most inmates' desires not to include them into the mainstream. In our next step, the staff replaced their interaction with the group with regular inmates. The response was excellent on both sides and time spent by the normal inmates was time recreating as well as teach and helping another inmate.

What the PIRA method attempted to do was to get the inmates involved in recreation skills development, in performing physical fitness programs and in learn-how to play or execute simple activities or participate in a simple activity.

The first step of this task was to survey those inmates in the affected population. Once surveyed and the data analyzed, we found that most mentally retarded inmates wanted to play the two available video games. The one blind inmate wanted to learn proper exercise skills and learn to lift weights. The remaining elderly inmates wanted to basically do four activities; watch others play competitive sports, play video games, read and walk around and take in fresh air.

With this understanding of need, the staff was assigned the task of working out an individual recreation/physical fitness/exercise plan for each of the special inmates. A variety of games and activities were specially designed to meet their needs; such as the playing of table games like Connect Four, Cards, simple stress reduction and relaxation exercises, drawing/painting, standing and sitting down exercises, reading assignments, and getting each other to show the other what they had learned or accomplished that session or a previous recreational session.

It is important that when you plan activities for all the cohort classifications such activities should be simple, not complicated with short playing time and easy goals for accomplishment. Handicap, mentally retarded, blind and elderly inmates should not be treated any differently than other inmates during recreation. It is important to get these inmates to associate with other inmates in competitive sports or activities.

Jails must begin to service the recreational needs of their handicapped and elderly inmates and not just sit them aside as spectators. They need to recreate just as does the normal troublesome inmate. The PIRA method has proven satisfactory in developing an effective program for this group based on the inmates' needs, constraints, handicap, likes and dislikes, and PIRA worked like a charm.



quires manpower from community volunteer detox and drug/alcohol programs and cost to operate the program should only come from the Inmate Welfare Fund, otherwise cost to operate the program should be in-kind from various community groups, church groups and college/university research programs.

Diagram 1, illustrates the multi-disciplinary approach to this particular systems design function. The 10 Steps to Recovery in Jail in diagram 2 is the key to the success of the PICA method.

#### SUMMARY

The PICA method has yet to be implemented. Its approach is innovative, aggressive in design and comprehensive in treatment scope. PICA stresses more counselling and group dynamics than chemical treatment applications.

It encourages inmates to understand their condition, present situation and deal with it in a positive manner while helping them build within themselves the desire to stay off drugs and stop using alcohol. PICA is a self-motivator and rehabilitator.

The need for jails to take a serious look at PICA as a new system, new approach to problem solving and as a cost-effective program approach in attacking a rapidly growing problem is now.

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**END**