The Art of Prevention:
How Arts Programmes Are Operationalising the Mechanisms to Help Incarcerated Youth
End the Cycle of Violence

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Abstract

The United States of America has the biggest prison population in the world. With problems and concerns over overcrowding in prisons, human rights abuses, and recidivism of the incarcerated population, there is a strong argument for the adequate rehabilitation of prisoners so that they can re-enter and co-exist peacefully with the rest of mainstream society. Research has shown that frequent adult offenders of serious, violent, and sometimes gang-related crime share the similar risk factor of delinquent behaviour in their youth; being incarcerated at a young age increases one's chance of incarceration as an adult. With the increasing criticism of its criminal justice system, particularly over human rights concerns, American society can no longer afford to ignore this problem, both economically (by investing in more prisons) and socially (by not redressing the structural and cultural violence facing the poor, especially those belonging to disadvantaged minority groups). The incarceration epidemic of America is a reflection of how its social inequalities with a strong component of racial disparity are causing so many avoidable deaths, especially among youth of colour and low-socio economic standing.

In an attempt to address this problem, there has been a strong social movement of using community-based arts programmes to assist in the early intervention of at-risk youth in hopes to prevent them from becoming too embedded in the street life of gangs and crime so that they can escape the cycle of violence, drugs, poverty, and incarceration. There are ten mechanisms that contribute to their success. In theory, these mechanisms, when implemented effectively, can help incarcerated youth, those not just at-risk but in-risk, to resist the street life and avoid future incarceration of more serious crimes. In practice, these mechanisms are extremely difficult to operationalise though not impossible, but they do face challenges and limitations that reduce their long-term impact. Despite this setback, their place in the prevention programming field in giving voice to a marginalised group is of significance. The process of creating art and the end-products created by the youth participating in these programmes carry important policy implications for structural change, increase awareness for cultural change, and empower these in-risk youth to seek out personally change to lead a better, longer life.

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Introduction

The rate of incarceration in the United States of America has accelerated over the years in an unprecedented manner that alarms human rights activists and brings forward issues of human rights abuses of prisoners. Minority groups such as African Americans and Latino Americans are disproportionally represented in the American criminal justice system. When one steps into a prison, it is hard to ignore the racial disparity. Is America living in a post-racial society? If so, why do its minority groups make up a disproportionate percentage of crime, poverty, mortality, and incarceration? In face of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, domestic conflicts, despite having more direct impact on the lives of Americans, have a tendency to be overshadowed or ignored in public debate. With the apparent concerns of over-crowding in prisons, increasing costs, rights of prisoners, and the rehabilitation of detainees back into society, the alarmingly high rate of incarceration in American needs urgent attention in the political, economic, and social realms of public discourse, particularly with special attention to the disparate treatment of minorities.

Presently, the United States of America has the largest prison population in the world. The rate of incarceration has tripled from 1980 to 2010, from two hundred and twenty people incarcerated for every hundred thousand Americans to seven hundred and thirty-one (Gopnik 2012). No country even comes close to approaching this number. The money that states spend on prisons has increased at six times the rate of spending on higher education in the past two decades (Ibid). More youth, especially those of colour, are getting entangled in the criminal justice system at a younger age. Research shows that once a youth is incarcerated, the chance of future incarceration is more likely (Greenwood 2008, 186). The rate of recidivism is also of a major concern with more and more chronic offenders appearing and staying in the system. With this disturbing reality, early intervention and rehabilitation of juvenile offenders is argued to be the best possible solution to the prevention of an ever escalating incarceration rate.

This Master's thesis is rooted in the social plight of incarcerated youth, especially those belonging to minority groups. The intention is to bring awareness to the different forms of violence experienced by them in present day America resulted from the legacy of slavery and

centuries of cultural violence that have normalised poverty and the racial disparity in the American criminal justice system. The attempt to address their social plight in the form of arts programmes to intervene and prevent future incarceration or an early death is the main focus of this thesis. There is a substantial amount of literature that suggests that arts programmes can be an effective mean to achieve this. In fact, a social movement of this nature has already been underway. In spite of this, preventive arts programmes continue to face scepticism. Little is known as to why some programmes fare well and others fail. The core purpose of this thesis is to study the mechanisms and how they are operationalised in practice to better understand how an arts programme can be successful in intervening in the early stage of an incarcerated youth's life to prevent recidivism or an early grave.

Chapter One: Analysis of the Conflict

Africans are captured, forced across the Atlantic to work as slaves; millions are killed in the process - in Africa, on board, in the Americas. This massive direct violence over centuries seeps down and sediments as massive structural violence, with whites as the master topdogs and blacks as the slave underdogs, producing and reproducing massive cultural violence with racist ideas everywhere. After some time, direct violence is forgotten, slavery is forgotten, and only two labels show up, pale enough for college textbooks: 'discrimination' for massive structural violence and 'prejudice' for massive cultural violence. Sanitation of language: itself cultural violence (Galtung 1990, 295).

1.1 The Legacy of Slavery

The United States of America, despite being the wealthiest country in the world, has millions of people living in poverty and deprived of adequate health care, job opportunities, affordable housing, etc. due to an unequal system that favours some over others, a discriminatory system passed down from a history of oppression and great violence. Its name is slavery. Its enforcers are discrimination and prejudice. Its effects are poverty, crime, substance abuse, gun violence, and gang wars, which all contribute to a disturbingly high incarceration rate. Its main victims are historically Native and African Americans but presently with the changing global political economy, Latino Americans are being disproportionally affected as well.

Slavery was a dark but integral part of American history. Slavery may be outlawed now but its structural and psychological remnants still exist, which continue to have negative effects on the welfare of a vulnerable minority and as a result, the social cohesion and the moral advancement of the American nation. Some may argue that the race issue is no longer a relevant topic in the present public discourse; all parties have equal right under the Constitution. Slavery is over and it is time to move on. It would be nice to believe in such a picture; however, it is hard to ignore the facts. Blacks may have equal rights as Whites under the law, but this is a façade when these rights cannot be equally exercised in real life due to structural discrimination and cultural prejudice. Racial and class segregation continues to exist, but more covertly now than before.

There is a strong body of research that continues to support this, such as in *American Apartheid* by Massey and Denton. Racial tensions continue to fuel social conflicts as social inequalities persist. Arguably, this is the result of an absence in a proper reconciliation process at the end of slavery to help the perpetrators and the victims redress the direct violence of the conflict and the unequal social structures that were institutionalised during the conflict. As a consequence, the legacy of slavery continues on in the latent forms of persistent structural and cultural violence (chronic poverty, discrimination, and prejudice) with the periodic manifestation of direct violence (riots and shootings).

In 2010, 46.2 million people were reported to be in poverty by the US Census, an increase from 43.6 million in 2009 (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2011, 14). That is more than the entire population of South Africa. This mental conceptualisation is staggering. Poverty may not necessarily cause direct violence or conflict as some research may suggest, for example in the work of Paul Collier; however as Galtung argues, it is a form of structural violence when an individual dies of a preventable disease due to the inability to afford treatment. In America, a universal healthcare plan does not currently exist.[1] In 2010, there were 49.9 million Americans without health insurance (Ibid, 23), which puts this group of people at risk of structural violence. Poverty in America is also a major risk factor for crime. Research shows that being raised in poverty contributes to a higher likelihood of involvement in crime and violent behaviour (Sampson and Lauritsen in Children's Defense Fund 2007, 205).

Poverty and crime are problems that affect everyone but the reality is that it disproportionally affects certain racial groups and neighbourhoods. Poverty in the US tends to be concentrated in clustered neighbourhoods where researchers have found that living in these areas often places more burdens on low-income families beyond what their own individual circumstances would dictate. This then often creates an environment with a higher crime rate, underperformance in public schools for its residing young, poor housing and health conditions, and limited access to private services and job opportunities for its adult residents (Bishaw 2011, 1). The correlation between poverty and crime is undeniable. Poverty may lead to crime and crime may lead to poverty; both are capable of initiating a cycle that perpetuates the other.

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[1] At the writing of this paper, such a plan does not exist though the process to create one is under political debate pushed by the Obama Administration.

The racial aspect of poverty and crime is also hard to ignore. Poverty and crime in American tend to affect, on majority, African Americans, Latino Americans, and Native Americans. The 2010 American Community Survey's child poverty rate is 21.6 percent. It found that White and Asian children had poverty rates below the national average whereas Black and Hispanic children had higher rates, at 38.2 percent and 32.3 percent respectively (Macartney 2011, 1). As the Children's Defense Fund (2007, 4) succinctly puts it in its report, 'the most dangerous place for a child to try to grow up in America is at the intersection of poverty and race'.

US child poverty rates are continuously ranked as one of the highest among industrialised nations with a strong component of racial disparity. This disparity is also evident in the incarceration rate. As Adam Gopnik (2012) points out in his piece, 'The Caging of America: Why do we lock up so many people?', in *The New Yorker*:

> For a great many poor people in America, particularly poor black men, prison is a destination that braids through an ordinary life, much as high school and college do for rich white ones. More than half of all black men without a high-school diploma go to prison at some time in their lives. Mass incarceration on a scale almost unexampled in human history is a fundamental fact of our country today—perhaps *the* fundamental fact, as slavery was the fundamental fact of 1850. In truth, there are more black men in the grip of the criminal-justice system—in prison, on probation, or on parole—than were in slavery then. Over all, there are now more people under "correctional supervision" in America—more than six million—than were in the Gulag Archipelago under Stalin at its height.

