Episode 79 - Brian Farragher: The Sanctuary Model: Changing the Culture of Care - Transforming Human Services (part 2 of 2)

[00:00:08] Welcome to living proof. A podcast series of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work at www.socialwork.buffalo.edu. We're glad you could join us today. The series Living Proof examines social work research and practice that makes a difference in people's lives. I'm your host Adjoa Robinson. And I'd like to take a moment to address our regular listeners. We know you have enjoyed the living proof podcast as evidenced by the more than one hundred fifty thousand downloads to date thanks to all of you. We'd like to know what highly you may have found in the podcast. We'd like to hear from all of you practitioners researchers students but especially our listeners who are social work educators. How are you using the podcast in your classrooms. Just go to our website at www.socialwork.buffalo.edu forward slash podcast and click on the contact us tab. Again thanks for listening and we look forward to hearing from you. This is part two of a two part series on the sanctuary a model of changing the culture of care in the first episode. Brian Farragher discussed the principles of the sanctuary model and how the model was implemented at the Andrews Children's Center a provider of mental health services for children and families in Yonkers New York. Brian Farragher is a social worker and the executive vice president and CEO of the Andressa Children's Center. And over the past eight years has worked closely with Dr. Sandra Blum and the staff of the Andra center to implement the sanctuary model.

[00:01:57] Mr. Farragher recently coauthored a book entitled destroying sanctuary the crisis in human service delivery systems. In this episode Mr. Farragher discusses the sanctuary institute developed two years ago to offer training and consultation to other organizations seeking to implement the sanctuary model. Mr. Farragher describes the process as transformational. Nancy Smyth professor and dean of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work spoke with Brian Farragher by telephone. You just mentioned the commitments one of which is the commitment to growth and change can you say something about some some of the other commitments the commitments are really about. I think going back to the issue of trauma that there are seven commandments there's there's open communication democracy social responsibility social learning emotional intelligence nonviolence and growth and change and those commitments really are what we see as sort of the antidote to trauma that people who are who have experienced trauma. There's a lot of secrecy involved. So you know please don't you know you know this happened but you can't tell anybody. There are all secrets around the traumatic experiences and abuse democracy really speaks to the issue of power. I think in an organization where you're treating people who have been victims of abuse of power mostly you have to be very careful about the use and abuse of power in the organization. So democracy is really an antidote to the sort of abuse of power social responsibility I think is it goes back to the issue I was talking about in terms of you know it's very easy to say well you know I'm not significant. You know it doesn't matter what I do and it really does.

[00:03:44] So I think the fact that everybody has a responsibility to each other in the organization. Both kids on staff you know that we're all here to help each other is very important. The social learning is what we talked about before is really learning from your mistakes and doing something differently. You know if you're not getting the result you're looking for then do something different. Learn from that and then and change. Emotional intelligence is really everybody in the organization has to manage their emotional world. And we make lots of bad decisions in our lives when we get overwhelmed by our emotions staying emotionally intelligent emotionally mindful is really important to good decision making and all of these sort of relate to each other and then nonviolence is sort of a no brainer that I mean I think for people who have been victims of violence to have a culture that does not support violence at any level is really important. And you know we talk about

safety on a lot of different levels and maybe I'm just I'm digressing a little bit here. But what we have learned I think is that everybody focuses on physical safety. You know we know we have lots of conversations I think you know even at the national level of school violence and bullying and school shootings and all these terrible things were physical violence erupts in settings. And what we believe is that there is a social context for violence. And I think that physical violence erupts and physical safety is threatened when people feel that their emotional social and ethical safety is threatened. If you have an organization where people feel insignificant where they feel dismissed where they feel mistreated they feel disrespected they feel marginalized.

