



# **BUILDING BRIDGES: RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION**



**BUILDINGBRIDGES**

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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.

# ABOUT BUILDING BRIDGES

- Research on initiatives for (unrelated) victims and offenders
- Guidebook for running 5-8 group sessions
- 14 pilot programmes in 7 countries, inside and outside prisons
- Developing support for victims throughout the BB process, including risk assessment
- Scientific evaluation - victims
  - offenders
  - social ecology

# 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

# IMPLEMENTING THE BB PROGRAMME

- 'recruiting' and preparing victims
- 'recruiting' and preparing offenders
- arrangements with facilities
- training team
- running 8 session programme
- support in between sessions
- evaluating, aftercare

# WHAT BUILDING BRIDGES OFFERS VICTIMS

An opportunity to:

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

# 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
- acquire a capacity for responsibility
- make (symbolic) reparation for their past offences

# EVALUATING BUILDING BRIDGES

Did the programme 'work'?

How effective is the programme in:

- (a) bringing about desirable changes within offenders who participate and
- (b) counteracting the harm of crime victimization?



# MECHANISMS — OFFENDERS I

Clear about what BB is designed to achieve and its mechanisms

BB is not the sort of programme that one would expect to have a *direct* impact on the future conduct of offenders.

It is not designed to address, nor even to identify, the complex range of factors in a person's life (situational, environmental, cultural, psychological, biological, etc.) that render a person more likely than others to engage in offending or anti-social behaviour

# MECHANISMS — OFFENDERS II

BB seeks to instil the motivation to engage with activities and interventions they will need if they are to change in their conduct.

BB is a 'victim awareness/empathy' and 'responsibility acceptance' course.

BB employs a range of didactic methods to instil a willingness and a capacity to accept personal responsibility for their patterns of living, which include committing criminal offences.

# OUTCOME

No statistical change in offenders 'pro-criminal attitudes'  
(measurement scales were not designed to evaluate the core principles of BB – CrimePics are standardised – new scales are needed)

Qualitative research revealed some significant benefits

# QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

We conducted qualitative interviews with 15 offenders who took part in BB. For all of the offenders who were interviewed, this was their first experience of a meeting between victims and offenders. We asked about:

how they came to participate

preparation they had undertaken;

their thoughts on the arrangements for the programme;

their understanding of what the programme was designed to achieve;

whether the programme was successful in helping them achieve their goals;

whether they thought their attitudes towards crime and victims had changed as a result of taking part in the programme.

# VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE OFFENDERS REPORTED THAT BB HAD HELPED THEM ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS.

Better understanding of the consequences of crime, and therefore a better sense that crime was wrong. Greater empathy with victims:

“I feel closer to crime victims because I saw their sorrow, their suffering, from a close perspective”

“I felt distant before, now I feel close to them”

“the victims that I have met have made me understand so much that I admitted my true responsibilities”

“I start to see the other side”

# STORY OF GREGORY



# MECHANISMS — VICTIMS - I

Many victims suffer psychologically, socially, physically and financially as a result of what happened to them

If they are to recover from this damage, a range of needs must be met.

Many of these needs can only be met through interventions that have little if anything to with criminal justice, such as counselling, advice services, medical treatment and financial compensation

What Building Bridges does have the potential to do is to meet a small but significant sub-set of victims' needs.

# MECHANISMS — VICTIMS - II

The harm:

The offence and the offender may dominate the victim's life.

The victim may become filled with enduring emotions of anger and resentment which – whilst healthy as short-term reactions – can result in an emotionally stunted life and health problems

Victims might also live in excessive fear, which again can have a stunting effect on their social lives

Living with fear and anger can put a strain on the victim's intimate and social relationships, and even productivity.



# MECHANISMS — VICTIMS - III

In order to recover from such harm, victims need to make a transition from a state of resentment and fear to a more normal state. Processes that can assist include:

having the opportunity to have the harm they have suffered receive appropriate acknowledgement;

having the opportunity to tell their story in a meaningful setting;

learning more about what offenders are really like, so the fear of crime is dissipated;

the contentment of doing something good with the bad that has happened;

# OUTCOMES – STATISTICAL STUDY

The well-being of victims who participated in Building Bridges improved.

They suffered less anxiety and depression

They worried less about crime

The extent to which their quality of life was affected by fear of crime decreased

Feelings of anger toward the person who offended against them and about the incident decreased.

