



THE BUILDING BRIDGES PROJECT: ASPIRATIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS



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ABOUT BUILDING BRIDGES

An EU funded project to establish a programme of intervention for victims and offenders

A collaboration between nine European partners

- Prison Fellowship organisations in seven European countries
 - Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain
- two research institutions
 - University of Hull, UK and Makam Research, Austria

Sought to *develop* and *adapt* the Sycamore Tree Project® for use throughout Europe.

CORE ELEMENTS OF BUILDING BRIDGES

Brings together a group of victims of crime with a group of offenders for 'restorative dialogue' and learning

- 'unrelated' victims and offenders

The offenders are often in prison or have served a prison sentence for a serious crime

WHAT BUILDING BRIDGES OFFERS VICTIMS

An opportunity to:

- share experiences of victimisation
- tell their story
- experience a form of apology
- experience constructive dialogue with offenders
- obtain some restoration and healing and gain emotional support

WHAT BUILDING BRIDGES OFFERS OFFENDERS

An opportunity to:

- understand how their offending behaviour affects others
- develop more empathy for victims of crime
- reflect upon the roles that values such as respect and accountability might play in their lives
- make (symbolic) reparation for their past offences

SOME DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF BUILDING BRIDGES

Victim-focus: seeks to focus more intensely on victims, develop tools to attract them to the programme and to provide them with support.

designed to be run in a range of settings, both inside and outside of prisons

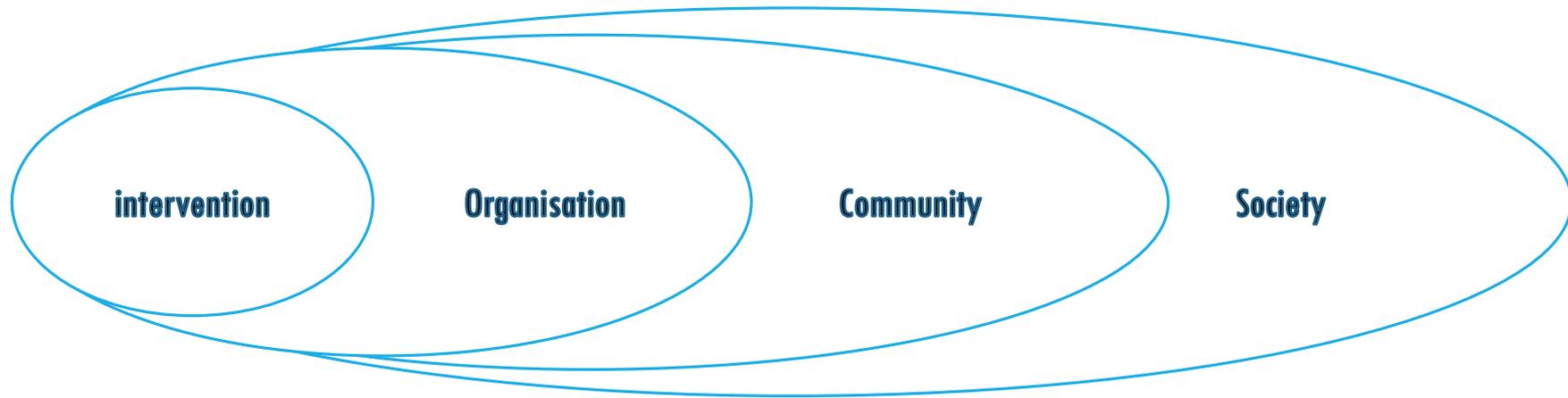
An experiment: systematic evaluation an integral part of the part of the project



