

Feature Story 3 (3rd in a series): Youth Voice Band/Care principles in action.....

This story is part of a series about the Youth Voice Band from Hillside Family of Agencies and written by Kim Draheim.

This article and ones to follow will be available on the Cornell RCCP Website, <http://rccp.cornell.edu/>, featuring new article every 4-6 weeks

A unit supervisor Robert came to me to discuss a situation and ask for my advice. One of the young men on his unit, Dante (not his real name), was consistently experiencing difficulties in school as well as for the first 30 minutes or so on the unit after school. As a result of these difficulties the staff on the unit was outraged that the young man was still allowed to go to his music lessons and Youth Voice Band rehearsals. The supervisor told me that he knew he was doing the right thing by letting Dante go to the music lessons and rehearsals and that he had no intention of taking music away from him.

The supervisor said, “Kim, it’s the only time he’s happy. I know he needs it and I know it’s right to let him go to the lessons and rehearsals. But I can totally see where my team is coming from. I disagree with their position but I respect it and understand it and I know how frustrated they are. They’re on the verge of mutiny over this. What do you think I should do?”

I said, “Well, Robert, Dante’s a bright kid and I assume he likes you?”

“He does.”

“Then tell him.”

“Tell him what?”

“Everything you just told me.”

“What do you mean?”

“Assure him that you are not going to take music away from him. Let him know that you understand how much he needs it and how good it is for him. Make *sure*

he understands that he is in no danger of losing it. Then tell him about the position he's putting you in. Tell him that you disagree with your team but that you understand their frustration and where they're coming from. Then ask him to help you."

"How?"

"You're in a tough spot. His misbehavior is frustrating the whole team, including you. They want to take away his "privileges" to go play music. While you understand and empathize with those feelings you know it's not the right thing to do, but you haven't been able to sell that to your team. He needs to help you out of the jam you're in. Help him see that his actions are largely what're putting you in that jam. He likes you and you will make it clear to him just how much you are in his corner. I think he'll understand and I think he'll want to help you."

Dante continued to show up for music and was successful with his lessons and in the band. But success with me had never really been an issue. A few weeks later I ran into Rob and asked him if he'd ever had the conversation I suggested with Dante. He said he had and that it went pretty well. I asked him if it helped. Rob told me that Dante still struggled in school but that his behavior, both in school and on the unit, was definitely somewhat better...but that the really big difference was in the dynamic between him, his team and Dante, which had improved a lot.

"I discussed some of what you and I talked about with the team and what they have seen from Dante now that he's trying. The fact that he doesn't succeed as often as we'd all like doesn't really seem to bother them too much. They find it much easier to support him now. He finds it easier to be around them and communicate his needs to them. I think all of us grew from this experience."

(This is an excellent example of a CARE moment in action! Not taking away an activity that is very important to the youth, even when behavior is less than desirable, is applying CARE principles to help the youth succeed. This is also a good learning experience for the staff as the relationship between staff and youth appears to have improved.)