US has the largest prison population in the world, surpassing China and Russia. American states spend nearly on average three times as much per prisoner as per public school student (Children's Defense Fund 2007, 81). In 2006, 837,000 African American men were incarcerated. Many of them were fathers, which further exacerbates the poverty problem because it means that a part of the household that could be working to financially support the family is unable to, which puts more strain on an already delicate

family situation. In America, incarceration is closely tied to poverty. It is no mere coincidence that a disproportionate number of people in jail come from low-socio economic backgrounds. In a culture that advocates personal responsibility, some may brush this statistical fact off as the result of greedy individuals making bad choices. This may be the case for some individuals committing crimes; however, it is erroneous to make the grand generalisation that all individuals committing crimes are doing so for the same greedy reason when there is no adequate evidence to support it.

It is convenient and easy for policy makers to frame the mass incarceration problem in terms of a narrative that demonises all incarcerated individuals by constructing a collective group identity that is based on the negative stereotypes of a few that justifies persecution and punishment rather than constructive action to fix the underlying structural problem, which is often more difficult. It can be argued that poverty in America is the new form of slavery and that inner-city neighbourhoods are the new modes of segregation while incarceration is the weapon used by the authoritative power to control resistance in maintaining the new face of the old status quo. This may be the unintended consequence of American history whereby structurally and culturally, slavery was never properly redressed and therefore, continues to have its effects in the persecution and incarceration of a marginalised group.

1.2 Understanding the Mass Incarceration of America

According to Galtung (1990, 295), crime and violence can be understood as such:

> Ordinary, regular criminal activity is partly an effort by the underdog to 'get out', to redistribute wealth, get even, get revenge ('blue-collar crime'), or by somebody to remain or become a topdog, sucking the structure for what it is worth ('white-collar crime'). Both direct and structural violence create needs-deficits. When this happens suddenly we can talk of trauma. When it happens to a group, a collectivity, we have the collective trauma that can sediment into the collective subconscious and become raw material for major historical processes and events. The underlying assumption is simple: 'violence breeds violence'. Violence is

needs-deprivation; needs-deprivation is serious; one reaction is direct violence. But that is not the only reaction. There could also be a feeling of hopelessness, a deprivation/frustration syndrome that shows up on the inside as self-directed aggression and on the outside as apathy and withdrawal.

Galtung's analysis of crime and violence provides an accurate theoretical interpretation of the incarceration epidemic as well as the violence faced by many at-risk youth living in low socio-economic neighbourhoods of America. 'Blue-collar crimes' are grievance-based, which are often the crimes committed by those coming from poverty who face an unequal social structure that limits their access to legitimate forms of satisfying their needs. Many incarcerated youth grow up with inadequate education due to poorly funded schools as well as family and environmental stresses that prevent them from receiving a proper education, which then limits their ability to find decent jobs and achieve financial security. This financial insecurity is arguably one of the deep-rooted contributors of direct violence in low socio-economic neighbourhoods. The population of Americans living in poverty experiences a relative needs-deprivation caused by structural violence and as a result, they commit direct violence to address their grievances. But as Galtung indicates, direct violence is not the only reaction. Structural violence also creates a sense of hopelessness and self-directed aggression among victims, which explains why anti-social behaviour, drugs and alcohol addiction, mental illnesses, and apathy have high incidences among the poor.

This non-violent form of reaction is often ignored in conflict studies though it is just as damaging to the welfare of a people. Self-directed aggression of apathy and withdrawal explains why poverty does not necessarily bring about violent conflict, though it does increase the likelihood of it. Certain conflict analysts may misinterpret this non-violent reaction as evidence that a causal relationship between poverty and conflict does not exist, which has the useful implication to discredit the need to alleviate poverty as part of the solution. However, this is simply not true. Poverty creates needs-deficits as Galtung argues and such violence will only breed more violence, either in the form of direct violence or self-directed aggression.

A causal relationship between poverty and social conflict does exist though it must be noted that not every conflict is caused by poverty. Poverty (or relative-poverty) can cause conflict but not every conflict is caused by it. This distinction is very important. To see poverty not as a social conflict when direct violence is absent is itself cultural violence, which is reflected in the normalisation of poverty in this country. Reactions to a conflict manifest in different ways; some are externally destructive like riots and gang wars while others are internally destructive like drug abuse, alcoholism, apathy, and withdrawal. Galtung is not alone in his analysis. Thomas Pogge and Amartya Sen (in Ho 2007) also argue that poverty is a form of structural violence and a structural violation of human rights in their extensive work on this subject.

From a purely structuralist perspective, the analysis of the incarceration conflict lies in the discriminatory nature of the social structures. Incarceration in the United States is the government's reaction and management of the reaction of the poor to these structural inequalities. This structural violence is the cause of the conflict. People are trapped by the social structures around them and are forced to act in pre-determined ways. I found that from my own research working in juvenile detention centres in California, this was the justification used by almost all of the incarcerated youth in legitimising their illegal actions. They see themselves as victims and their actions as reactions to being victimised. It is hard not to feel sympathy for them when one hears of their life stories of the structural violence that they face in their everyday lives. Their stories provide convincing evidence to support the structuralist theory and there is no doubt that there is truth to it; however, the structuralist theory fails to provide a complete and accurate analysis of the conflict. If agency plays little to no role in this conflict, then all poor individuals would be committing crimes, which simply is not the case. This plain fact demonstrates that agency does play a role. So what best explains this conflict? How is it that some at-risk youth are able to overcome the odds while others succumb to the risk factors that lead them to be incarcerated?

Elijah Anderson, a professor of Sociology at Yale University, provides an insightful analysis of the conflict in his book, *The Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. His book is based on his own research in the ethnographic work of two urban communities – one black and impoverished and the other that is racially mixed and of middle to upper class.

His work provides an astute account of the reality facing youth living in inner-city neighbourhoods. Though his work was done in the 90s, his findings are still extremely relevant and applicable to the present. Anderson was curious to know why despite the fact that youth violence affects youth of all classes and races, youth living in inner-city neighbourhoods are more inclined to commit aggression and violence towards others.

In his research, he found that in these neighbourhoods exist two groups of individuals, the decent ones and the street-oriented ones. The so-called decent ones are the families who hold mainstream values of playing by the law while the street-oriented ones are the ones who have adopted an oppositional culture of the street as a result of the alienation they feel from the mainstream (Anderson 1999, 287). The adoption of this oppositional culture, also known as the 'code of the street' is the cultural aspect of Galtung's conflict triangle that explains why not all at-risk youth end up committing crimes and becoming incarcerated. Anderson explains that there is diversity of people even within these impoverished neighbourhoods; not everyone supports the street culture. Despite the fact that many people living in these impoverished neighbourhoods consider themselves as 'decent', they are forced to adopt certain elements of the street culture for security purposes. The hyper-masculine element of the street culture is an important quality to have for a male living in such an environment. This quality serves as deterrence from being taking advantage of, such as becoming a victim of crime. The code of the street provides a set of rules of conduct to maintain security and a relative peace in these neighbourhoods to counteract the lack of positive police presence. To an outsider who is unfamiliar with this reality, it is easy to mistake and group all youth exhibiting street culture as young delinquents up to no good when in reality, many of them are decent kids attempting to navigate the best and the safest way they know how in an insecure environment.

The temptation to group all youth in this predicament into one negative category is often translated into discrimination by the police in dealing with these youth. Many of the so-called 'decent' youth feel anger and frustration towards the police due to the harassment they face on the streets in the form of 'random' searches and questioning. As a result, many of them are uncooperative in interacting with judicial authority, which then re-enforces the negative prejudice towards them that reproduces the cycle of discrimination. The conflict stems from a

historical context; however, it is able to persist through time because individuals react in a destructive manner out of anger and frustration that contributes to the continuation of the problem rather than its resolution. The implication of Anderson's ethnographic work is that agency does matter in the resolution of this conflict.

Vivienne Jabri (1996, 74) notes in her book, *Discourses on Violence: Conflict Analysis Reconsidered*,

> As pointed out by Kratochwil, 'Actors are not only programmed by rules and norms, but they reproduce and change by their practice the normative structures by which they are able to act, share meanings, communicate intentions, criticize claims, and justify choices.' Human conduct is, therefore, both constitutive and transformative of the normative structures which render conduct and social interaction meaningful.

The structurationist approach provides a more appropriate explanation of the conflict. The dichotomy between structuralism and agency does not exist. Individuals are constrained by the structures around them but they have the agency to either reproduce or transform them. This analytical framework provides a more accurate explanation than the structuralist theory in describing why some at-risk youth are able to avoid incarceration while others are not.

