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Rethinking Crime, Community, & Justice: A Symposium for Practitioners and Volunteers

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RETHINKING CRIME, COMMUNITY, & JUSTICE: A SYMPOSIUM FOR PRACTITIONERS AND VOLUNTEERS

June 25, 2018

Sheridan College
Davis Campus

--PROCEEDINGS--

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With notes from Student Symposium Ambassadors
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Overview

On June 25, 2018 a symposium hosted by Sheridan College in Brampton, Ontario focused on the role of crime, community and justice with an emphasis on the role of the voluntary sector. 80 people were in attendance, including criminal justice practitioners, scholars, voluntary sector practitioners, faith groups and students. Financial support for the event from Sheridan's Scholarship, Research & Creative Activities fund.

Opening remarks were provided by Dr. Mary Louise Noce, Associate Dean of the School of Community Studies. Associate Dean Noce acknowledged the land that Sheridan sits on has been and still is the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, Anishinaabe Nation, Huron-Wendat and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Associate Dean Noce welcomed the guests to Sheridan College. The keynote lecture was delivered by Dr. Philippa Tomczak, on the sociology of the Penal Voluntary Sector. Delegates from academia and practice presented papers on the role of the voluntary sector in the youth and adult systems in Canada. Presenters included Garry Glowacki and his team at the [Bridge Prison Ministry](#), [Dr. Rai Reece](#), Kaitlyn Quinn and Abigail Salole. The symposium was infused by art curated by the Bridge Prison Ministry.

The symposium was well received by attendees with many expressing interest in learning more about this research area. The full proceedings for the event can be found below.

KEYNOTE LECTURE

A Sociology of the Penal Voluntary Sector

Dr Philippa Tomczak, University of Sheffield, England

The Penal Voluntary Sector (PVS) is under-valued in mainstream criminal justice, and under-studied academically. It is wrong to assume that every criminal justice volunteer or voluntary organisation is turning lives around and making communities safer, however, it is important to examine the work of this sector from an economic and social perspective. The PVS contributes to saving lives of those in conflict with the law. Tomczak's research demonstrates how the PVS has a distinctive, strengths-based way of engaging with prisoners and offenders. At the same time there is a degree of censorship. When those working in the PVS have concerns about the treatment of offenders, there is restraint in voicing concerns. The capacity of voluntary organisations to tackle structural inequalities and problematic penal institutions should however not be overstated.

Strategic service delivery contributions *must not* be negated: voluntary organisations' programmes can make the difference between life and death for prisoners and probationers. Tomczak raised the question: Is it good enough to restrict influence to gaining the unsettled cooperation of individual prison staff who may allow you to work with individual prisoners? Is it good enough to work within an institution that is criminalising the ill, aiming solely to make punishment more tolerable for some therein? What can we do? What forms of campaigning are there? Tomczak closed her presentation by explaining a model she co-developed with Dr Gillian Buck (University of Chester) that illustrates

different ways of working in the sector, with implications for theory, practice and social change.

SIMULTANEOUS SESSIONS

Insight from the Trenches

Garry Glowacki, Richard and Natalie, The Bridge Prison Ministry

Today the Bridge prison ministry is the longest running program in provincial corrections. Garry met THE Bridge's founder Daisy as a result of a court order for treatment and eventually became a community worker with the Bridge. Today the Bridge builds community for those leaving prison by hosting community events, making art and walking with people on their journey. The Bridge has a proven track record of being able to keep those leaving prison out of prison and advocates for their employment. The artwork on display at the symposium is curated by the Bridge. The Bridge gives ex offenders a sense of purpose and sense that they are contributing to the community. Peer support workers like Richard help to support those leaving prison and in recovery. Natalie shared photos of Bridge hosted community initiatives including a cookbook, bowling and volunteering for water stations at marathon races.