[00:05:33] The likelihood that physical violence will erupt is increase dramatically. So what we try to do and yes successful these days and unsuccessfully others is really try to move upstream to dealing with not just physical violence but really when physical violence erupts. What happened on the social and emotional level. You know did this child feel disrespected you know dismissed you know and you know and you see that very often you know and it's not anything you know intentional very often. I mean our children are exquisitely sensitive to you know because they've had these terrible things happen in their lives so they're hypervigilant. They see threat in the environments where we don't see it necessarily because that's not our orientation. So when a staff person raises their voice or says something that they thought was funny but insulted the child or humiliated the child. Physical violence erupts and you have to as an adult in a setting have to say what could I have done differently here. And it's not because you did anything terrible it's because you have a kid who's extremely sensitive to those sort of empathic failures. And I think we you know we need to get better at that. I think not just in this organization I think suicidally a lot of these kids that we work with are carrying around some very heavy bags. And I think we're not as sensitive to to that as as we should. You have an institute that helps work with other agencies to implement this model. Can you say a little bit about how that works about how agencies how you work with them and what that process is like.

[00:07:14] You know we started this probably and probably saw this in 2005 2006 after we had worked with Sandy Blum for for a while and we came up with this idea because we you know we thought that the way we had implemented the sanctuary in our organization was extremely labor intensive and so there were two things one was we thought we were enamored with the model but also mindful that you know for an organization to do this was just almost too much of a commitment. We were lucky you know at the point that we did this. We were you know we had some resource at hand and we were relatively small but we realized it was a lot of heavy lifting so we took some of the lessons we learned and we packaged those into you know this institute the way it works if an agency is interested in the model and in implementing the model we the first thing we do is we'll go out and just do an organizational assessment so we'll look at those issues around the commitments and self and really see where the agency is right now. The next step is the agency sends a team of staff and usually about five to seven people to a five day training at our organization and the five day training is really walk through a couple of things walks through the trauma theory parallel process. The tool kit that we use but I think for people who have been through it I think it's a transformational experience. We've seen it being really a transformation back to where we began.

[00:08:44] We asked people to kind of think about why they got into this work in the first place and what you end up what people realize is that they have strayed from you know what they thought they were going to do which was to really help people recover and what you end up doing is you know you end up sort of just managing risk and setting rules and looking at spreadsheets you know. So what we help people I think do is reconnect with what's important in this work. So that team then goes back to their agency and sets up a core team. So and as I described before you know a multi disciplinary multi level team of people who are going to help implement the model at the organization over the next two years two to three years. There's a bunch of things that organizations

do they they train their staff. They look at their policies and procedures and practices. They start implementing the tools that we recommend and they begin to transform their organization with some help from our faculty. So we have a faculty adviser who then will help the agencies you know who are who are in this process through you know on site consultation phone consultation to implement over a two or three year period. Agencies implement and and every agency is different so I think it's you know this is not a cookie cutter kind of approach. So depending on the size of the agency the population you know we've we've done this in juvenile justice facilities we've done it in hospitals we've done it in residential treatment centers and schools and outpatient clinics all those places are different they have a different flow they have a different culture. And we've done it in different regions so we've done it.

[00:10:27] You know all of the country we've done training in Australia. And and in Scotland and Northern Ireland. So all those places have very different ways of looking at the kids in the world and you know they have different values and so on. So what we help the organization do is and implement you know based on its you know its value system and you know it mandates and so on. After about a three year period then we we certify the agency basically a certification process which looks at you know the agency along most again those dimensions of their commitments and the self model and looks at how they're doing in terms of really delivering drama and form care and having an organization that really speaks to the to the values we you know we believe are important. So that's kind of the process. And it you know it can either be faster or slower depending on the size of the agency. And I guess the sort of starting out health of the agency and most importantly I think it is about leadership. I think the the agency leadership really has to buy this. You know it's not something that you know the other people are going to do or it's not something that your staff are going to do. You're not going to do it if you are not going to adhere to these values you should take your money. Interesting. Now that makes a lot of sense is that it really has to be the whole system that takes that on.