According to Anderson, the best way to resolve this conflict is prevention, to prevent at-risk youth from getting too deeply embedded in the street culture that serves as the justification for their illegal actions and destructive behaviour. Anderson (1999, 288-289) recommends the following:

1. A need for early interventionist programmes before the oppositional culture has had a chance to begin developing in the child and for continuing intervention with preadolescents and adolescents.
2. The importance of giving maturing boys and girls job training and education in the practicalities of operating in the world of work with real job opportunities.

3. The system must be more receptive to the youths of inner-city neighbourhoods at an earlier stage of their development to diminish the feeling of alienation and the tempting influences of the oppositional culture.

4. Simply providing opportunities is not enough. Young people must also be encouraged to adopt an outlook that allows them to invest their considerable personal resources in available opportunities.

A solution is possible, thought it may be difficult to operationalise. Prevention and early intervention may be the best strategy. The question of inquiry is then, how can this be achieved in practice? One answer is arts-based prevention programming. The next chapter focuses on the literature review that adds to this discussion.

Chapter Two: Core Concepts and Literature Review

2.1 Defining Arts Programmes

The term, arts programmes, in this paper refers to programmes where participants are able to express themselves in creative outlets and share in the creativity of others. Participants are encouraged to partake in activities in which they are involved in the artistic production by making, doing, or creating something, or contributing ideas to works of art through mediums such as but not exclusive to drawing, painting, music, writing, drama, and dance. The medium or mediums used in an arts programme is not central to the definition; rather, it is the creative process of self-expression through the production of something that is central to the definition of an arts programme.

2.2 Defining Conflict Prevention

The term conflict prevention has been used in this paper thus far without a proper definition. Before any meaningful research can be done or conclusions made, a tangible definition is needed. Conflict prevention can have various meanings or implied meanings that differ from individual to individual; therefore, the construction of a common understanding of what it means should not be taken for granted. Conflict prevention in this paper follows Galtung's conflict triangle of preventing direct, structural, and cultural forms of violence. As he argues, all three forms of violence are connected and therefore, all three forms must be targeted for the proper prevention of a conflict.

To operationalise this definition, prevention of direct violence is pre-empting the eruption of violence for imminent crises, which means preventing a youth from using violence to solve his immediate problem. For example, when a youth is verbally provoked at school, prevention of direct violence is successful when the youth is able to seek out alternative means of non-violent action in reaction to the situation rather than using violence to attack the provoker, which could then get him incarcerated for assault and perpetuate the stereotype of a troubled youth.

The prevention of structural violence is understood as helping to change the current social structure that underlies the problem to one that is more equal and attempting to alleviate

poverty and discrimination. For example, grievances from poverty can lead to incarceration where a young adult steals to satisfy his basic human needs. When the individual is caught and persecuted by the criminal justice system and punished through jail time, this further contributes to his poverty as he is unable to work and lift himself out of that state. This cycle of poverty then repeats itself through the trans-generational transfer to his offspring, which subjects the next generation to the continual exposure to structural violence and the unequal access to social resources. Prevention of structural violence is successful when individuals are able to access resources through legal ways to satisfy their basic needs so that they do not have to resort to illegal activities.

The prevention of cultural violence is changing the cultural factors that justify the use of violence as legitimate means of conflict resolution as well as challenging the normalisation of poverty, discrimination, and prejudice. This includes the social discourse that generalises all at-risk youth as problematic individuals prone to extralegal activities, having unintelligent characters, and dangerous to society. This cultural discourse provides the justification for their continual discriminatory treatment in mainstream society, which then creates alienation and strengthens a youth's subscription to the street culture increasing their likelihood of incarceration.

2.3 Risk Factors for Incarceration

According to the research in the report done by Children's Defense Fund, *America's Cradle to Prison Pipeline*, common risk factors are exhibited by youth facing incarceration. The research indicates that if a child experiences one or a few of these risk factors, the child's own resiliency and some intervention from a teacher, counsellor, relative, mentor, or some other adult offering assistance can help the child from falling into or staying on the so-called 'prison pipline'. However, if a child is exposed to six or more of these risk factors, he is ten times as likely to commit a violent act by the age of eighteen as a child who is exposed to only one or a few risk factors (Children's Defense Fund 2007, 18). According to the report (Ibid, 18-20), these risk indicators are:

1. Poverty, especially extreme poverty.

2. Family composition where single parents, teenage parents, alcohol- or substance-abusing parents, a parent in prison, a parent abandoning the home all predict increased delinquency.

3. Lack of health care, from prenatal care for pregnant women to preventive screening for children and youth of all ages to detect illnesses that block learning, hearing, seeing or concentrating.

4. Babies born at low birthweight, which is a risk factor for later physical, development and learning problems.

5. Abuse or neglect during childhood that goes unnoticed or untreated and fuelled by poverty.

6. Foster care placements when families break down (especially in families not related to the children) risk abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation, low self-esteem, anger and poor social relationships.

7. Poor school performance where not reading at grade level, failing or acting out are met with police intervention, and suspensions or expulsions leading to dropping out altogether.

8. Few timely and quality mental health interventions in communities to provide care in a timely manner to prevent or interrupt negative behaviour or remediate problems causing children to get into trouble.

9. The juvenile justice system which cements many children's sense of hopelessness and offers too few positive programs to change the prison pipeline's trajectory.

10. The disparate treatment of children of colour.

The report, using case study findings in Ohio and Mississippi, argues that intervention is important in early childhood. It finds that community- and family-based programmes are more effective in changing a juvenile's course down the incarceration path. The Children's Defense Fund report (2007, 20) emphasises that, 'the deeper a youth gets into the Prison Pipeline, the harder it is to get out. Not only do they have few choices, they don't see the choices that do exist' and that 'even with sincere resolve to change and stay out of trouble, it is difficult to separate from an existing network and identity'. This indicates that once a child gets more

heavily involved with the street culture, it gets harder for him to escape despite the desire to because of a cementation of identity associated with the streets and the relationships formed with other street-oriented individuals that create an extremely difficult network to leave. The report suggests that prevention is the most cost-efficient in the long-run and perhaps the most effective, which is in accordance with Anderson's conclusions from his ethnographic work.

Incarceration often does not work to help at-risk youth and costs society more than prevention programmes in the long-term. The average annual per prisoner cost is $22,650, which is almost three times as much as the cost that states spend on public school per student. The average annual per child cost of a mentoring program is $1000 while the average annual per child cost of Head Start is $7,028 (Children's Defense Fund 2007, 20), which is also a programme that Elijah Anderson (1999, 289) recommends as a possible solution to the problem. Once a child gets into the 'prison pipeline', it is extremely difficult to get out. The cycle of poverty, violence, and crime has to be broken by preventing new generations of actors from reproducing the negative actions that contribute to the continual existence of this problem.

By analysing the risk factors that contribute to the likelihood of incarceration, one can see that many of them are structural factors, though direct violence and cultural factors are also present. In order for prevention to work in minimising an at-risk youth's chance of getting too entangled in the 'prison pipeline', risk factors need to be reduced. Therefore, it begs the question: What can the arts do in reducing these risk factors?

2.4 Arts Programmes and How They Differ from Other Prevention Programmes
A growing field of out-of-school, community-based prevention programming has come out of the debate as a possible solution to address this problem. Prevention programmes can come in various forms, using various means such as the arts, sports, life skill education, etc. A survey of literature on youth development suggests that effective after-school, community-based programmes can have a positive impact on targeting risk factors that contribute to drug abuse, gang activity, violence, and juvenile delinquency among youth (Americans for the Arts 1998; Becker 1994; Costello 1995; Fiske 1999; Hawkins and Catalano 1993; Heath and McLaughlin 1993; Lakes 1996; McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman 1994; Mortimer 1994; Randall 1997; Schorr

1989; and Weitz 1996). So, why the arts? What particular characteristics of the arts separate them from other forms of prevention?

There is an abundant amount of work written on the power of the arts to transform lives from rehabilitating child soldiers to decreasing stress and anger in prison inmates in the field of psychology as well as significant amount of literature supporting the arts in helping at-risk youth to steer away from anti-social behaviour (Halpern, et al. 2000 and Anderson, et al. 2003). In addition, it is argued that art therapy has a tremendous ability to redress the trauma of political violence experienced by victims (Kalmanowitz and Lloyd 2006). Significant amount of literature exists to support claims that the arts possess a healing power that differs from other modes of prevention to help victims of violence make sense of their traumatic experiences and break away from the cycle of violence.

Truus Wertheim-Cahen (in Kalmanowitz and Lloyd 2006, 216) argues that, 'Psychological trauma as a result of war means foremost a destruction of identity and meaning.' She asserts that art making often proves to be instrumental in the repair of the survivors' sense of identity and meaning by providing possibilities to heal the destroyed connection between past, present, and future. Art activities offer survivors a transition from helplessness and passivity towards being in charge again, even if it is only momentarily. For youth growing up in unstable, crime-ridden environments, a violent event in their lives, such as the death of a loved one by shooting, can cause a traumatic experience that when it goes untreated can have detrimental effects. This kind of trauma coupled with the stressors of poverty that prevents them from accessing timely and quality mental health services or in the absence of an adult's guidance that can help them make sense of their trauma could lead to psychological problems that could result in internal and external acts of aggression. As it has often been said, violence creates more violence.

