

Blind Spots: Charting the Unexpected Findings After Mapping the Impacts of Whatcom County Jail Trauma

Report Prepared for Legal and Justice System Committee of the Whatcom County
Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force

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Outline of Presentation by Joy Gilfilen
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- 1) Introduction – Background, Purpose and Context – Joy Gilfilen
79 People Directly Interviewed – Cross-sector
- 2) Optimal Points of Maximum Leverage (OPML) for Systems Interception – Joy Gilfilen
 - a. Meta-Systems producing macro and micro systems conflicts
 - b. Cross-sectional triangulating of systems produced “Hot Spots”
 - c. Diagrammed fractured layers – from staff, to volunteers to inmates, family
 - d. Compound trauma crosses community
- 3) Whatcom County Trauma Chart and Areas of high impact leadership consideration
 - a. 1st Responders – Radicalized Acute Distress under Duress (RADD)
 - b. Jail, Corrections, Prosecution – Repetitive Accelerating Trauma (RAT)
- 4) Practical Applications Discussion, Clinical Field Experience – Chericka Ashmann
- 5) References and Research Findings in Literature
- 6) Q & A – Open Discussion

Retrospective Analysis

'Mapping of Unexpected Findings' after interviewing 79 justice system involved people about their lived experience of going through the Whatcom County jail and justice system – the top five items:

- 1) **Administrative Systems Failures:** There are clearly optimal points of aggravation in the system that cause unexpected and excessive harm to family members and staff due to complex systems, silos and unwitting administrative bottlenecks and “housekeeping” problems. These findings are not included in this report, for this requires more in-depth discussion and further analysis with the different departments to comprehend the full impact. Many of the problems identified are not a matter of law, but management rules and “privileged” business practices that do not reflect whole brained community impacts.

For example, expecting a person who lives out in the County to be required to come into the courthouse during a work day just to fill out a form (that takes just a few minutes and could be easily filled out online) has consequences that are not incurred by a City of Bellingham resident. A person in Sumas, or living in Seattle would have to take a day off work to come to Bellingham to fill in the form. This not only costs time off work, it can cause job loss, and a person without a driver's license can be charged \$160 in taxi fare for the trip, unless they are willing to travel for about 6-10 hours, or stay overnight.

- 2) **Excessive Costs:** It was discovered and estimated that people arrested incur roughly \$10,000 to \$30,000 in extra costs that are not seen, understood or considered by the Prosecutors, the Public Defenders, or the Judges as they are doing the court and legal processes. Again they are working in silos, so as they are considering punishment for a violation, or are negotiating court appearances, jail time, probation demands, investigations and taking the case through its first round of decision-making – they do not see the impacts on the families. Example: While 8 or 12 continuances may be normalized and just a standard routine for attorneys who are in the system, the costs and the pressures are mounting for their clients.

These are unseen costs incurred by job loss, extra housing needs, or they are charged by various jail service vendors, evaluators, attorneys, and privateering companies who charge families for services that the family cannot easily refuse – like phones, bail, commissary, storage, tests, classes, etc. The family is subject to these costs and fees and they are not negotiable. These are costs above and beyond legal and financial obligations imposed by the courts. If a case is appealed the costs can escalate to \$100,000 and more – with no consideration or compensation given to the family if mistakes are made by the justice system administrators. This kind of detailed information is not included in this report, for the issues require more in-depth examination to comprehend the injustices discovered.

- 3) **Domestic Emotional Terrorism Attack is unexpected from their SAFE Country:** Unreasonable expectations by police, staff, social workers and attorneys do not understand that saying, “all they have to do is this...” reflects a clear lack of comprehension of the situation facing inmates and family members. The administration has presumptive biases that are blindspots to comprehension, and do not understand that the clients are traumatized, broken down

economically, socially, physically, financially and dealing with a hostile environment, where there is no safety net, and their world just turned upside down.

- 4) **Unmitigated Emotional Trauma:** leading to symptoms that are similar to CPTSD (Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder): This was the most significant issue. It was discovered inadvertently by the interviewer as she was listening to cases unfold and watching the people's behaviors as they went through describing their case from the initial incident through all stages, to ultimately exit from the system (or to continue in some cases).
The interviewer's observation was this: Every single person who was involved with the arrest and jailing could not easily talk about the first 24-72 hours of their experience. The shock, the duress, the extreme emotional impact was so deep that people could not easily speak about it, or they would avoid it completely. The cognitive dissonance was strong. That initial point of arrest was so unnerving for them, that they were not willing to examine or regale what happened to them.

