Bringing Justice Back into the Community: The Case of Vermont, US

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Outline

- Research questions
- Permeability of social systems
- Research design
- Discussions
Research questions

Initial questions

- How did restorative justice permeate child protection services in Vermont, US?
- What factors are shaping professionals’ decision to use such restorative practices in their work?

Further questions arising from data

- How did restorative justice permeate the criminal justice system in Vermont, US?
- To what extent can we label as restorative the practices used by child protection workers?
Permeability of social systems

- Prison studies
- Erving Goffman (1961)
  - Prison as total institution
  - Permeability is the extent to which the social standards within an institution and the social standards within society have influenced one another

Impermeable systems

Permeable systems
Continuous learning in organisations

  - Different triggers spark learning
  - System’s readiness shapes the learning mechanisms and the change process
Research design

- **Methods**
  - Interview (70)
  - Non-participatory observation (15)
  - Case file analysis (4)

- **Sampling**
  - Convenience sampling, top-down approach
  - Professionals (69): DCF, DOC, Court Diversion, CJC's, BARJ programs, CWTP, private service providers
  - Service users (11): children (12-18 years), parents, caregivers
About Vermont, US

- 626,000 inhabitants
- Most rural of all states
- Montpelier: the least populated capital in US
- First state to outlaw adult slavery
- Racially homogenous: 95% white
- Majority democrats in power
- Best maple syrup

Picture: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vermont#
Human services in Vermont

- Under one agency (AHS)
  - Department for Children and Families
  - Department of Corrections
  - Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living
  - Department of Health
  - Department of Mental Health
  - Department of Vermont Health Access

- New approach
  - Integrating Family Services
RJ permeating criminal justice

Different developments
- Reparative boards made of volunteers from the community, for low-level adult offenders
- Vermont Legislature was changed to incorporate principles of reparative probation
- CJC were created in every county to conduct panels
- DOC adopted CoSAs

Issues
- Overlap between community justice principles with restorative justice principles
- Participation of victims
RJ permeating child protection

- Types of practices
  - Balanced and Restorative Justice programs
  - Family centred meetings: Family Group Conferencing (New Zealand model), Family Safety Planning, case closure meetings
  - Family Time Coaching, including family time and post family time meetings, shared parenting meetings

- Issues
  - Overlap between family engagement principles and restorative justice principles
  - Participation of children
Participation and taking responsibility

Restorative justice is about involving all parties and promoting responsibility and healing.
Factors fostering permeability

- Key people
  - Governors
  - Commissioners
  - State Attorneys
  - Partnership with the university
  - International experts

- Training
- Attitudes
  - Professionals
  - General public

- Social fabric
  - Small communities

- Local conditions
  - Infrastructure
  - Funds available
  - Economy

- Budget
  - State Attorneys
References

Thank you!

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