In the book, *Art Therapy and Political Violence: with art, without illusion*, the contributors make a case for the arts and their place in helping redress political violence, though other forms of non-political violence can also be applied. The contributors of the book are artists, psychologists, art therapists, professors, and humanitarian aid workers who share their experiences working in art therapy interventions in conflict zones such as Kosovo, Sudan, Northern Ireland, Palestine,

Sri Lanka, and the former Yugoslavia. One of the contributors, Diane Waller, notes that there is no illusion among the art therapists that art therapy is going to solve all the conflicts; however, she states that it might just help its participants to feel that they have a voice and to regain a bit of control over their lives (Kalmanowitz and Lloyd 2006, xviii). Kalmanowitz and Lloyd write that living through and surviving political violence can be an isolating experience and that for many, the act of giving testimony is essential in making meaning of that experience and in aiding in the healing process (Ibid, 24).

As Victor Frankl (Ibid, 26), a survivor of the concentration camps of WWII writes, 'to live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in that suffering.' In essence, that is the power of the arts, helping to make meaning of human suffering so to bring about a healing process that might end the cycle of violence. The arts provide survivors or even witnesses of violence an alternative mode of expression to that of speech to communicate their suffering because sometimes the trauma is so great that words alone are insufficient to express the emotions felt by survivors. The arts are especially useful for child survivors because they often have trouble verbalising their traumatic experiences due to the fact that the language skills needed for such a task have not yet been fully developed in their stage of development (Ibid, 217). This is what makes art-based prevention programmes different and especially powerful. The arts provide at-risk youth an alternative mode of expression so that they can use it to make meaning of the suffering in their lives and channel their negative feelings of anger and alienation produced by a structurally and culturally violent environment in ways that are not internally or externally destructive. This is the theory but there is also an abundance of literature that supports the arts in practice.

The book, *Art Works! Prevention Programs for Youth and Communities*, argues that the arts when used appropriately can help prevent substance abuse and help tap into the resilience of children living in difficult social environments (Randall 1997, 14-19). The book is a collection of examples of arts programmes in the US using the arts to help children from different ethnic but mostly low socio-economic backgrounds facing violence, drugs, and poverty. It provides interviews of children participating in these programmes and their testimonies of how their lives have been positively affected by the arts. It provides the reader an extensive understanding of how the arts

are helping at-risk youth to cope and manage their difficult social realities as well as insights into the positive impacts that the arts have had on these youth. The book is filled with successful stories of youth overcoming the odds through programmes such as WritersCorps in areas such as the Bronx, Washington DC, and San Francisco in strengthening literacy, personal and social vision, communication, and community-building skills (Randall 1997, 32-36).

The journal article, 'A Renaissance on the Eastside: Motivating Inner-City Youth Through Art', proposes that community-based visual arts programs can help children develop protective factors that will allow them to be resilient. The researchers interviewed 40 kids at an arts programme called AIM (Artists in the Making) located in San Antonio, Texas. They found that many of these kids, despite living in at-risk environments, possess good self-esteem, good relationships with adults, and the ability to cope with anger and peer-pressure positively (Gasman 2003, 445-447). The authors argue that arts programmes provide young people the opportunity to practice positive risk-taking, which is unlike conventional settings of learning like school where the goal is to produce the right answer. This opportunity enables participants to explore other possible answers and give them the chance to build confidence and positive self-worth especially for those who typically do poorly in school. They also argue that these programmes can help young people build social competences and effective problem solving skills by teaching them not to oversimplify problems but to examine them in multiple dimensions like that of a piece of artwork. It states that research suggests that youth who participate in community-based arts programmes have a greater tolerance and respect for difference and develop coping strategies that allow them to better handle conflict (Ibid, 431). From their interviews and observations, the researchers of the article conclude that the arts programme, AIM, cannot be said to be the singular factor that has contributed to the positive attitudes of the children but the children themselves have acknowledged the important impact that the programme has had on their lives (Ibid, 445).

In reviewing the relevant literature on arts programmes in the field of prevention, the consensus is that the arts can have tremendous positive impact on the lives of at-risk youth. The literature gives explanations on the characteristics of the arts that are able to prevent, intervene, and rehabilitate at-risk youth such as fostering positive risk-taking skills, communication skills,

making meaning, etc.; however, the implementation of these mechanisms is rarely discussed in how to best operationalise such a programme. How does a programme effectively implement these theoretical features in real life? How does one best develop communication skills in at-risk youth? In what way can a programme effectively reach its participants to make meaning of their circumstances? What are the barriers and obstacles faced by arts programmes when they fail? Despite all the support for the arts, not all programmes are successful in their implementation. Why is that? How does an arts programme effectively operate in practice?

2.5 Empowerment and the Discourse of Peace

In the journal article, 'Toward a Peaceable Paradigm: Seeking Innate Wellness in Communities and Impacts on Urban Violence and Crime', the researchers, Roger C. Mills and Ami Chen Naim, worked in community revitalisation and empowerment programmes for twenty-five years in some of the most at-risk communities in the US and observed the correlation between how they work with communities and their ability to reduce crime and alienation. They noted that paradoxically that in areas where activism was the strongest, change sometimes appeared to be the most resistant. This was the case in the San Francisco Bay Area where the researcher did most of their work. The researchers found that despite the fact that San Francisco possesses progressive activism and grassroots political organising that is far greater than that of any other major US metropolitan area, the result has not been matched.

The researches (Mills and Naim 2007, 45) explains this paradox by arguing that,

> [W]e observe another, powerful, subtle, and often unrecognized factor that contributes to this dire situation. Although the vast majority of people working in community-based organizations (CBOs) are admirably concerned and committed, and other community organizing bodies are truly dedicated, the philosophies and methods used to foster change, along with the unexamined mind-set of many providers, can produce an unintended, adverse impact: greater resistance to change in the wider community, an increased feeling of hopelessness among residents, and a lowered sense of individual empowerment.

They found that a principles-based approach to community outreach that helps residents to discover their own ability to wisdom, well-being, and resiliency tend to be more effective than those programmes focused on hand-outs and ones based on no principles of personal empowerment. It is a mindset change that is crucial for the transformation of a community and its people. The authors suggest that what is making programmes effective is in their ability to change the disempowered mindset of residents by moving them towards a 'peaceable paradigm' that emphasises on personal responsibility and efficacy, positive feelings, and the understanding of the 'other' or the 'enemy' in the system – such as police officers, opposing gang members, or government officials – to decrease conflict. In essence, the article is arguing for a counter discourse that emphasises on peace and empowerment that provides an alternative to the discourse of violence and disempowerment that is prevailing in low socio-economic neighbourhoods (Ibid, 52-54) through the discourse of the street culture.

This aspect is crucial for the success of an arts programme or any programme aiming to help at-risk youth and rebuild communities tore apart by violence, alienation, and poverty. Hand-outs or solely making art alone will not work; programmes must also foster the idea in the youth that they have the power in themselves to solve their own problems. This principle is essential for a programme to adopt but how can this be implemented in real life? The concept of a 'peaceable paradigm' as proposed by Mills and Naim corresponds to the cultural corner of Galtung's conflict triangle. For the resolution of this conflict and the prevention of future actors to sustain the conflict, this cultural aspect needs to be targeted. Through years of learned hopelessness, disempowerment, and cultural violence imposed on the poor, how does one empower a youth in practice?

2.6 Ten Mechanisms for Programmes Aimed at Serving Highly At-Risk Youth
The Mentoring Center, a non-profit organisation created to serve as a technical assistance and training provider for mentoring programmes in the San Francisco Bay Area and a nationally-recognised resource that creates and influences policy regarding prevention programming, developed a list of ten mechanisms that are required for a successful prevention programme. The guide, 'Best Practices Guide for Organizations Serving Highly At-Risk Youth', provides ten qualities that an effective programme ought to have in serving highly at-risk youth. These ten

mechanisms are actually geared towards in-risk youth, which are youth who are already incarcerated, on probation or parole, out of school, in gangs, and/or using drugs. The ten mechanisms are:

One, *relationship building in a pre-release program* that engages the youth in transforming their lives. This means to begin the programme by building relationships with the youth during incarceration, before their release, when many youth are in a state of regret and have a desire to change, which is the prime time for a programme to intervene effectively.

Two, *cognitive behavioural change/interpersonal skills curriculum-based programming* that is designed to address the root causes of a street-oriented mentality. It should include material on: self-identity, life's purpose, self-value and worth (in order to raise self-esteem), character development, spiritual awareness, decision making, process/consequences of behaviour, anger management, and cultural competence. The purpose of a prevention programme should be to change the mentality that justifies the destructive behaviour. The report highly emphasises that a program that provides resources but does not address the cognitive aspect will not likely be successful in making a long-term transformation in the life of the youth. If a young man with a criminal mentality was committing robberies on the street before getting arrested, and all a programme does is get him a job, when he gets out, he may no longer be committing robberies on the street, but instead he may steal out of the cash register at the job that the programme has helped him secure. Therefore, as vitally important as employment opportunities are for this population, attitudinal change is essential for its ultimate success.