- 5) **There is no health recovery and mental health safety net for families.** Big issues is that we, as a community have very little meta-systemic comprehension about the current and relevant impacts of poverty, political violence, constitutional conflicts, homelessness, and the impacts of technology on the people who simply call 911 to get help and end up in a legal, economic and captive situation where they are wounded, preyed upon and left with psychological damage that is sustained AS A RESULT of the System. There is a pre-assumption that people were mentally ill before they entered the system in the first place. A unspoken pre-assumption of guilt, and the consequences that come as a result, and the excessive punishment that is caused is largely unseen, again due to lack of cross-sector analysis.

For example, it is misunderstood about how few social services in truth exist in the community to help people dealing with emotional trauma, distress and upheavals. We are at the bottom of the heap in the nation in providing services – yet most of us think we are doing well. We do not have any safety nets for people – and we instead use the jail as a defacto mental health facility.

This is not working, and to stop the repeating cycle of social-civic-economic and legal abuse we must confront the community business systems that are unsustainable, and implement new community solutions that allow non-institutional alternatives like restorative justice, prevention and intervention BEFORE an arrest ties everyone's hands.

Focus of this report – the Trauma Inflicted at the point of 911 and 1st Contact:

The Vera Institute Report to Whatcom County made clear that Whatcom County needed to examine more deeply the underlying drivers of incarceration from the point of view of the inmates themselves. Since the IPRTF did not take on this task, the Restorative Community Coalition President, Joy Gilfilen, decided to interview people who were such users – people who had been arrested, their family members who had been impacted, and people who were supporting them either as case managers, court navigators, mentors or coaches. It turned out there were 79 people who were willing to spend several hours each to endeavor to analyze their experience of arrest, incarceration, and court processes in Whatcom County.

This was a diverse group of males and females, ages 18 - 65, from homeless to millionaires, different college and professional backgrounds, cultures and lifestyles, different ACE's history. The reason for their arrests varied, but in virtually all cases the arrest was not from an intentional criminal act or violence. Most started with family or emotional upheavals or misunderstandings, from addiction or mental health issues, or from accidents or other misjudgment. Some of the people had never been involved with police in their entire lives.

For the author, this study culminated a prior nine years of qualitative ethnographic research into how mass incarceration impacts communities on many levels. Her study was originally about analyzing how the meta, macro and micro-systems that intersect our community have become contraindicated, unsustainable and ready for renovation.

Gilfilen used the Superior Court map sequence to help her diagram, map out and understand each person's complex case management process even as she was listening to the very human significance and sequence of stories that were being told as the case unfolded. The intent of listening to people was to provide a safe space where the intent was to glean whatever she could using the prior knowledge she had gained from:

- 100+ direct discussions with Whatcom County employees, staff and officials who work in the Law and Justice System and were dealing with secondary and tertiary trauma themselves, and were looking for solutions
- 200+ experiences with interns, students, researchers and people volunteering or working off community service hours who had brought in research, data and tools
- 400+ interactions with justice-system involved people at panels, conferences, events, trainings and workshops that were all focused on reentry, restorative justice, jail issues
- Hundreds of meetings with Whatcom County specific Task Forces, Councils, consultants and hearings where local jail problems and solutions were the topic, including the meta-systems mapping process of the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force.

The Whatcom County Jail Trauma Chart was specifically compiled after interviewing:

- Fifty-three (53) inmates who had been arrested and held inside the Whatcom County jail and experienced the court system from beginning to end.
- Twenty-six (26) people who were directly involved with cases – either as family members, mentors, court navigators, or coaches of people going through the justice system in Whatcom County.

Whatcom County Jail Trauma Chart:

Radicalized Acute Distress under Duress (RADD)

**Psychological Beliefs
BEFORE the EVENT:**

FREEDOM IS SACRED

Innocent Until Proven Guilty
Civilized society
Trust authority
Believe we have rights
Believe in fairness, honor
We have right to a defender
Entitled to police protection
The "Right to Remain Silent"

WE FEAR JAIL:

Afraid of criminals
Criminals are dangerous
Criminals are cruel, hurt you
Torture only happens in war
Never me - NIMBY
Do not associate with them

**TO SUDDENLY BE
CALLED A CRIMINAL IS
TRAUMATIZING!**

**In the space of 24-72 hours
people become prey to:**

Psychological injuries
Emotional dysfunction
Interpersonal trauma
Community violence
Interpersonal abuse
Marketplace terror