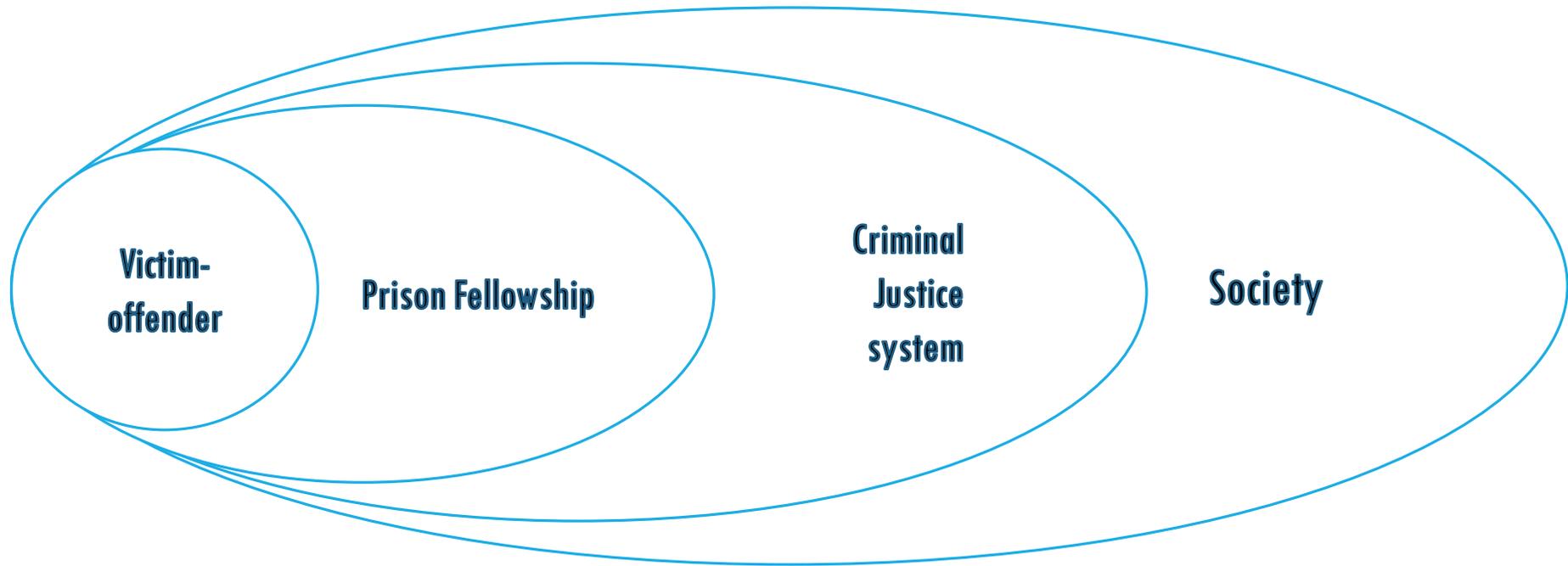
Evaluating Building Bridges

A Social-Ecological Approach

THE SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF INTERVENTIONS



THE SOCIAL ECOLOGY OF BUILDING BRIDGES



WHY SOCIAL ECOLOGY? MECHANISM AND SUSTAINABILITY

Every new project follows a different path to development

The factors that make a programme work in one country may not be the same factors that make a programme a success in another country.

Understanding the development of an intervention through a social-ecological lens allows us to understand the types of environment that will allow an intervention to flourish

Understanding the development of an intervention through a social-ecological lens allows us to identify obstacles before they occur

DEEPER ASPIRATION: TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES FACING THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE MOVEMENT

- Ensure that restorative justice lives up to its promises to victims
- Extend restorative justice to serious crimes resulting in the imprisonment of perpetrators
- Develop diverse models of restorative justice practice
- Spread restorative justice throughout Europe
- Spread restorative justice practices developed by faith communities

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: HOW TO ENSURE THAT RESTORATIVE JUSTICE LIVES UP TO ITS PROMISES TO VICTIMS

Restorative justice promises to meet needs of victims of crime for healing and justice

Yet, relatively few victims experience restorative justice

Especially victims of serious crimes resulting in imprisonment of offender

Building Bridges sought to address this issue.

ATTENTION TO THE ISSUE OF HOW TO RECRUIT VICTIMS

Self-referral

Personal contact

Selection from well-known pool of victims

Professional referral bodies

Word of mouth referral

Victim conferences/events

PREPARING VICTIMS

to ensure that victims understand the nature of the programme, what it can achieve, what it cannot achieve, and what their role will be;

to assess the expectations of victims from the programme;

to answer any questions the victim may have concerning the programme.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Ran 14 pilot programmes with **66** victims involved

Who were the victims? (provisional findings)

- Many were victims of serious crimes
- A lot had some previous experience of voluntary work with offenders
- Many had a prior commitment to 'restorative' values
- Harder to recruit victims who were outside this 'profile'

VICTIMS STORIES: IZABEL (NOT REAL NAME)

Victim of multiple burglaries/robberies

Experience of working in a prison as a volunteer

Wanted to:

- know if people who committed such crimes were aware of the sorrow they bring to people
- Gain a better understanding of the lives of offenders

Participation created tensions with family members who could not understand why she worked with offenders

TEREZA

Already involved with PF

Committed to its values: 'in a society with a lack of love, I am delighted that I can stand on the side that goes against it'

For me, to suffer has its meaning only if I can help someone else and I think it can help the offenders when they understand what I went through

I couldn't believe that they really killed. The programme Helped me to accept them, to like them and to feel them as human beings worthy of love

ABI

I had already participated in [previous course]... I am myself a board member of a support group organisation

Maybe I can influence them so that they will realize what they have done and take responsibility

I don't call myself a victim

I feel like I am betraying my children ... My son is still angry, so he finds it very difficult. My daughter is a bit more behind me, but she would never be able to do it myself

INITIAL THEMES AND THOUGHTS

Successful methods of reaching victims: self-referral, exploiting existing contacts

For wider variety: challenge is to develop relationships with organisations willing to refer victims

A long process – need to ‘build bridges’ between offender support and victim support organisations

Need for mutual understanding and trust to be built over a period of time

VICTIMS' NEEDS

On the surface – victims already ‘healed’

Beneath the surface, their stories seem more complex:

- Participation in Building Bridges does enable them to construct **meaning** out of painful experiences that would otherwise be meaningless
- Their experience of crime – and their reaction to it – causes conflict in other relationships (especially family)
- There is much about the victim experience here that we still know little about that might be revealed through BB.

EXTENDING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE TO SERIOUS CRIMES

BB involved in a restorative process perpetrators and victims of very serious crimes

Clearly provided perpetrators with an opportunity for reflection upon how their life is going and how it might go differently and better

Strong desire for more to happen in and around Building Bridges

DIVERSE MODELS OF RJ PRACTICE

Leaders of the restorative justice movement emphasise the experimental nature of the field

In recent decades restorative justice has become closely identified with a limited range of practice models: VOM and restorative conferencing.

new practice models need to be developed, tested and institutionalised.

Building Bridges shows that the possibilities of working towards restorative justice are only beginning to be explored

SPREADING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE THROUGHOUT EUROPE

Very different cultural and legal contexts in European countries

Each poses its own challenges for the development of restorative justice

Through the Building Bridges evaluation we are learning more about the nature of these challenges

Attention to the environment (ecology) in which restorative justice needs to grow and how that environment facilitates/hinders/shapes restorative justice initiatives

HOW TO SPREAD RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PRACTICES DEVELOPED BY FAITH COMMUNITIES

Restorative justice 'born in a Christian stable' (Chris Marshall)

The organisational structure of faith communities and their experience of working in communities/prisons are important resources

Challenges of expanding the capacity of faith-based organisations – complex negotiations with secular society

BB energised and shaped by faith commitments of the partners – but adapted to needs of various contexts.