

News release



Everett Public Schools

Sept. 21, 2012

For more information:

[Mary Waggoner](#), Director of Communications, 425-385-4040

[Kelly Shepherd](#), Principal, Sequoia High School, 425-385-5100

[Gary Marks](#), Lead Teacher, Denney Juvenile Justice Center

IF Project at Denney Juvenile Justice Center featured on Q13

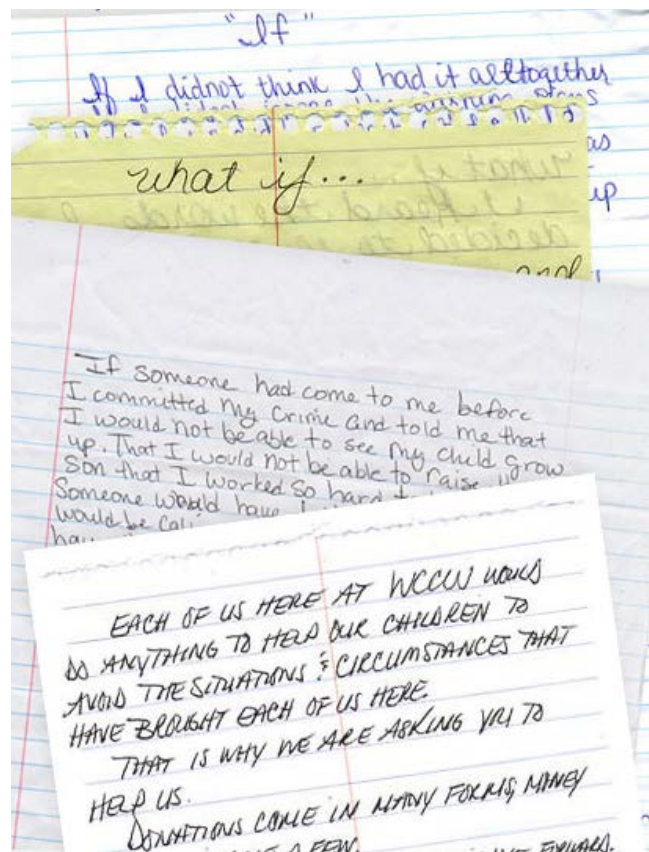
Program begun in adult prisons is now helping younger detainees turn their lives around

Last spring, Gary Marks, lead teacher at [Denney Juvenile Justice Center](#), invited the [IF Project](#) team to spend a day with male and female inmates at the county's youth detention center. Marks and seven other Everett Public Schools teachers and staff are responsible for the educational program at the Center.

As Marks explained, he was motivated to bring the *IF Project* to Denney by the image of a former Denney student on YouTube who was speaking while incarcerated at the state penitentiary for women. "One day last fall I saw a YouTube video clip on the *IF Project*. One of the speakers on the video was a former Denney student, who is now at Purdy serving her time. What she shared on the video made me think that we should be asking our students the *IF* question."

Knowing that life lessons are as important as academic ones, Marks and his team felt that meeting *IF Project* team members and hearing their stories could give Denney inmates a better chance at school subjects and their futures.

---more---



The *IF Project* began when someone asked a group of prison inmates a simple question, "What if things had been different?" That question and its hundreds of answers launched a program to help others think about the consequences of their actions and how to turn their lives around.

Marks explains how the idea evolved into a December 2011 and June 2012 visit at Denney and into future plans for even more *IF Project* team visits. "Working with our Success Coordinator, Amy Perusse we added the *IF* question to our pro social curriculum. The students responded well to this curriculum, so Amy contacted Kim Bogucki from the Seattle Police Department to see if there were any additional resources that we might be able to use in our classroom. Kim was enthusiastic and asked if her *IF Project* team could do a presentation at our detention center."

In December 2011, Denney students became the first Washington state detention center students to engage in an *IF Projection* presentation. Students were impressed with the personal stories *IF Project* members shared and the individual conversation they had with members of the *IF Project* team.

"Throughout the presentation," Marks emphasized, "the message was of hope, and that it's never too late to change."

Following that first December visit, the adults in the room began making plans to bring this message of hope and change again to Denney. "We found a funding source making it possible to bring the *IF Project* back to Denney in June 2012 – this time with a Q13 news crew working on a documentary about the impact of the *IF Project* in adult and youth incarceration centers. In September 2012, [Q13](#) featured the Denney Center visit in their evening news.

The visits and experiences with the *IF Project* teams have made a difference. Marks notes, "Several of the students who attended the June presentation have not returned to Denney. For others, a seed was planted. At the heart of that seed is the idea that if you want a different experience, you have to make different choices. In addition, we have also seen an increase in the number of students who are willing to open up and identify their needs as well as ask for the help they need to make different choices."

Kelly Shepherd is principal of Sequoia High School and oversees the educational program at Denney. "The *IF Project* provides an intervention for juveniles to think about their choices and see the future implications. They hear from others who made similar decisions once and how they now wish they had made different choices. The goal is to help youth see the impact of today's decisions on the future and how different decisions open different opportunities for the future."

In addition to being pleased with the impact of the *IF Project* team visits, Marks is "... happy to report that we have found some grant funding this year that will allow us to bring the *IF Project* team back to Denney for a couple more visits."

You can learn more about the [IF Project](#), see the impact of the team's visit at Denney on the [Q13](#) website, and you can also learn more about the need for and ways adults can be involved in mentoring at risk youth. An *IF Project* brochure is also available [online](#).

---end---