1. INCIDENT

EMS, Police, People
Involved, Onlookers

2. ARREST

Police, Media, Examiners,
Corrections Staff

**SHOCK
= PARALYSIS**

Internal Feelings

Deep Grief
Embarrassed
Sadness
Remorse
Guilt
Regret
Anger
Despair
Horror
Sorrow
Devastated
Vulnerable
Hurt or in Pain
Heartbreak

External Reactions

Reality Splits
Can't Speak
Lose Privileges
Probed/Questioned
Financially Violated
Family Violated
Body Violated
Become a Commodity
May be injured
Condemned by others
No Money
Wounded/Hobbled
Victimized by Event

**SHAME
= VULNERABLE**

Internal Feelings

Fear / Exposed
Disoriented
Betrayed
Condemned
Isolation / Coldness
Deep Loss of Freedom
Emotional Terror
Emotional Shock
Abandoned
Disconnected
Dishonorable
Desecrated
Violated
Punished/Targetted
Feel abused
Antagonism
Emotional Disconnect
Emotional pergartory
No space to say I'm sorry

External Reactions

Investigated	-Silenced
Captured/Prey	-Judged
Presumed Guilty	-Separated
Disrespected	-Blamed
Victimizedd	-Examined
Deception	-Dissected
Chaos/Confused	-Accused
Speculation	-Retaliated
Loss of Rights	-Bankrupted
Loss of Privacy	
Flashbacks	
Deprived of Love	
Deprived of Sunlight	

"What Happens as the Mind Switches from Freedom to Captive?"

Repetitive Accelerating Trauma (RAT)



CPTSD*

3. JAILED

Corrections officers, Angry,
Hostile Conditions



4. JUDGED

Prosecutor, Judges,
Public Defenders



5. PSYCHE BREAKS

People are prey to medical, social

HUMILIATED = MISERY

Internal Feelings

Suffocated/Panicked
Powerless / Numb
Loss of Control over Life
Scared /Caged
Feel Priced /Sold
Persecuted
Discombobulated
Defensive / Defiant
Restlessness
Degraded
Psychological Withdrawals
Deep depression
Vulnerable
Distrustful
Self-Annihilation
Self-Mutilation
Despairing
Defenseless
Misery
Hopelessness
Acute Terror
Emotionally numbed
No Music/Happy place

External Reactions

Identity Broken Apart
Attack Back/Rebel
Raped/Beaten
Antagonized
Ridiculed /Hostile space
Laughed at/ Scorned
Spit on / Called names
"Pissed or puked" on
Watching trafficking
Seeing drugs sold

CONDEMNED = BETRAYED

Internal Feelings

Devastated
Isolated/Abandoned
Doubt Everyone
Battered
Broken / Beaten
No Drive
Anxious/worried
Deep inertia/can't move
Disassociating
Can't find emotional center
Can't focus
Angry
Ferocious
Emotions stunted
Go through "hell"

External Reactions

No Help / No answers
Mind Won't work
Can't Think/ No clues
No Resources
No Money / No resources
No network
No friendships
Entire Beliefs Shattered
Can't trust / No choices
Submissive
Can't follow
Can't do calendars
Cense of surreality
No privacy/violated
No automony
Preyed Upon
No one to trust/talk to
No one to listen/forgive

ANNIHILATED = SYSTEMIC BREAKDOWN

SIDE EFFECTS INCLUDE:

Lost your "tribe" / Identity
Loss connection to world
Inconsolable / Disassociated
Lost beliefs/trust in everything
Cast Out/ Shunned/Ostracized
Aimless/ Lost / Soul Shattered
"Broken Brain" / Can't think
Can't Process Logically
Futility / "Dead Brain"
Out of Body Experiences
Unable to Organize
Can't function right
Unstable emotionally
Delusions / Paranoia / Rage

BECOME SYMPTOMS LABELLING

After-effects are associated with:
-*CPTSD - Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
-Behavioral Attachment Disorders
-PTSD - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
-Stockholm Syndrome
-Serious Psychological Distress (SPD)
-Developmental Trauma Disorder
-Conduct Disorder
-Combat Stress Disorder
-Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
-Oppositional Defiant Disorder
-Co-occurring substance use disorder
-Panic Attacks / Anxiety Attacks
-DSM-5 dysregulation disorders
-Personality disorders
-Emotional Triggering/ Unmitigated Stress

Blind Spots: Unexpected Findings from Jail Trauma Research

53 Interviews Reveal How Losing Freedom Causes Extreme Emotional Harm

BEFORE EVENT

Person's Familiar Life:

Freedom is taken for granted
Food, jobs, car, phone
Money, friends, clothes
Understand the rules
Privacy, shower, bed

Familiar Stress:

-Life/Relationship/Family Stress
-Market/Media/Political Stress
-Economic/Safety/Social Stress

Disclaimer:

This study was not undertaken with people who were considered dangerous Some did have Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's), a prior

SUDDEN CRISIS:

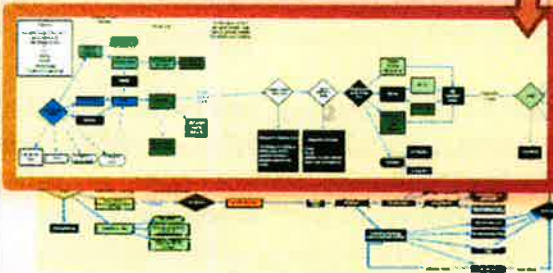
- Made a mistake
- Used poor judgement
- Had an accident, a fight
- Got drunk at a party
- Had a medication problem
- Bad drug choice or reaction
- Family beef/conflict
- Mental Imbalance/Illness
- Fight over acute \$\$ distress
- Conflict at work/Loss of job
- Divorce/ Family breakup
- Extreme cold/ Survival
- Substance use issues
- Grief/Emotional Distress
- Shock/ Loss/ Sudden Death

Help!
CALL 911

**WE
TRUST
EMERGENCY
PROVIDERS**

To SAVE LIVES!
To RESCUE people!
To HELP US!

From 911 to



Schema highlights high impact Emotional Trauma time between incident shock and 1st appearance. Multiple authorities can intervene and affect the negative psychological impact on people.



Our "SAFETY COCOON" = IN GOD WE TRUST!

In childhood, we develop an historical, predictable identity as an American who is FREE. We know we are part of a society, a culture, a group, a marketplace. Our "KNOWN" is an "identity bubble" that WE BELIEVE IS TRUE. We teach our children to call 911 for Safety and Protection! We Pledge Allegiance to the Flag. We sing songs of freedom, God, loyalty and patriotism. Life, while challenging, is comfortable in how it has worked for decades, generations.

We have built up a psychological idea of who we are, how we are connected to the world. We have friends, relationships, networks, social groups, work groups, neighborhoods and communication systems. We have a core



NO-ONE EXPECTS:

- To be arrested ourselves
- To get a family member arrested
- To make a health problem worse
- To ruin a loved ones life
- To put family under investigation
- People to become a commodity
- To set off a media storm
- To start a multi-year legal conflict

WE DO NOT EXPECT that words used in a crisis can:

- INCRIMINATE a loved one
- CONDEMN to debt/poverty
- PERSECUTE someone for life
- Make things WORSE
- To get a family member arrested
- To invite an invasion of privacy
- Set up prosecutor's charges
- Start a police tracking record

WE DO NOT KNOW Secondary Trauma

(How it expands, ripples out and impacts staff, family, friends, bosses, neighbors)

- People are separated/polarized
- Loved ones become adversaries
- People get scared to help/speak out
- People react/pull back/avoid media
- Don't want to get more embroiled
- Don't want to cause trouble
- Afraid of police/jail/persecution
- Don't want to be soiled/desecrated
- Don't want to become accomplice
- Are afraid to talk/get involved
- Don't want to cause more harm
- Get angry when harmed/examined
- Are angry at violations/costs
- People fight/flight/freeze up

We Do Not Know What Happens as People go from Freedom into Captivity.

A person's world is turned upside down: They are shackled with handcuffs, searched, everything is taken, they go into a police car, are booked and enter a jail cell that is all concrete and steel. They are told not to talk to anyone for it could be held against them, and they are left to stew in fear and confusion. They have no information and no help inside a hostile, unfamiliar, de-humanizing environment.

The physical, mental, spiritual and emotional impact of the hours a person is held captive is life-shattering. It can take up to 72 hours before their 1st appearance in court. Until then they do not know the charges filed against them. They discover the bail amount, meet their Public Defender - who stands up to speak for them. They discover the whole process is not about fixing the problem, reconciling issues, or justice. It is about laws, rules, law enforcement, corrections officers, prosecution, punishment, money, ostracism and pre-judgement.

**We believe in
GUARANTEED
RIGHT TO
FREEDOM**

**As children we study constitutional rights and freedom.
We hire and send our children to war to protect our
constitutional rights, democracy, freedoms.
Our elected officials and law enforcers
*swear an oath to protect us
and we pay them to do so.*
We give our sacred trust to authorities!**