[00:11:47] Once you've done the three years you then have to also look at sort of continuing to implement it as the agency grows and changes. And I think good for us that was a really I don't want to say it was an epiphany frankly. I mean if you if you think about that kind of a moment. But you know we spent we spent a lot of time when we first started implementing on staff training and then we didn't we didn't build it into our orientation process the way we needed to because we thought it was just so compelling that people would just get it out of the woodwork. So we spent a couple of years where things went really well and then there was a little bit of a downturn because we had turned over a number of staff and we hadn't oriented them and train them properly and in the model. So I think it is all these things I think is really costly thinking about how you embed these things in the organization. But I should say that I think it is also the reasons why you don't do the reasons why you need to. And let me clarify that is that we probably didn't build this into our station because it takes time and it is hard and it's a cost and we're under some stress. So it's easy to sort of say how it all work out and because you need to do all that legwork and to spend those resources is a challenge when you're under stress. I think sometimes if everything worked the way it was supposed to. You know you wouldn't you would need you know to do sanctuary.

[00:13:22] You know if we were in a perfect world and I think you know the imperfections in the world are the things that make it hard to run agencies like this and also implement any kind of model. So I think it's always being able to keep that on the scope and listen to your staff when they're telling you what's not on the scope. So all that stuff all those things that we've sort of built into our culture I think help us to right the ship faster when we start coming off the rails. And so this has been we keep coming back to this and that we do stray at times but it's been we really found our way out of a lot of difficult situations I think because we've recommitted or we'd said Geez you know we really have strayed away from this practice and we need to get back on it. So I think on that level I think we've remained really true to it. I don't want to say we've you know we've never

been a stepped off the line but I think we know where the line is and we know better now to get back on it. Can you mention the full name of your institute. I'm assuming we'll probably have a way to sort of put some links on things there too. But some people will be listening to this podcast. Not while they're at the Web and probably frustrated that they haven't heard it yet. It's the Andrew sanctuary Institute and we're in the process of rebuilding our Web site and so that we're hoping that we'll be up and running next week. So we're very close.

[00:14:42] And our Web address is Andreus children's dot org and we will have like a second way of getting that which will be an address 1928 dot org. So we'll have you know either one of those we'll be watching right now of Andrews children dot org and Andrus OK just so people know that because they think that more and more people are getting interested in this and I can't let you go without mentioning the wonderful book that you and Sandra of recently wrote called destroying sanctuary. And I was wondering if you could say a few words about what made the two of you decide to write that book and if you've been getting any feedback about it. We are incredibly bad promoters. So we are we're probably not getting as much feedback as we might have hoped but we probably we probably have not put ourselves out there and the way we need to either I think we're both busy doing you know our day jobs. But I think the reason why we wrote it and where we're working on a second book now which is a follow up to that you know Sandy had originally written a book called Creating sanctuary. Some years ago. And when we when we started working on the second book it really the publisher felt like we really were writing two books. It was so this one was destroying sanctuary which is really a conversation about what's gone wrong sort of in mental health and human services you know. And I think it puts it in the social context of economic and social forces that have really sort of chipped away at the services that really are rendered to people in need. So I think there is.

[00:16:24] And also I think that the overwhelming lack of a better word the overwhelming denial about the impact of the levels of adversity and trauma that people are experiencing and its impact on not just the folks who we serve but all of us that really public health issue of violence in our society is really all about we think about childhood adversity. That's where it begins and that people who are injured and hurt are people who end up injuring and hurting others. That and we think you know that's a germ that I think is really finding its way through our whole society. And I think we're not airing it. So what we tried to do in the book was really to talk about. First off you know the the issues that are affecting our kids and our families and our communities which is violence and racism and poverty. And then what has been a rolling safety net socially that is helping people who have had who have you know been victims of versus the abuse actually find their way back. So I think it is. And it's been interesting you know I feel like as we better understand we talk about sanctuary that this notion of us not what's wrong with you with what's happened to you. And I think it's we better understood that people's troubles are really social problems not moral weakness or deficit the amount of support for recovery have been deteriorating. So I think you know we were finally figuring out I think how you help people to recover. And I think there's less and less resource to help them do that now. So you know so that's really what the book is about.

