

What Others Have Said

TAKEN FROM EVALUATION & PROGRAM RECOMMENDATION

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Some summary thoughts:

Taken together, the levels of trust and responsibility support some very significant growth in the self-esteem of the participants. The results of *the back door* go beyond changes in external behavior; the program affects deeply held attitudes and values which in turn alter the lives of the youth who participate.

The back door system of goals ("STEPS") and incentives ("BONUSES") makes frequent use of written CONTRACTS with individual participants. The CONTRACTS spell out the mutual commitments and bonuses, are kept in open files, and are modified as progress is made. The result of the CONTRACT system is twofold: as each external "STEP" is achieved and bonused, the participant not only achieves a measurable result, but experiences a sense of increasing integrity and self-worth as they learn to make and keep agreements with themselves and others. While warm human relations are clearly part of the formula, the incentives for progress are not tied to politics, favoritism, or a staff need to feel parental. The written straightforward CONTRACT keeps the expectations on the table for both the staff and the participants. From the perspective of the interview team the contracts, are in fact, "a clean deal." The unique adaptation of the CONTRACT method to help solve the social and economic problems associated with street life seems very effective, and worth replicating. Rather than creating yet another institutional half-way house or a separate world with different symbols and priorities from the mainstream of society, *the back door* program is blunt about recognizing "success" in the same way that employed people receive recognition: BONUSES are for money, not gold stars.

For four hundred years the western system of charity and welfare has emphasized either "handouts" (which undercut self-esteem and initiative) or sheltered workshops (which utilize different incentives than the mainstream economy). The traditional message to the recipients is that they are "not OK" and may never "make it" into an economically (and socially) acceptable position. The review team finds that *the back door's* use of CONTRACT has been an important lever in creating a new model. The underlying message of the CONTRACT process is that "learning how to earn money, and keep agreements (with yourself and others) will help you achieve a valuable sense of independence in our society."

Findings: The review team is pleased to report that, in our opinion, *the back door* has initiated an innovative and effective program which we find to be successful in helping street youth. Not only is the specific program of value, but

the CONTRACT system itself should be evaluated for export to other kinds of programs. *the back door* is a success. It is also rightly a focus of pride for the people involved in the agency, particularly the participants.

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the back door is to be contrasted with most mainstream social service agencies addressing the needs of street youth. What is obvious is that *the back door* differs from mainstream agencies in many important respects. It is not a mainstream agency but it is out to one side - a fringe agency for want of a better term. It could be likened to venture capital in the business world.

**Selected Characteristics of
the back door and Mainstream Social Service Agencies**

The back door	Mainstream Agencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * committed to helping youth get off the street * located away from the streets * emphasizes empowerment and taking charge of one's life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * usually committed to enriching the life quality of youth while they are on the street.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * focuses on steps, contracts and bonuses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * located adjacent to the streets * centres on helping by providing services, e.g., housing, counseling
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * quick response time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * may focus on steps, usually not on contracts and never give money to participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * comfortable with an on-and-off relationship over a period of time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * may involve paper work and waiting lists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * small, familiar and deeply committed staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * may be more stringent about admission and discharge criteria and length of involvement.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * large, changing staff with varying levels of commitment.

After talking with four participants who were either currently enrolled in the program or who have completed it but still keep in touch with *the back door*. Dr. Dan Offord says all four were extremely complimentary about the program. They made statements such as "the best thing that ever happened to me". As one might expect, they commented positively on the special aspects of the program as noted in the preceding table, and then talked about the characteristics that turned them off of the usual programs to help street youth. It is clear that for these four youth, *the back door* has played a unique role in changing their developmental pathways in late adolescence from destructive trajectories (including possibly death) to ones that do not include the street and generate feelings of hopefulness and productivity in these youth.

the back door does accept a limited number of students for their placements. This training element of *the back door* could be expanded to include, not just more students, but also staff from mainstream agencies. *the back door* is a unique, effective program for a portion of street youth who want to get off the street and move towards a more traditional lifestyle. It deserves ongoing, enthusiastic support.