# OUTCOMES FOR VICTIMS – QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Strong experience for all participants

Mutual acceptance and tolerance

Openness

Well delivered

Different modules well designed

It works on both sides

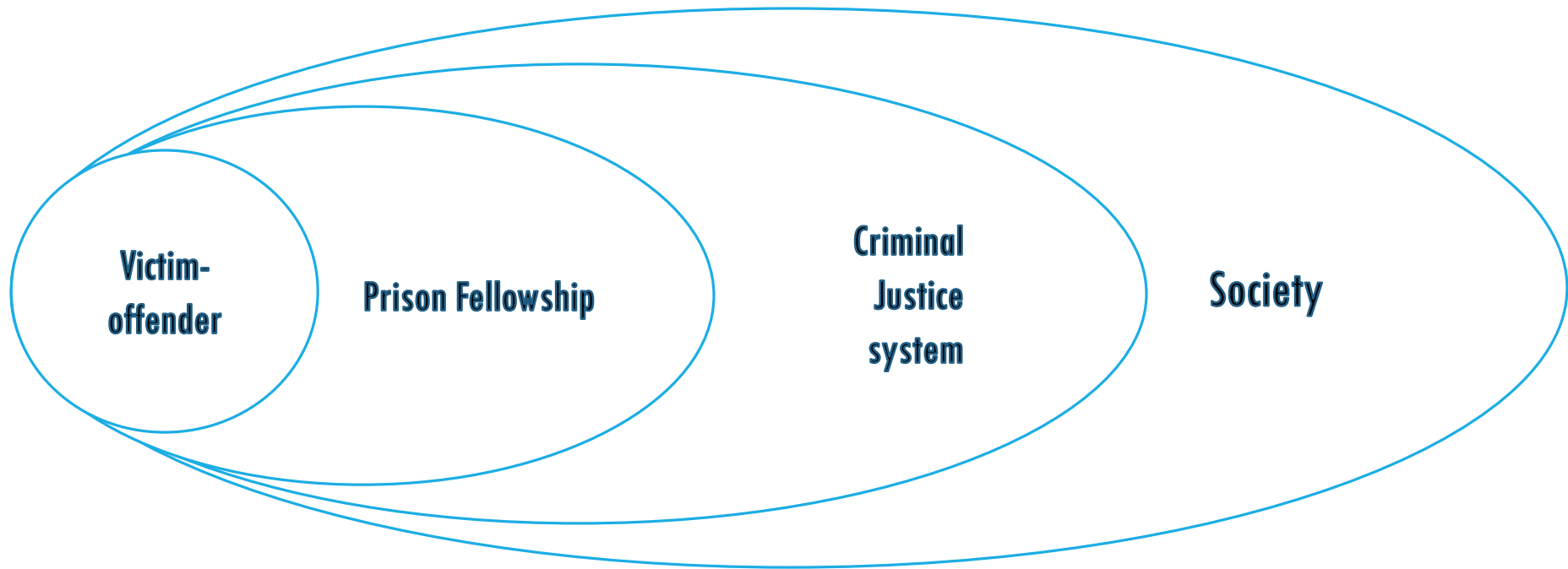
Still feel anger, and relief of expressing it

Meeting with offenders was important for personal growth (in this case not able to meet the actual offender)

# STORY OF LINDY



# THE SOCIAL ECOLOGY OF BUILDING BRIDGES



# BUILDING BRIDGES - FUTURE

- Developing a sustainable long-term series of Building Bridges programmes
- Securing wider-based victim involvement (information)
- More understanding of effects of RJ programmes on unrelated victims and offenders
- More bridges (communication / collaboration with stakeholders, society involvement)
- Challenge of funding

[HTTP://RESTORATIVE-JUSTICE.EU/BB](http://RESTORATIVE-JUSTICE.EU/BB)

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# DIRECT VS INDIRECT VICTIMS

## Direct victims

### Advantages

Offender-specific  
'More impactful'  
Asking for forgiveness

### Disadvantages

Residual anger  
Ego defence  
Difficult to recruit – small numbers

## Indirect victims

### Advantages

Easier to recruit  
Multiple victim perspectives (up to 8 per group)  
A degree of separation may be a good thing

### Disadvantages

'Harder to relate to'  
Offence type may be too abstract  
BB victims don't match the demographics of real victims



# THINKING ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF BB WITHIN VICTIM-FOCUSED DETENTION

BB - 'standalone' intervention?

It may be better framed as a 'primer' for more intensive rehabilitation

Cognitive-behavioural interventions talk about victims in abstract terms and tend to focus on past victims

BB presents victims in reality and allows offenders to consider future victims

Perhaps BB can unlock the door to an offender's thinking about victim in real rather than abstract terms?