Impactful Social Skills Development
Lessons Learned in Hungary

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About social skills of juveniles – in general

- Nondelinquents are more socially competent (Gaffney & McFall, 1981) → delinquents have less social skill-knowledge

- Hypothesis:
  - Maladaptive behaviour is due to lack of skills to do better (McFall, 1976) and inadequate learning (Roush, 1996)

- Social learning deficits can be remedied by social skills training

- Especially useful at a younger age (Veneziano & Veneziano, 1988) →

- The possibility of a more responsible lifestyle + long-lasting effect (Long, 1985)

A study of 411 young delinquents (Veneziano & Veneziano, 1988)

- Although juveniles have UNDERSTANDING of proper behaviour and (social) expectations, they SCORE POORLY when tested

- High:
  - Manipulation, physical and verbal aggression, oppositional behaviour, antisocial tendencies, following rules

- Low:
  - Good judgment, morality, acceptance of values, family functioning
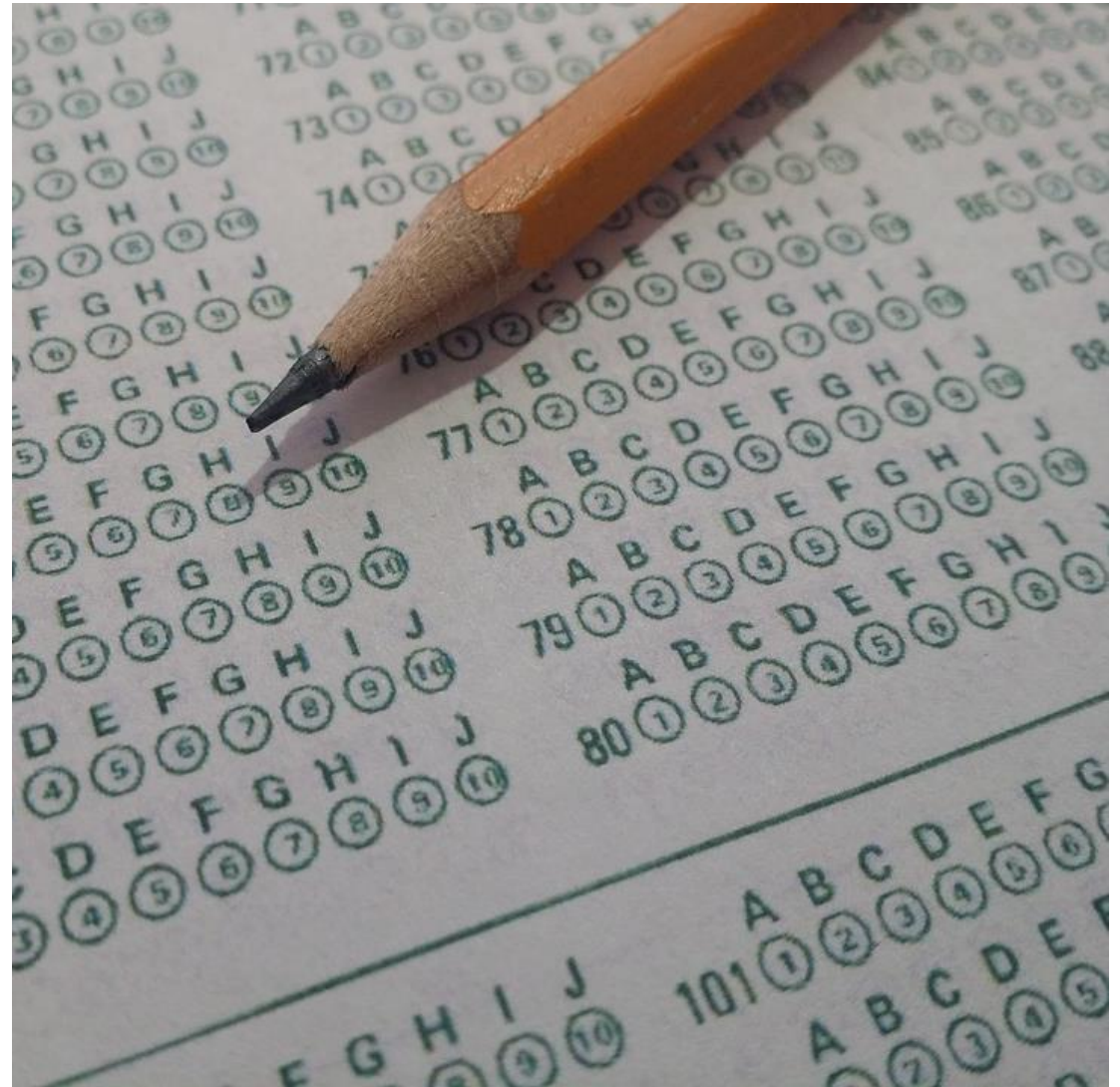
"What works?"

