**Notes on Community Organizing For Family Issues (Austin Peace Center)—Introduction to the School to Prison Pipeline—Room 503**

Lynn Morton works as a coordinator for Austin Peace Center, which works with Power Pac. Power Pac is funded by COFI.

Lynn was let go five years ago and while she was working was not very involved in the school. After she was let go she began to become more involved in the school and did not like what she saw. The school had grades K-5 and the school system would suspend kids as young as kindergarten. They would take 11 and 12 year olds out of the school by handcuffs. Lynn then took in a couple of her nephews who were a little more “troubled”. They just continued getting suspended. There were 355 suspensions in one school year in this particular school. She began talking to parents from other schools and the same thing was happening everywhere—400 or 500 suspensions in one school year.

Lynn decided that she would read CPS policy. She decided that she wanted to be proactive in her community—“restorative justice.” Power Pac met with Michael Scott, the school board President. They sent her to Minneapolis, Los Angeles to see all of the restorative work in action—same demographics as CPS. At this point she had already started the Peace Center at her son’s school on a very small scale. After they got back from Minnesota, they were convinced that these restorative justice practices would work. Mr. Scott then decided that he was stepping down. Lynn believes that this is because he was just “tired.” They did gain funding though and started these practices five years ago.

This program began with 10 pilot schools and slowly went down to one but then back up to three before Mr. Scott returned. Unfortunately, he died—Lynn does not believe that he committed suicide as was reported. This happened only 2 months ago. He was only 59 or 60 years old.

They came up with a Guide to Restorative Justice in Chicago Public Schools. Lynn acts as a consultant to CPS.

Lynn was trying to get recess back into schools—Arnie Dunkin stated that this is what he wanted—but then it turns out that CPS did not support the bill. There is a new blueprint for education that lacks the ability for parents to be involved in the schools.

Community Justice for Youth Institute is a great institute in Chicago.

The pipeline from suspensions to expulsions to arrests to prison is a very clear link.

Restorative Justice is a “way of life.” She has meetings with his son.

Power-Pac Recommendations for CPS from Parent-to-Parent Guide:

1. End out-of-school suspensions—it should be the last resort not the first resort
2. Reinstate recess and breaks in the school day—the playground is where a lot of socialization happens
3. Implement prevention programs—children are not just being bad—there must be something else going on
4. Provide training on discipline policies
5. Parents need to be involved in oversight and accountability

A boy who had been taking care of his younger brother since he was only 10 years old—had to make dinner, comb his sister’s hair, take them to school, pick them up because he mom was strung out on drugs. He just kept on getting suspended for being disruptive in class. He opened up during circle time. Suspension is not the answer because it does not address the problems underneath as restorative justice does.

Restorative Justice is now in the Code of Conduct for CPS as an alternative to suspension. Another change is that punishments for younger children cannot be punished in the same way that the older students can be. Zero tolerance has been removed from the CPS Code of Conduct as well. The culture of zero tolerance is still very much alive at CPS. People have not been taught and trained in restorative justice.

Some ways to encourage the social-emotional learning are through requiring students to do service learning. Testing in schools definitely gets in the way.

Restorative justice pulls the community in. You have to have people who believe in the school in order to get it to work. We need people who have a vested in our children excelling. It is not okay for the community to spend $12000 per inmate when students don’t even have books to learn.

Austin Peace Center—Cook count court service attorney’s office (?) funded them for 2 years.

Work towards restorative learning has been funded by outside foundations like COFI, not affiliated or linked to COFI.

New Culture of Calm initiatives now introduced to CPS and she feels that it is a lot of money that is not going to the correct places. They are looking for changes in culture in only 18 months, but this does not seem like a possibility. It is unclear whether any of the money coming in from here is going to go to restorative justice.

Something that has been frustrating is the disconnect between people have been working in the communities for years and the new people that are on CPS contracts who are contracted to help with restorative justice. These people have been trying to implement changes for years and new people are then hired within the school system who do not utilize the work that all of these other individuals have contributed.