“Horticulture, Healing and Hope”: Examining the Efficacy of Apprenticeship Programs for Incarcerated Women

Dr. Rai Reece, Humber College

Dr. Reece presented evaluated research on the Impact of the Horticulture Technician Pre-Apprenticeship Program on the Lives of Incarcerated Women. This funded research project examined the efficacy of the Horticultural Technician Pre-Apprenticeship Program (HTPP) offered by Humber College's School of Applied Technology and developed and coordinated by the Community Outreach and Workforce Development. Using feminist, critical race and ethnography methodologies, this research employed qualitative interviews with incarcerated and post-release women who have completed the program, and key players in support of the delivery of the program. Research outcomes indicate that social issues (addictions, poverty, and trauma) are directly connected to recidivism rates and women's access to resources. Therefore, it becomes imperative to address the needs of incarcerated women prior to incarceration and post-release with key stakeholders such as Ministry officials, frontline staff and community organizations working directly with incarcerated women.

Since the symposium Reece's research has earned a research excellence award from Humber College. Congratulations Dr. Rai Reece!

The Politics of helping: Examining divergent practices in the penal voluntary fields
Kaitlyn Quinn, University of Toronto

Quinn's research examines how the voluntary sector and the criminal justice system work alongside each other in the imprisonment and rehabilitation of Canadian women. The relationship between the voluntary sector and the criminal justice system can be described as collaborative and/or antagonistic. The growth of the voluntary sector outnumbers the growth of the prison population. One of her research questions is: How does the voluntary sector help criminalized women? She is interested in practitioners' subjective understandings of how they assist criminalized women. Another research question is how the help provided by the actors vary and if these actors occupy a different status in the voluntary sector? Control and punishment seem to continue through the voluntary sector. The voluntary sector sometimes adopt neoliberal rationalities and middle-class values. This expands to social control as a part of the community. Her research maps the field through an examination of 300 hours of raw data of ethnographic participant observation with semi-structured interviews in Toronto and Edmonton.

It's Kinda Punishment: Mechanical measures and the legitimacy of youth justice work
Abigail Salole, Sheridan College

Salole's research uses freedom of information requests and interviews as data-points to investigate the role of the voluntary sector in governing youth offenders in Ontario. This presentation explored how and why front-line workers in the PVS describe their legitimacy to do youth justice work. Front-Line workers emphasise the distinctiveness of PVS work, their independence of the voluntary sector from the state and that the PVS are established experts in responding to youth in conflict with the law. This legitimacy is in contrast to how the rehabilitation of young offenders is measured and tracked for youth in conflict with the law. Salole argued that performance management and indicators are taking a form of imaginary penalty (Carlen 2008) in the voluntary sector by seemingly tracking performance, outcomes and measurement but they are often illusory and distract from what front-line workers describe as important. Performance measurements that track outcomes like recidivism and 'occupancy levels' in PVS operated open custody facilities are contradictory.

Closing Session: Mississauga's Poet Laureate
Wali Shah

Selected as one of Canada's Top 20 Under 20 in 2014, Wali Shah, is a spoken word poet and public speaker. He's given TED talks, he's worked on voice-overs for the Canadian Football League, he's created and performed custom poetry for corporate groups, and has spoken at hundreds of schools across North America. Wali performed poetry that connected with the theme of second chances.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

61 Participants filled out evaluation forms for the symposium. To a large extent, participants rated the registration process, scheduling, art exhibit, venue and food high (over 90% of respondents rates these aspects excellent or good). Some participants would have appreciated more opportunities for networking (20%).

The content of the presentations were also rated highly with over 90% of respondents rating the presentations either excellent or good based on new information learned, demonstration of expertise on the topic and overall content.

Participants also provided comments on the value of the symposium. A sampling of these comments are:

“Academic research informs possibilities for social action and community development”.

“The connection-making aspect of the symposium brought the most value to me”.

“I gained improved knowledge on women and youth in criminal justice system and their interaction with the Penal Voluntary Sector. I see my programs being designed with this enhanced knowledge”.

“All topics discussed has relevance to the work that I do. Although the clientele might range in age (youth/ adult) the fundamental practices are beneficial”.

“This conference needed to have more of the root social factors named (i.e. oppression, racism, colonization). I often felt that the issues were talked about but never named I think this is important particularly for an individual that needs to have these conversations as we are often not given the space in our workplaces”.

We thank those who took the time to provide feedback.
