

Conflicts at school, problems with peers, divorce or family tragedy — it all adds up to angst ...

... but a new program offers youth

A CHANCE

W By KAREN GRAM
e all know them. Young people looking at the future with a dark sense of hopelessness, unwilling to get out of bed in the morning, angry and confrontational. We've seen others who have grown up to lead fearful lives, never believing in themselves. We know it shouldn't be that way, we hope it won't be for our kids.

But often, despite our best intentions, it is. "Every person has something they have been through that may stop them in some way from going for their true potential," says Sandy Levey-Lunden, a personal development consultant, who returns to Vancouver this summer to head up an intensive year-long program for youths called Youth on Purpose.

It may be conflicts at home, or at school. It could be interactions with peers or a traumatic event such as a divorce or a sudden move to a new city. "It all affects us the same way," she says. "It's all pain."

Levey-Lunden has been offering workshops to adults for years. She started working with teens while living in Sweden. There she developed the program she now brings to Vancouver.

Youths enrolled in the Swedish program reconciled with their parents in ways that have endured since. They found careers, training or education that truly suited them. Those who had been on drugs, got clean, those who operated in gangs, got out, those who had been suicidal, found their purpose. In short, the 85 kids who went through the program in its pilot year discovered their true potential and the desire to pursue it.

"Everyone can do it," she says. "It's only your thinking that blocks you."

Levey-Lunden says most people develop a secret belief about how others perceive them, based on their interpretation of a situation and then seek out evidence to back up that notion. They could believe others think they are stupid, or boring, or bad or ugly. Every situation has the potential to add to the body of evidence that this secret belief is true. Then, having become convinced of it, they accept it as truth and live it. Many only act out of guilt or

fear of what others think.

"I work with them to release those negative thoughts, feelings and beliefs," she says. "I help them figure out what all they can be."

Diederik Wolsak is a Vancouver-based therapist who has worked with Levey-Lunden for years. He explains that the basis for her approach comes from the Buddhist idea that your reality is created by you. Everything that happens to you is neutral until you interpret it.

"It's an extraordinarily fast-track psychology," he says. "You can change who you think you are very quickly."

"Sandy's particular brilliance is her intuition. More than any other therapist I have ever seen, she can hear what a client says and repeat it back in such a way that the client hears what she is really saying. I have nothing but admiration for her. I would never pass up an opportunity to work with her."

The first Vancouver program begins Aug. 8, with a 10-day residential program at a retreat on Bowen Island that will work to get to the heart of the youths' problems. Six hours of each day will be spent with Levey-Lunden in which they will explore their potential in a variety of ways including hiking and the other six hours in a drama program run by Jack Barnard.

"The theatre is going to bring it all together," says Levey-Lunden, because it teaches the youths maximum expressiveness in a fun and outrageous way.

Following the residential program, the youths return for weekly meetings with the entire group and one-on-one sessions with leaders and staff, to re-

lease blocks in their thinking and clarify their intentions. They also take part in eight three-day workshops. One of these is a three-part workshop called the art of personal marketing, in which the students figure out what career or profession they really want, how to reach for goals that fulfill a personal purpose, good communication, personal definitions for success, how to access all their inner resources and how to develop self esteem.

Another workshop introduces the youths to spiritual principles that will help guide them in choosing freedom from anxiety, judgement, fear and guilt. A third works with the entire family and improves communication both ways. In a fourth, they will be linked up with mentors and elders who will offer career and life advice.

"By working with youths, I'm saving them 40 years of unhappiness and years of therapy," she laughs. She also notes that each youth saved from a life of hopelessness saves society \$1 million over the lifetime of that youth.

The program includes about 800 hours of counselling and costs \$7,500. But Levey-Lunden doesn't want price to be a barrier, so private and corporate financing allows them to offer subsidies to anyone who needs it.

For more information about this program, call Howard Staples or Nadine Simonis at Youth On Purpose, 532-5840 or attend an information meeting at the Bonsor Recreation Centre on Tuesday, July 25, at 7:20 p.m.

Youths enrolled in the Swedish program reconciled with their parents in ways that have endured since.

livingroom

Wednesday, July 19, 2000 - North Shore News - 31

Bowen Island to host youth workshop

Vashti Singh

Contributing Writer

A successful Swedish counselling program is making its way to Bowen Island.

Youth on Purpose is based on the philosophy that every situation is neutral and that every reaction is a choice.

The program that teaches youth how to find the peace in their lives is targeted at people aged 16 to 25.

It is billed as producing "youths that are fully alive, clearly expressive, rejoined with their families, know their vision for their lives, have plans for the future, communicate clearly, lead effectively, and take full responsibility for their lives."

The founder of Youth on Purpose, Sandy Levey-Lunden, said the difference about her approach is "there's no judgement, no matter what they do. No matter what they tell me, I

have no judgement and no punishment."

Instead, she puts the responsibility for change on the individual.

"You are the only one that can change your life," she said.

Counselling is done through an intensive 10-day course and a recommended year of follow-up workshops.

With her particular approach, communication is key.

Part of the way this is

taught is through drama, where people can truly express themselves.

She described the counselling method as a clearing technique.

"...we break through each person's barriers to do whatever they have to do to be motivated about their life."

Levey-Lunden has been helping people with her unique methods for more than 20 years. She estimates that she's helped 30,000 people worldwide.

For the last ten years she's lived in Sweden. During 1996-97 Levey-Lunden worked specifically with youth on a project called Fri Sikt, or Open View in English, which is what Youth on Purpose is based on.

Her project was widely successful and as a result she wanted to bring it to North America.

She chose Vancouver because of the network of human resources she's developed here.

She also cites helping the young people she sees on the streets in Vancouver whose lives revolve around drugs and prostitution as another reason she chose this location.

The non-profit society is based out of Langley and offers scholarships when available.

The workshop will be held August 8-18 at the Xenia Retreat on Bowen Island.

For further information, call 532-5840.