Three, *effective needs, risks and assets assessments* that give the programme a good picture of who the youth is and what services are needed to best help that particular youth. Many programmes are constructed under a one-size-fits-all blueprint that assumes that all at-risk youth are the same and require the same services, which is completely untrue. Despite coming from similar backgrounds, every one of them is a unique case with variation in education level, residential needs, employability readiness, family stability, addiction severity, and physical and mental health conditions. This assessment provides a clearer understanding of who the youth is and therefore, allowing a more effective method of intervention. In addition to risk and needs

assessments, the reports notes that a programme must also assess young people's assets, such as skills, talents, gifts, and interests, which could be used to provide the youth with positive alternatives.

Four, *a long-term process element*. A programme must have a long-term focus to be effective. Mentality change over time and under different circumstances. The most effective programmes will work with the youth for at least 18 months, often through a combination of services during and after an incarceration.

Five, *utilising program graduates*. Having examples of people who have made a transformation through the participation of the programme is essential to the success of a programme. It gives credibility and validates the effectiveness of the programme as well as providing the participants mentors whom they can relate to, which is crucial.

Six, *intensive case management.* A case manager assesses the youth's needs, develops life plans with them, and helps them attain the necessary resources to accomplish their life plans. Case managers must interact with other agencies working with the youth, such as probation or parole, counselling services, school, and the young person's family. The key to effective case management is small caseloads. Full-time case managers should not have more than twenty cases, with fifteen being the ideal maximum.

Seven, *system partners*. Institutions (detention centres), probation and parole departments, judges, county and city agencies are essential stakeholders in the work. Having and maintaining good relationships with these parties are crucial for a programme aiming to help highly at-risk youth.

Eight, *aftercare/wrap-around support services*. Once a youth is released, aftercare services of a programme must adequately serve their needs. Aftercare services include: mentoring, transportation, housing, employability training, job placement, drug treatment, mental health therapy, education assistance (GED classes, community college, universities), and more. One programme does not have to have the capacity to offer all these services directly, but it must be

able to connect these services effectively and to refer the youth to organisations that can provide these services.

Nine, *cultural competency*. In every state and nearly every jurisdiction, there is a huge disproportionate minority detention problem. Services for youth in and coming out of the system must address the cultural issues these young people face. Many highly at-risk youth belonging to African American, Native American, and Latino American groups face issues that are at least two-fold: they battle overwhelming contemporary issues that all youth have, but they are also affected by a long history of racism. These intertwined factors make the issues that these young people face more complicated and deep-rooted than youth outside of these social groups. It is most effective when mentors/facilitators come from the same ethnic and cultural background as the young people; however, this is not necessary when consciousness and competency of this cultural aspect is present.

Ten, *the mentor spirit*. The devastating reality is that many inner-city, at-risk youth are expected to have inferior performance, to exhibit negative behaviour, and eventually to become delinquent. While involved in huge, often dysfunctional systems, these children are treated badly, ill-spoken of, and are expected to fail. In additional, too many programmes and their funders see youth in these programmes as units of service rather than assets. Children are resilient. If given the right encouragement, nurturing, and opportunities, youth from the most difficult backgrounds can excel and succeed. Many programmes have great designs, but they are missing 'the mentoring spirit'. Each mentor or person who works with youth must see and understand young people – regardless of their current circumstances – as being of unlimited potential and innate greatness. There must be a personal passion held by the staff interacting with the youth, many of whom have exhibited negative behaviour due to the lack of caring in their lives. This is why utilising programme graduates is important because they most often hold a personal passion for this work since they have experienced the juvenile criminal justice system. As the guide notes, one may not be able to train or teach people how to care, but this attribute is an absolute requirement for this work and for a programme to be successful.

The above are the ten mechanisms that in theory make for the success of a prevention programme. These ten mechanisms outlined by The Mentoring Center correspond closely to the list of criteria set forth by the National Youth Gang Center, which is based on the research done at the Vanderbilt University Center for Evaluation Research and Methodology (2002) on outcomes of more than six hundred studies with control groups that identified the most effective delinquency prevention and rehabilitation programme services. I have chosen to use these ten mechanisms as the foundational stones for my own research because I find that from surveying the literature, they best summarise the findings. The question of interest now is how can they be applied in real life? How do arts programmes aiming to help at-risk youth operationalise these mechanisms if they want to be successful? The next two chapters attempts to address this question through my own field work in an arts programme undertaking such a task.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Research Setting

The research is done by observing and participating in the daily operations of an arts programme called The Beat Within in San Francisco. The programme uses the medium of poetry and creative writing to give incarcerated youth a consistent opportunity to share their ideas and life experiences in a safe environment to encourage literacy, positive self-expression, critical thinking skills, and healthy, supportive relationships with adults and their community. The organisation partners with another arts programme called Southern Exposure that uses the medium of visual arts. This partnership gives the incarcerated youth the added option to draw during the workshop. The goal of the programme is to act as an effective bridge between the incarcerated youth and their community to foster and support their progress towards a healthy, non-violent, and productive life in the community.

The programme was founded in 1996 and operates in thirteen California counties as well as in the states of Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington DC. The Beat Within holds weekly workshops in these juvenile detention centres where participants are encouraged to write and/or draw on assigned topics or any topic of importance or significance to them. Some examples of topics are shown in Appendix I. Each workshop is one hour long and usually facilitated by one to three adult volunteers. There is, on average, between twelve to twenty-five youth participants per workshop. The youth participate in the programme, on average, between six weeks to two years depending on their case.

Each workshop begins with a short greeting and introduction period of five minutes. The topics are then presented. A volunteer is asked to read one topic out loud, which then is followed by an open discussion until all topics are covered. This process normally lasts for about twenty to twenty-five minutes. After the group discussion, participants are encouraged to spend the reminding time writing on the discussed topics or topics of their own choosing. They are also given the choice to work on any writing that they may have been working on during the week in between the workshops. During this writing period, facilitators are available for individual help and further discussion on a more personal level. The focus here is on positive individual

attention for the participants. The facilitators read the written work of the youth when they are finished and give positive feedback on the writing to foster caring and meaningful relationships with the youth. With time permitting and available volunteers, some of the pieces are read out loud to the group at the end of the workshop.

At the end of the workshop, the participants have the option to submit their work for publication. These pieces are collected and then sent to the headquarters in San Francisco for typing, editing, and responding. Each piece of the writing is read and responded by an editor. A bi-weekly magazine of eighty pages is published and given to the participants so that they can read their own work and the work of their peers in their detention centre as well as in detention centres across the country.

In addition to publishing the writing of incarcerated youth, The Beat Within devotes the last ten pages of the magazine to the writing of incarcerated adults, some former participants of the programme who continue to write for the organisation after their transfer to county jail. These pages are usually filled with life stories and lessons that older prisoners have learned and want to impart on the youth so to help them avoid making the same mistakes.

3.2 Research Design

This research employs a qualitative approach of participatory observations, in-depth interviews, surveys, document analysis, and the hands-on experience of the daily operations of an arts programme serving highly at-risk youth to study the ten mechanisms in application. The research is done in conjunction with a three-month internship with the organisation to examine how the ten mechanisms are implemented, when they are implemented successfully, and the challenges of their implementation. This is done through a comparative study of two of the serviced juvenile detention centres by The Beat Within, one in San Francisco and the other in San Jose. These two locations will be studied individually and then compared and analysed in how they operationalise the programme design.

The choice to study this particular arts programme is largely due to the issue of access. After months of researching and contacting various community-based arts programmes for the

purposes of prevention and early intervention of at-risk youth, I found that many were no longer in operation or were struggling with funding to continue to provide their services thus, were unable to grant me access to study their programmes. The Beat Within is one of the few successful arts programmes still in existence. It has been in operation for seventeen years and continues to generate support from its donors, the staff and youth at the juvenile detention centres, and the communities it serves. Due to these reasons and with the permission from the programme directors for me to take part in their programme as an active intern alongside my own research, I have chosen The Beat Within as my research setting.

One of my responsibilities as an intern was to facilitator weekly workshops. As a facilitator, I conducted four weekly one-hour workshops for three months in two California detention centres. Two workshops were in San Francisco on Tuesdays and two workshops were in San Jose on Thursdays; all were in the evenings. The participants ranged from thirteen to eighteen years of age. Participants included both female and male in minimum, moderate, and maximum security units. Each workshop differed in size of participants from a small group of five to twenty youth per session. This role gave me the opportunity to observe and participate in applying some of the mechanisms such as the cognitive behavioural change/interpersonal skills aspect of the programme, working with system partners, developing cultural competency, and exercising the mentor spirit. By observing the facilitator-participant dynamics in the workshops of other facilitators, conducting personal interviews with various facilitators and the participants, and my assessment on the effects of my own contribution in these areas, evidence is gathered.

