



Critical Social Work Practice

Working in a school context

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We are definitely outsiders in the school community. I think the teachers and administrators, a lot of times, look at us “these bleeding hearts that are always trying to make excuses for the kids that are just bad”, and we spend a lot of time really advocating and trying to raise awareness with teachers about what our students are going through, what their lives are like, without giving too much information to break a confidentiality and there’s a lot of tension between our staff and the teachers because they say, “we’re with them in the classroom all day long and we don’t know what’s going on with them but they ruin our whole environment, they ruin everything for all the students and now you’re always coming and trying to tell us to understand but you won’t tell us what’s going on”.

What frustrates me a lot about my job is the politics, especially being a grant funded programme. In order to get more money we’re always trying to please the people who have the money.

Right now we have to gear all of our services to show academic improvement. That’s hugely frustrating when you are starting with a student and your real goal is to get them emotionally stabilised so they don’t want to kill themselves. You know, it’s going to take me more than 10 months to get a chronically suicidal gang member who is addicted to drugs to be passing all of her classes and that’s what, the school-based services are often asked to, to prove as a way of proving ourselves and our services. So that’s my biggest frustration.

There’s a real lack of prevention services. I feel that there’s a real lack of services in general. When you call the Department of Children and Families voluntary services you have to really prove that there’s this incredible crisis need. So parents who are looking to get some help before a problem turns huge are left with, “well you’ve got to really wait till it becomes bad before we can do anything about it”.

A lot of the services like mentoring, you know, the kind of more prevention and less clinical, services that can be so powerful, when used appropriately are, even if they are run by community based organisations, they are contracted with the Department of Children and Families because that’s where the money is; so all these families that aren’t involved with the Department of Children and Families don’t have access to services. So, again, you have to like do something to require the state to step in before you can have access to services to help your family not get worse, and that’s a huge problem in Connecticut.

One thing I would like to do and that I wish we could do more of is prevention services, and that’s what we are supposed to be doing. But in order for us to truly be doing prevention work, there needs to be other programmes really doing the intervention and crisis work. The need is really so high that prevention gets pushed aside. But then when you think about in the larger scale we’re really doing band aid kind of work and it’s important work, I’m not minimising what we do, you know, every time we can save a life I don’t minimise that at all but we’re not making huge changes in terms of prevention so I think that’s something that’s really lacking, not just at the Student and Family Assistance Centre, not just at Quirk, not just in Hartford, it’s a huge issue, throughout the country and probably throughout the world.