- Robert Martinson (1970s): „nothing works"-doctrine in criminal justice

- Latessa, Gendreau & Cullen: evidence-based practices (Fekete & Hegedűs, 2022)

- MacKenzie (2005): the basic requirements of effective rehabilitation:
  - <u>Trained professionals</u> and institutional background
  - <u>Multiple methods</u>
  - Responsive to juveniles' individual characteristics
  - <u>Competence-based with cognitive elements</u>

- „Primary prevention programs of the type that promote social and cognitive skills seem to have the greatest impact on attitudes about violent behaviour among children and youth. Skills that aid children in learning alternatives to violent behaviour include social perspective-taking, alternative solution generation, self-esteem enhancement, peer negotiation skills, problem-solving skills training and anger management." (APA: The Commission on Violence and Youth, 1993: 56)

Methods, results and dilemmas

- Methods:
  - Instruction, feedback and evaluation, role play, experiential education, behaviour rehearsal, social reinforcement, cooperative techniques, debate, field visits, project works, non-violent methods (Hanák, 2007; Homoki & Rácz, 2019)
  - In small groups
  - With trained professionals

- Results:
  - Self-esteem and self-reflection, acknowledgement of cultural (ethnical, religious, etc) identification, perceptions of school can be corrected, verbal responses enhance, anxiety reduces

- Juveniles are often hesitant to participate (see: Ollendick & Hersen, 1979) → the importance of +++ reinforcement

Holistic approach: family, professionals, NGOs

- Desistance from crime is a result of a long, **multifactor process** (Borbíró & Szabó, 2012)

- Family is in itself dysfunctional: divorced- or one-parent families, abuse (substance, etc)

- The importance of strengthening families in their role to provide guidance and discipline as primary carers (Greenwood, 2008; Albert & Tóth, 2012)

- „The most successful […] programs are those that emphasize family interactions, probably because they focus on providing skill to the adults who are in the best position to supervise and train the child." (Greenwood, 2008: 198)

Holistic approach: family, professionals and NGOs

- Trained professionals and measurable results (see Martinson, Gendreau et al)

- Sense of trust and acceptance (Kaczvinszki, 2012)

- Professional works with their personality: cornerstone of effectiveness (Homoki, 2018)

- Lifespace Crisis Intervention (LSCI): a new direction for chronic self-defeating behaviour (Long & Fecser & Brendtro, 1998) → for the job market

Holistic approach: family, professionals and NGOs

- The role of NGOs and church: support, extracurricular programs (Albert & Tóth, 2012)

- The role of schools: sense of achievement, foundation of values, child protection programs, +++ experiences (Albert & Tóth, 2012)

Results of HU research

- Qualitative research → focus group interview

- 6 professionals from correctional settings

- Three areas being reflected upon:
    - Difficulties of working with an offender
    - Difficulties in the community (work)
    - Reflections of family ties

Working with an offender

- **Different people with different background:**
  - "It's very hard to prepare to this. These people come from different backgrounds with a different set of competences. We can work with what they bring to the table." (R5)
- **Offender vs non-offender:**
  - "We often think that we need to teach differently but I'm not always sure about that. Those who are not in closed institutions need the same input. If we talk about prevention, the same applies." (R1)
  - "Listen, personal concern, devotion – everybody love these attitudes. If we do a training for average people, not offenders, the proportion, the rate, the highlights might be different, but the same topics will come up." (R6)

Working with an offender

- **Competence-based learning:**
  - „We always talk about transversal competences. As everything is connected." (R5)
- **Various methods tailored to individual needs:**
  - "One method is not enough. Whatever works with one will not work with the other." (R1)
  - "Versatile methodology and flexibility are the key. You need to have a plan, but you also need […] to adapt if needed." (R2)
  - "[You have to] be able to handle failure and success properly. You need to accept if this method works with this group of people but doesn't with the other." (R3)
  - "You need to define success. It's the small steps." (R6)

Perceptions and prejudices

- **Prejudice of the professional:**
  - "[I]f anybody ever wants to work with this circle of clientele, they have to reframe their thoughts: they are not offenders, they are people." (R1)
  - "If I don't believe in the possibility of progress, I can leave right away. I need to accept where they come from." (R4)
  - "We cannot assume that they act the way they do because they are inherently evil. […] they lack social competences, literacy, communication, proper behaviour, the ability to phrase emotions, etc." (R6)
- **Prejudice in the community:**
  - "Stereotypes dissolve once they meet our pupils face-to-face. There is a coordinator for Tesco, who, when first heard that two girls will come from corrections – and the two with physical abuse in the bag – was dumbstruck. And when they met in person it was beyond question. Because these girls were 'sweet' – she used that word to describe them." (R1)

The competence of the professional

- "We also need to know what we have the contract for. Boundaries. My work starts here and ends there. Whatever happens afterwards is out of my control. And not my fault." (R4)

- "Anybody who comes to work here has to have the skill to deal with problematic minors. [...] they can either be psychologists, social workers, pedagogues." (R1)

- „We need to reflect on ourselves, too, and change when needed." (R6)

Reflections on family ties

- "We always push them to keep the connection, write that letter, doesn't matter if they don't reply 5 times, write the letter the 6th time. It might not be the best, might not be the most supportive, but it is your family. We try to support these ties through family consultation." (R2)

- "If it's not an abusive background, we cannot take the responsibility to make that girl completely rootless. They are not even in the age to accept that breaking family ties and breaking with my past is a possibility." (R1)

- "But if I am being honest, sometimes it's better to be released in a vacuum, rather than going back to the dysfunctional family." (R6)

- **For girls it's different:**
  - "Girls have very weak relationships. What we see is that these girls are not very important to their families." (R3)
  - "We had a colleague who previously worked with boys. And he was very surprised about the differences in this respect. Boys receive more, bigger packages, more visits. Girls are being abandoned more easily." (R1)

CONCLUSION

Conclusions and recommendations

- Transversal competences
- Systemic approach (family, professional, NGOs, church, etc)
- Follow-up if possible
- Treatment is more successful in the community than in closed context
- Evidence-based practices

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