In-depth and brief interviews were done with participants, facilitators, and the programme directors in the juvenile detention centres as well as in the head office to assess how the implementation of the mechanisms can be realistically achieved. Positive results and qualities, limitations, challenges, and frustrations were noted from parties involved in the operation and the receiving end of the programme. Observations were made during the workshops in the juvenile detention centres between participants and fellow facilitators alongside the interviews. Due to the nature of the programme where participants submit their written work for publication, extensive document analysis of their written work was also employed. As one of

the editors of the publication, I read and analysed the content of the youth's pieces of work. The attempt to triangulate the evidence of what they write, what they say, and what they do was done to give a more complete understanding of the picture. This approach is used to determine whether or not certain and when and how mechanisms were actually effective in making an impact on the youth's behaviour. For example, if a youth writes about how he disapproves the use of violence but says something different in front of his peers and acts violently to resolve his immediate problem, the analysis of these three components was done to better understand why the cognitive behavioural change mechanism was unsuccessful this time around and how it could be better implemented for the future.

With all the data-collecting techniques used, the research is designed to be a qualitative study to observe and assess how the ten mechanisms can be successful implemented in reality to make an arts programme effective in intervening in the lives of incarcerated youth at an early stage so to prevent them from being too deeply embedded in criminal and/or gang-related activities that could lead to more serious criminal charges in the future when they become adults or an early death. Data was gathered to analyse when and how these mechanism were successful by observing participants who have gone through the programme and if they return after their release as well as chronic offenders participating in the programme to better understand what failed that contributed to their recidivism.

3.3 Challenges and Limitations

One of the main challenges of this research is to assess objectively and precisely the effectiveness of these mechanisms in practice. How does one measure or determine objectively whether or not a facilitator's mentor spirit is successful in operation? Or to know for certain if cognitive change has indeed taken place in the youth, especially when one is unable to observe the actions of the youth at all times? Due to the personal nature of some of the mechanisms, objectivity is a challenge to achieve in formulating conclusions, though it will be attempted as best as possible through a vigorous analysis of the data and the triangulation of information gathered from the participants, the facilitators, and the staff at the detention centres.

Another challenge is the attempt to decipher the validity of what the participants say in a group setting and what they write knowing that their work will be read by their peers. At times, their

group identity differs and conflicts with their self-identity and thus, how they act in a social setting may be different from how they would act alone. It is a challenge to determine if a youth is over-dramatising the hardships or the violence in his life story to achieve more 'street credibility' from his peers or if the story is true. Also in dealing with creative work, it can be a challenge to differentiate reality from imagination. Which parts are based on real life and which parts are imagined? What precisely does a youth mean by the use of certain symbols and metaphors in his writing? Sometimes, it is hard to know for certain especially if the youth does not want to give up that information. As a result, objective interpretation of what the youth write and say in the workshops may never be truly known but this fact will be taken into serious consideration in analysing the evidence. Other forms of data will be used in conjunction to mitigate this challenge, such as what they say in private, when they use code names for their pieces, their relationship with their peers, and their personal situations shared to me by other facilitators and counsellors in the units.

One of the main limitations of this research is that the evidence is limited to only one arts programme. All the conclusions made here are specific to this context, though it can be argued that the information acquired from this research can be applied and used to understand the operational side of similar arts programmes sharing overarching characteristics. Another limitation is time. Three months may or may not be adequate time to gather sufficient data to provide a comprehensive picture of the situation. Of course, a longer period of study would be better; however, this was not a possibility. Due to this time restraint, it was not possible to directly observe the long-term effects of these mechanisms and how they impact the lives of incarcerated youth after they leave the programme and never come back. In fact, epistemologically, one may never truly know or understand the full impacts of these mechanisms on the youth. The information they choose to share only offers one side of the story and with the limitations of time and access to other parts of the picture, the long-term effects and impacts of these mechanisms is difficult to assess. As a result, the observations were limited mainly to a short-term nature. However to address this issue, stories of past participants who have kept in contact with the programme after their release were used when they were available and the highly recidivist participants in the programme who were in a bad habit of

constantly returning to the juvenile detention centres were utilised to help serve as basis for extrapolation to understand possible long-term effects of these mechanisms at work.

With these challenges and limitations in mind, the following chapter presents the findings of three months of research done in with The Beat Within in San Francisco working with incarcerated youth in two California juvenile detention centres.

Chapter Four – Research Findings

4.1 The Ten Mechanisms in Operation

Begin relationship in a pre-release programme, the operationalisation of this mechanism is straightforward and quite simple. The Beat Within employs this mechanism. Its writing workshops take place in detention centres to help incarcerated youth cope, make sense, and reflect on their time in detention and the actions that have brought them there. The volunteers of the programme work hard to build positive relationships with the participants during this time, which is a surprisingly easy task for the most part as many of the youth are starving for positive adult attention and guidance.

Despite its simple and straightforward nature, this mechanism is an extremely crucial element as it gives highly at-risk youth the opportunity to stop and think about the path that their lives are heading and the necessary actions to alter that path through the help of positive adult guidance, which is a rare chance for many of them until they end up in jail. One of the more positive aspects about being in jail that some of the youth have told me, despite hating the experience, is that it gives them the opportunity to think and re-evaluate their life choices. Many of the participants have described their life to me in terms of the word 'fast' and out of control. The environments that they live in are often not supportive of this kind of necessary reflection that challenges the cultural discourse of the street or are they conducive to the formation of a positive self-identity that is more than what their neighbourhood dictates. Many of them have internalised the identity of the street and cannot see anything beyond that. This was observable in my conversations with them. They frequently voice to me the viewpoint that higher education needed for a decent job was out of their reach and therefore, the street life was the only available option that could provide them with what they need. Many of them also feel that they were peer pressured into joining gangs or engaging in delinquent behaviour because they were fearful that not doing so would jeopardise their safety.

By intervening at this developmental stage in their life when they themselves realise the need to change and with the opportunity available to provide them a safe environment for such reflection where they will not be ridiculed for seeming weak to want to walk away from the

street life, effective prevention is more likely to succeed. Many of them at this stage are in a state of regret and have a desire to change for the better so to avoid future incarceration. Many of the youth at this point in their life want guidance and help to change the gang/street mentality that got them incarcerated, which makes the implementation of this mechanism relatively easy to achieve among the ten mechanisms.

The main challenge in the implementation of this mechanism is in acquiring permission from the juvenile detention centres to have these programmes run in their facilities. In my experience working for The Beat Within, I have found that the directors of the juvenile detention centres serviced by the organisation have been supportive and welcoming of the programme. However, not all facilities are as supportive and may be resistant to the idea. The best ways to overcome this challenge is to be respectful of the institutions, make it less work for them to allow the programme to operate, and by presenting a strong case for the usefulness of the programme by getting support from other facilities. The Beat Within started out in one facility in San Francisco and has slowly expanded over time. Presently, it operates in more than fifteen detention centres across the nation.

The *system partners* mechanism is also very similar in terms of its operationalisation. The Beat Within makes extra effort to maintain good relations with its system partners and fortunately, it has been able to do so successful through a consistent commitment to the youth and the detention centres. The directors of the programme are extremely personable individuals and work hard to gain the trust of their system partners by showing up every week and doing what they promise. With consistency, mutual respect, open communication, and a common understanding of each other's role, trust and a strong relationship can be built for the effective implementation of this mechanism between the organisation and its system partners. This process can take time to achieve but with persistence and a positive approach, it can be done as proven by The Beat Within.

The mechanism, *cognitive behavioural change/interpersonal skills*, however, is much more difficult to implement effectively. In this area, arts programmes face limitations. In actuality, any programme looking to change cognitive behaviour and interpersonal skills of incarcerated

youth faces limitations, although, using the arts can have an advantage over other types of programmes. The important point here in changing cognitive behaviour is to make sure not to tell the youth what to do or how to behave in a forceful manner. Many of them have issues with authority and do not respond well to forceful tactics. Simply telling them what to do or how to think will only be met with resistance. They already face so much pressure from their family, the police, staff at the detention centres, their teachers, and their peers to act in certain ways and be certain things that they are sick of being told what to do. In effect, telling them to stop stealing or to stop using violence to resolve their conflicts will have little impact. Usually when this approach is used, the youth will merely nod their heads and pretend to be listening. As many have told me or have written in their work, a lot of the stuff on cognitive behavioural change that has been forced upon them by their families, friends, and the correctional officers simply 'goes in one ear and out the other'.

Realistically, there is no guarantee that the information presented to the youth in this area will be retained in the youth's mind in a way that is long-lasting. No matter how many times or how great one's reasoning is in telling a youth to stop behaving in a destructive manner, the decision to accept this cognitive change is in their hands. Many of the youth in the workshops and in their writing express the view that their criminal behaviour and mentality need changing, though there are some who express the view that a better job of not getting caught by the police is what is needed. For those who express the former view, nevertheless I have observed, still behave in ways that counter their expressed beliefs. It is too common to find out from the interviews that they have been in jail multiple times for similar behaviour despite their desire and the cognitive awareness for the need to change. Those expressing the latter opinion are usually first time detainees and have yet to fully comprehend the implications of their actions or have had the opportunity to undergo the process of cognitive change.

