

Our Missouri Youth Services Institute (MYSI) work with the New Mexico system began in 2008 in a limited fashion with increased presence in 2009. Critical incidents within the secure facilities were the norm at the time, with staff and youth being injured and multiple restraints with punishment and isolation preceding and following incidents. Clearly it was an unsafe, unproductive environment for all concerned and it was determined by CYFD that something had to change.

The Missouri Juvenile Justice system evolved over decades. This writer and other MYSI staff began with the Missouri system in 1970's. In those days Missouri operated 2 large training schools for young people. By the time I began with the system in 1977, Missouri had reduced the young men in the training school for boys to 260, down from 600 youth at its peak. There remained a coercive, unsafe atmosphere for kids, so we had nowhere to go but up.

In the time we were working with the New Mexico juvenile justice services (JJS) there were a number of leaders in the system. Indeed "it starts at the top" and as a result there were at times one step forward and two back. It is not uncommon for MYSI to see systems operating in "silos"; or given portions of a system attempting to function independent of others. This was present in New Mexico with Education and Behavioral Health Leadership in JJS. Education leadership eventually changed and practices were implemented that MYSI had recommended to the system. Seemingly, immediately the atmosphere in school was safer and kids began achieving increased academic success. Much of the Behavioral Health side of JJS remained less than committed to New Mexico's reform efforts. This remained the case during MYSI's work at the three larger JJS facilities and continued at the Lincoln Pines program when it began in September 2013.

The last and largest deviation from CYFD's reform efforts from MYSI's perspective occurred in Oct 2013. We were directed from the new CYFD leadership as to what content and how MYSI could deliver training. This direction supported our concerns that the system was taking a step back toward more of a basic "compliance" approach. We shared our concerns with CYFD's new leaders that the youth care staff would quickly return to having a custodial role with the youth and would not be expected to engage in the real and necessary work with "change" which is the essence of the MYSI approach. Often times the staff struggling most in the paradigm shift is the direct care staff who must change from being guards to become "change agents" with the kids. In CYFD's case, while there were some staff who struggled with that development and transition; this area of concern seemed to be evolving in an acceptable manner as of 2013, although there were still a few youth care specialists and management staff who would have preferred being guards and return to just providing custodial care.

In summary, "ground gained is quickly lost" in the transformation of large systems. The tendency to return to the familiar is overwhelming, especially when the opportunity presents itself with changing and/or absentee leadership. That is exacerbated further when incoming leadership's vision is limited or their philosophy and direction supports past practice. However, it is the belief of this writer that some of the principles and practices MYSI trained, taught and modeled remain in the New Mexico system, in spite of what has transpired during and since. There were and likely remain some dedicated and caring staff working in the facilities of New Mexico. It is the belief and hope of this writer that, given the correct CYFD leadership and future technical support from an organization like MYSI that is well-versed

in the therapeutic approach to juvenile justice the New Mexico system could complete the reform efforts it was accomplishing until 2013.

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