[00:18:11] It's really about the what has been a really an explosion I think of understanding of what you know what the nature of these difficulties are. And then an erosion of our ability to respond to them. And that's unfortunate. I think moving upstream is essential and I think if you look at even recent budget cuts what have your kids families you know the disenfranchised people who are really struggling I think take it in the neck most of the time and we pay for it down the road. I mean you know prison populations are exploding and health care is exploding and we believe it's all tied back to the way we treat our kids. And that has to change. But when I speak to set of schools or you know even even frankly you know child care centres and and you mentioned the study. It's remarkable to me that and I say how many people are they studied. Maybe you know if you're in a room full of 200 people maybe 15 of them go up and then you ask people if they've ever heard of

bird flu and this is the biggest public health issue we have and I've seen very few things and even anything mainstream talking about this research which is extraordinarily important but it's soundly ignored as a culture we dissociate I mean we can't just separate formats. Before we finish I would love to say is there anything you'd like to add that we haven't talked about that you think is really important.

[00:19:34] The issue of trauma and and I think there's a sort of social dissociation from from these things that we frankly we know in our heart are happening and I think what our intention is and I think you know we're a little place in some ways but we have big ideas and this network that where we're growing we've now trained 200 agencies across the country and around the world and we meet every year we get our network together so we're now 200 you know agencies strong and 70000 of them but we have our network meeting and in White Plains we bring many of our the agencies together that we trained. And I think what we're hoping is really that our intention is to really see what we can do ultimately to really change the face of care for kids that this knowledge of trauma and adversity and its impact on our kids is crucial. And I think those of us who are doing this work don't fully understand that and don't incorporate the things those you know that research into our into our work. We're really in essence something our hope is really. You know as I said before this notion of sort of countering this feeling of hopelessness and helplessness is you know I don't want to quite yet we're building a movement. But where there are a lot of other people and lots of other organizations who I think are on that bandwagon. But I think these are we can change what we're doing. But of the destroying sanctuary and that sort of grim message of what's happened to us. I think it's important that we all sort of maintain this notion that it can be better. That's the only way things get better.

[00:21:13] So I try to come into work every day feeling like OK I can I can make a difference here with this kid with this family with this agency. And I think the network is really our effort to sort of make a difference on a much more macro level and we're taking steps to do that. And that's exciting. We've worked with some big systems. We've done a lot of work with New York State or CFS. We have done a lot of work with the city of Philadelphia with the state of Pennsylvania and we've changed some of the issues in care at the macro levels. And I we we weren't thinking about doing that when we started but sometimes when you're doing this work for a long time you do have that sense that you end up feeling like you've been beat. And I think our clients really need powerful people in their lives who feel who can make them feel hopeful. And our staff need that too. And our industry needs that. So I think probably the most important thing is that in spite of all that happened you know I think we all need to continue to feel very hopeful about what can change and take steps to doing that. I would say our society and world need that as well so it's definitely the case. Well thank you so much for your time. This has been really great. Thank you very much. You've been listening to Brian Farragher discuss the sanctuary Institute which offers training and consultation to other organizations seeking to implement the sanctuary model. If you liked what you heard look for part one where Brian Farragher discusses the address Sullivan Center's own journey to implement the sanctuary model.

[00:22:47] Thanks for listening and join us again next time for more lectures and conversations on social work practice and research. Hi I'm Nancy Smyth professor and dean at the University of Buffalo School of Social Work. Thanks for listening to our podcast. For more information about who we are our history our programs and what we do we invite you to visit our website at www.socialwork.buffalo.edu. At UB we are living proof that social work makes a difference in people's lives.