In my observations and interviews, there is a plethora of diversity within this group of youth in terms of the events and reasons that have caused them to be incarcerated. Most express a desire to change, while some not, and a few do want to change but feel that they cannot due to structural constraints. These individuals are those who feel utterly hopeless in their belief that they are too deep into the criminal lifestyle and are forever trapped in the criminal system.

There is a wide range of cognitive development within this group. For each case, a different approach to cognitive behavioural change is required.

Shown below is a poem written by a participant in the San Jose hall in Santa Clara County, which demonstrates similar sentiments shared by many youth during their time in incarceration:

My Reality

Memorable thought of me being free,

That's the last thing I will ever be.

See, people like me never succeed.

Dreams of me being successful were replaced with deceitful things.

Life seems more harder than it used to be.

Knowing who I've become and who I won't be.

I wish I didn't live my life in misery

Because my mistakes have become a mentality.

Dramatically my heart grows simultaneously colder,

Not even half way through my life and I feel like it's over.

Now all I need is for God to come closer

And for these demons to wash away so they could be over.

"Depression"

This life I'm living

Is missing the good things that were giving

Reminisce on mistakes.

I wish I would've listened to my family.

Because over some minor offences,

I'm now considered a failure to society.

Reality don't hurt.

I asked for this reality,

Jail cell with a gang mentality

All this time means nothing to me.

Every day wanting to be a better me for my family.

These walls have nothing for a G but pain and sorrow.

Mind stuck on tomorrow,

Disappointed the people I loved.

The devil told me he needed my soul to borrow.

God was attached to my heart so I felt the pain and sorrow.

Life in shame.

I'm done with playing life as a game,

Going outside having to walk in chains.

I hate living my life so plain.

So when I get out I hope I don't end up the same,

In a jail cell thinking about wanting to change.

-Elijah, Santa Clara (The Beat Within, Volume A, Issue 17.23/24; 8)

This poem expresses the cognitive state of many youth during their time in detention. They know their criminal behaviour is destructive; however, they feel a lack of power to sustain a permanent change in the environment that they live. This is the cognitive change that needs to take place, not just the criminal behavioural change but the cognitive belief that they have the power to achieve this. These youth need to be empowered to believe that they have the ability to rise above what their environment dictates as acceptable and necessary behaviour so that the justification process behind their criminal actions, despite knowing that they are wrong, can be altered to bring about long-lasting cognitive behavioural change. This task is extremely challenging to do in practice when the environmental factors are so great in opposing this mental transformation. To achieve and sustain this kind of cognitive change in face of the overpowering environmental factors takes a strong, disciplined personality. In this aspect, success is attributed more to the individual than the programme, though the programme can aid in the development of this process in the individual.

The advantage of using the arts to operationalise this mechanism is that the arts foster self-expression and self-realisation that enable the youth to come to these conclusions and mental development themselves through the encouragement and guidance of facilitators. The arts

provide an important platform that is supportive of a youth's path to empowerment by engaging in self-esteeming building through positive encouragement of their abilities and by encouraging them to challenge the status quo. There is no right or wrong answer, which is an aspect that the youth really enjoy. The participants of The Beat Within's writing workshops frequently express to me how much they appreciate the chance to have the freedom to write about the things that are important to them rather than being told what those things are and to receive positive validation for their work. Many of them have never had their views challenged in a constructive way, either because they are surrounded by people with the same kind of mentality or when those views are challenged, it is usually done in a negative, judgemental manner that demoralises them for holding those views in the first place. Using the arts to operationalise this mechanism is advantageous as a youth is more responsive to cognitive behavioural change when it is coming from within themselves.

I have seen how a youth resists when a facilitator commands him to do something; however when he is encouraged and given the power to make his own decisions, he is more receptive to a facilitator's words. From my observations, a youth is more likely to be open to listen with sincere attention and consideration when it comes from someone whom they respect, which usually is someone who exhibits compassion, a non-judgemental attitude, and a true sense of caring about their well-being. The best way to ensure that a youth is receptive to cognitive behavioural change is to ensure that this mechanism is implemented by individuals exhibiting these qualities in an approach that is not forceful and preachy. It helps to guide the youth to come to these changes themselves rather than to tell them to do it. Open up discussion, encourage them to reflect on their lives, and support them in expanding their minds to include greater life goals through a non-judgemental, compassionate approach is the best way to operationalise this mechanism.

Utilise programme graduates is also a mechanism that is hard to operationalise effectively. Sometimes, these graduates are simply unavailable or are limited in their time commitment to the organisation. Luckily for The Beat Within, they have this resource available and the programme has used them in the past; however, many of the programme graduates are unable to make a long-term commitment to volunteer with the organisation, which impedes the long-

term impact of this mechanism on the participants. These youth need consistency and time to build meaningful relationships and sometimes this is simply not possible. Structural barriers also serve as an impediment. Juvenile detention centres require background checks on every individual working within their facilities and often, programme graduates have a criminal past that disqualifies them from working within the halls. Realistically, there is little an arts programme can do in face of these structural and resource limitations other than to operate the best it can within their constraints.

The mechanisms; *effective needs, risks and assets assessments*; *long-term process*; *intensive case management*; and *aftercare/wrap-around support services* all face a resource problem for their proper implementation. Many arts programmes are not sufficiently funded and do not have the manpower to realistically operationalise these mechanisms. From my experience working with The Beat Within and my contact with other partnering arts organisations, this is a harsh reality that limits their ability to help at-risk youth in the long-run and in effect, constrains their contribution to effective prevention/intervention of future incarceration. Many of them succeed in the short-term in keeping the youth focused on a better life path and away from the streets; however without the necessary resources that allow for the operation of these crucial mechanisms, a long-term, permanent impact is highly unlikely, which weakens an arts programme's effectiveness to prevent recidivism over time. The Beat Within does not utilise these mechanisms because they do not have the means. The organisation do not possess the resources to employ staff who can do the needs, risks, and assets assessments of each participant nor does it have the resources for intensive case management or aftercare support services. It used to provide aftercare support services; however due to budget constraints, it had to abandon this mechanism. Due to the precarious nature of their funding, it is very difficult to have a long-term focus for many arts programmes and thus, makes it hard for them to implement the long-term process mechanism as well as the other three mechanisms.

The fact of reality is that many arts programmes do not have the necessary resources to implement these four crucial mechanisms properly and therefore, many of them focus on what they can implement with the resources they have. Because these mechanisms, which are crucial for long-term prevention, are not used by many arts programmes, many youth participants face

the risk of relapse in the long-run, which then puts these programmes in a paradoxical situation for future funding. Unless they are able to provide long-term results, their credibility in the prevention field will continue to be questioned, which then makes it hard for them to acquire adequate funds to operate the necessary mechanisms for long-term prevention. This is a dilemma that arts programmes must overcome for long-term success, which is a subject beyond the scope of this paper.

The next mechanism is *cultural competency*. The best way to operationalise this mechanism is through awareness, education, and experience. As noted by The Mentor Center, it is the most effective when facilitators come from the same ethnic and cultural background as the youth; however, this is not always possible. A majority of the facilitators for The Beat Within come from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds that are not always the same as the youth but as long as facilitators are conscious and sensitive to the cultural aspect of working with this group of youth, this does not appear to matter. The majority of the youth I have worked with were open to any individual whom they believed sincerely cared about them. The compassion that they felt from the facilitators was what really mattered to them. Despite this, cultural competency does help facilitators to be more compassionate mentors because it helps them to better understand what truly goes on in the life of these youth and the real reasons behind their actions.

I personally found it helpful when the organisation provided a training session to address gang culture, which is extremely pertinent to know when working with this group of youth. This session helped me to better understand the language used by the youth and made it easier for me to connect with them. Awareness and education are two key factors to help gain cultural competency; however, the most important one is experience. By listening and working with the youth with an open-mind, a volunteer can gain a tremendous amount of cultural competency alone. I have observed that my own cultural competency in the area of helping at-risk youth has greatly improved with my direct experience working with them. This real life experience supplemented a crucial dimension that is missing from the education and the awareness building of books and experts. The Beat Within recognises this and strongly emphasizes to its

volunteers during the training session to have an open-mind in working with the youth and to learn from the lived experience to build cultural competency.

The last mechanism, *the mentor spirit*, is a mechanism that an arts programme cannot operationalise like the others. In short, an organisation must find people who possess the mentor spirit already or attempt to encourage and foster that spirit within its volunteers by mentoring them in their work. To train someone to have the mentor spirit is extremely difficult. In reality, such a course or training session is most likely to be ineffective. One cannot teach someone to love or to be compassionate towards others; the only way is to show them love and compassion and hope that exposure influences them to act in the same towards others. The mentor spirit is an incredibly abstract concept that words alone are insufficient to truly communicate what it is; therefore, a conventional way of using verbal means to teach the mentor spirit is doubtful to work. The best way to operationalise this mechanism is to find individuals who already possess this quality and have them serve as mentors to the other mentors so to foster the spirit in them. Similar to the *cultural competency* mechanism, experience is the best kind of teacher.

From my observations working with different facilitators in different detention centres, it appears that some have the spirit and others do not. Various factors contribute to the overall success of a programme; however from the comparative study between the facilities in San Francisco and San Jose, the mentor spirit in the leadership of the San Jose branch is much stronger and it is not a coincidence that the programme faces fewer challenges there than it does in San Francisco. The mentor spirit is a critical mechanism for a programme's success but if the human resources are simply not there, its operationalisation is extremely difficult.

These ten mechanisms together when effectively implemented can successful intervene in the life of incarcerated youth and prevent them from future incarceration or an early death. However, they face tremendous amount of structural and resource challenges and limitations in how they can be operationalised in real life, which reduces the ability for arts programmes to sustain long-term effects. Their short-term contributions, nevertheless, are of great significance.

4.2 Analysis of Findings

Arts programmes have the ability to contribute to the prevention of direct and cultural violence of Galtung's conflict triangle in the short-term; however they have significant limitations in targeting structural violence, which minimises and constrains their long-term impact in preventing recidivism. In addition, due to a variety of real life challenges in the operationalisation of the mechanisms needed for effective prevention and intervention, their contribution to the prevention of future incarceration among in-risk youth is greatly curtailed. When the ten mechanisms have the necessary economic and human resources to be properly implemented, these programmes are able to have long-term results. However unless these programmes are able to have long-term results to show donors, they will continue to struggle with funding problems, which in effect will constrain arts programmes' ability to effectively operationalise those necessary mechanisms for long-term success. This is a serious paradoxical predicament that arts programmes are in.

In analysing the findings, arts programmes are able to target some of the risk factors that contribute to incarceration, such as serving as therapy to address the issues of abuse or neglect during childhood, helping to improve a youth's poor school performance, and countering the cementation of many youth's sense of hopelessness in the juvenile justice system through positive encouragement and empowerment. The structural risk factors for incarceration such as poverty, family composition, lack of health care, low birthweight, foster care placements, and disparate treatment of children of colour, however, put significant limitations on arts programmes' contribution to prevention.

Despite these discoveries, arts programmes are helping youth address problems with direct and cultural violence. Alissa, a participant of The Beat Within workshops in Los Angeles writes,

> **Writing Helps**
> I do think writing helps people
> Learn about themselves
> Because you don't have anyone telling you anything.
> Your mind is just flowing

As you write.

Writing helps your frustrations

Release.

Whenever I'm feeling frustrated,

I write.

It makes me feel a lot better

With all my thoughts on paper.

It keeps me from saying stuff

That might get me in trouble.

-Alissa, Los Angeles (The Beat Within, Volume A, Issue 17.21/22; 25)

This is a common response from the participants when I ask them what they like the most about participating in the programme. Many of them tell me, both males and females, how writing for The Beat Within has helped them to better manage their anger and frustration. Writing gives them an alternative mode of expression. From the interviews with the participants over three months, almost all of the incarcerated youth expressed an extremely high liking of taking part in the programme. New participants were often hesitant at first in writing because many of them did not believe that they were writers; however the longer a youth participated in the programme under the guidance of a strong-spirited mentor, the more they liked it and the more they employed the arts for self-actualisation and empowerment to help change their mindset and destructive behaviour. This is observable in the older participants who have built strong relationships with their facilitators over time and were setting goals to go to college and seek out legitimate careers.

In addition to working for The Beat Within, the workshops that I facilitated in San Francisco were in partnership with Southern Exposure, a visual arts programme. In each workshop, the youth can choose either to work on writing or drawing. This partnership enabled me to observe and interview the youth on their opinion of other art forms. A significant number of the male youth expressed a preference for music and used the workshops to write raps and lyrics for songs about their life. From my observations and interviews, it appears that regardless of the kind of the art form, self-expression is at the core of the experience. I often hear from the

incarcerated youth and read in their writing how they were never taught to express themselves positively growing up. Many of them were taught that violence was an appropriate form of expression and often it was only through a violent voice that they were heard. The arts serve to counter this kind of discourse by providing these youth a positive outlet to have their voice acknowledged.

Conclusion

In taking part in the operationalisation of an arts programme, I have observed how the arts can work to help rehabilitate incarcerated youth to prevent future incarceration while at the same time, I have observed their limitations. In theory, the arts can be used to help at-risk youth build resiliency to combat the risk factors that contribute to their incarceration and aid them in their rehabilitation process to avoid recidivism. However in reality, these programmes face significant number of challenges and limitations in the proper implementation of the ten mechanisms necessary for a successful prevention programme and thus for the majority of the time, are unable to effectively rehabilitate incarcerated youth to prevent recidivism in the long-run. It appears that arts programmes have the power to achieve the success that donors and governmental bodies want but due to the fact that many of them are so poorly funded and short on human and economic resources, they are only able to achieve short-term success for the majority of participants.

Without structural/environmental improvements in the lives of at-risk youth, the issue of incarceration and recidivism will persist. Arts programmes are very successful in the sense that they help provide incarcerated youth immediate but temporary relief from their environmental stressors. They give these youth an opportunity to stop and reflect on their lives, which is a rare occurrence for them. Arts programmes initiate the changing process by acting as the peaceable paradigm that empowers the youth to resist the street culture and change their negative behaviour but because these youth face tremendous structural barriers and obstacles to live a 'decent', law-abiding life, the long-term resistance of criminal activity is difficult to achieve.

Like any difficult battle – may it be with drugs, alcohol, or a criminal lifestyle – these youth need tremendous amount of support, encouragement, guidance, and compassion to beat the odds. Unfortunately, this group of youth belongs to the underserved class of society and the economic and human resources to help them are extremely limited. The direct, cultural, and structural violence that these youth face is overwhelming that preventing incarceration is a colossal task in practice. With the resources that arts programmes have, they can only do so much, but what they can do is quite amazing for these youth in the short-term.

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Appendix I

1. Time - What would life look like without clocks? Most of us, live a life by schedule, and for the most part have it down to a science. When we get up. When we eat, play, work, sleep, etc. Is this the natural way for us human beings, to have boundaries and limitations? What if the alarm was never invented, would our bodies need coffee or caffeine? When sleeping, would we wake when our bodies were fully charged, or when the sun came up? The very thing that most of us have grown to hate, we created ourselves. Without time, do you think the world would be a much slower place, and we would just follow the rhythm of the day? Think and share in detail what life would be like without clocks. Do you think things would happen, more on a whim, because there isn't anybody to tell you, "It's time to do...! Share your thoughts!

2. To Motivate - What is your biggest motivation? Of course there will always be haters, but what about motivators? On a more original perspective, what motivates you? We know most of us are motivated by furthering ourselves, or someone that we care about. Not everything benefits us on an equal level, and may not interest us. What could cause us to be less motivated? Do you think motivation is largely based on your personality, or is just like a cold shower, something to snap you into it? Now tell us what motivates you!

3. Racism - Will racism ever end? What will it take? Have you ever been called a racist name? How did you respond? Where were you? Be truthful, have you ever used a racial slur against someone else, and why do you think you went there? Was this reaction normal or out of character for you? What brings the racism out of many of us? What can we do to prevent the behavior in the future? We do not need specific names, we simply challenge you to respond in a way that all of us can embrace the views shared, in a respectful, non-racist way.

A word from the wise, quote of the week:
"It's so clear that you have to cherish everyone. I think that's what I get from these older black women, that every soul is to be cherished, that every flower is to bloom."
—Alice Walker, American author, poet, activist. Born 1944
Have you ever heard of Alice Walker, or read any of her writing? How do you feel about this thought? How can you apply this idea to your life?

The Beat Within

YOUTH SURVEY

Age: _____   Gender: M   F

Zip Code: _____   How long have you been in the hall?: _____

Circle the ethnicity you most identify with:

☐ Black   ☐ Latino   ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander   ☐ White   ☐ Multi Racial   ☐ Other

Question For each statement on the left circle a number that best says how much you agree with the statement.	Scale of Importance			
	Not at all	Not very	A little	Definitely
1. The Beat Within is important to me.	1	2	3	4
2. I enjoy participating in The Beat Within workshops.	1	2	3	4
3. The writing topics are interesting.	1	2	3	4
4. The Beat staff pay attention to me	1	2	3	4
5. The Beat staff are interesting.	1	2	3	4
6. I feel safe to share things about myself in Beat workshops.	1	2	3	4

If you have **not** yet written for The Beat, please skip questions 7-12 and **continue to question 13**

7. Writing for The Beat has inspired me to get my high school diploma or GED.	1	2	3	4
8. Writing for The Beat, has inspired me to consider going to back to high school or to a 2 yr or 4 yr college.	1	2	3	4
9. I'm certain will continue to write/draw outside of the hall.	1	2	3	4
10. I'm certain I will continue to send writing/drawings to The Beat even when I leave juvenile hall.	1	2	3	4
11. Writing with The Beat has helped me discover what I want to do with my life.	1	2	3	4

12. How does writing with The Beat every week affect you? How do you feel different?

13. What does The Beat need to do better?

14. What do you like most about The Beat?