

The Role of Evidence in the Future of Collaborative CSWB

Norman E. Taylor
Editor-in-Chief, Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being
January 24, 2017

Keynote Address to:

MEASURING COLLABORATIVE RISK-DRIVEN INTERVENTION

An Interactive National Dialogue on Research, Evaluation and Analysis of the Hub/Situation Table and Related CSWB Models

Good evening. Let me begin by thanking the organizers of this event for inviting me to speak on this topic, *The Role of Evidence in the Future of Collaborative CSWB*. I am honoured, and in keeping with that honour, I'm going to be a little more formal in the way I deliver my remarks tonight.

As many of you know, I wear a lot of different hats in my professional life. Last year, I was very proud to take on a new and different role as the first Editor-in-Chief of the first peer reviewed quarterly ... the first ever ... dedicated to our emerging field of collaborative CSWB. It is in that capacity that I deliver this address tonight. So, let me begin.

Jan 20 was an historic day. In my view, that day should always be remembered ... for being the day before Jan 21, when almost 3 million women and men took to the streets, in cities around the world, to push back against the rise of regressive and oppressive rhetoric. Truly, best thing I've witnessed since the summer of 1969.

Two potent words, those: regressive and oppressive.

Now, I could get political by concentrating on the latter, but that is not my purpose tonight, nor is it the point I want to address. No, tonight, in keeping with the focus of this 2-day gathering of social innovators, I want to focus on the former. Because, of all the dangers we may be sensing in the recent turn of global events, perhaps none is more pernicious than the foreshadowing in that *regressive* rhetoric ... rising here in Canada, in the US, and abroad ... that foreshadowing of a world where public policy might be formed on the equivalent of 140 character opinions and ideologies.

In many ways, preventing such a trend sits as the very foundation of this event.

Among the many signs that were captured and shared over the weekend from that historic day of protest, one really caught my eye. Due the peculiarities of Facebook, Cal Corley had 'liked' the photo on his own page, and as a result, as sometimes randomly occurs among FB friends, the post appeared on my timeline late Saturday night. As soon as I read it, I knew I'd have to use it here.

The photo showed a young man in his teens, holding a sign that mimicked the usual chant-format of protest signs, with which we are all so familiar. It had two questions, and two rejoinders. The sign said:

What do we want?

And the first rejoinder was: Evidence Based Science !!

Then, of course ...

When do we want it? and the answer was:

After Peer Review!!

Without doubt, that's the very definition of *academic nerd humour*, right?

But, let's consider its significance to our work together here this week.

Social Innovation and Public Policy

My good friend Dale McFee often likes to say that social innovation won't ever matter if it doesn't find its way into public policy. Now, that is a position that might rankle a lot of community-based organizers. And, it is true that some of the best social innovation arises outside of the formal systems of government at all levels. In fact, some of the best arises from the grass roots, and in counterpoint to those very systems.

I have tremendous respect for those innovators who operate in the community space, marshaling philanthropic or fund-raising resources, and delivering powerful programs over many years, often with little compensation for themselves. I have also seen how hard it is for them to sustain those sources of necessary funding year after year, and how too often such innovations remain rooted locally, non-scalable, and unable to reach their full potential in the widest range of environments with similar needs.

Let's face it, public policy often equates to those so-necessary and sustainable resources. And, while not always and certainly not guaranteed, when adopted into public policy social innovation can become enduring practice, with a much better survival rate in the face of political and ideological swings.

Unfortunately, this is so true, that we also see the endurance of many practices that have no business being policy in the first place. That's where we come in. That's why this event is so important.

From Opinion to Culture in Our Target Market

First, let's take a minute to consider the most direct markets we aim to serve in our social innovation. None of the policing, criminal justice and human services sectors – whose collaboration we are aiming to achieve in service of CSWB – is without its own sad traditions in the adoption and perpetuation of policies and practices for which there was and is not only no evidence to support them, but ample sources of counter-indicating evidence available to them.

From conversion therapies for sexual orientation and gender identity, to extraordinary rendition and enhanced interrogation techniques, from administrative segregation applied to young offenders, to mandatory sentencing and 3-strike practices that have led to mass incarceration across the US, and from punitive responses to drug and alcohol addiction, to bully-protecting and victim-shaming reassignment policies in classrooms. I could go on ... and on.

Many of these practices derive from long held social ideologies, some from religious mythologies, and far too many from the mere convenience of the system serving its own administrative lethargy, or from a beleaguered public service that must respond with duplicity to the economic and political priorities of a tax-and-fund system that favours the most advantaged while ever-expanding the marginalization of those it was intended to support.

More importantly, perhaps, is that we know from experience how fine is the line between opinion and organizational and systemic culture. Consider, just within policing, some of the examples of a culturally-based adherence to practices that are not supported by the evident social science, or conversely, the steadfast reluctance to adopt practices that are.

How many police services continue to deliver DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) programs?

How often do we hear US and Canadian police spokespersons still invoke the debunked 21-foot rule as the basis for justifying excessive use of lethal force?

How often are we asked to simply accept that the documented and disproportionate carding of young African-Canadian males is simply an aberration in the effective application of intelligence gathering practices, absent the production of any similar documentation on how such intelligence has been applied to any measurable effect?

How many police services continue to resist adopting harm reduction practices, because they run counter to a punitive narrative?

Why is the proven promise of Restorative Justice alternatives still being limited to some isolated applications?

Now, those were merely some policing and criminal justice questions. Here's one that is for everyone.

Why do we continue to let abstract and misinformed Privacy concerns be employed as a systemic impediment to sharing the information that is both necessary, and legally anticipated in every sector, for our human service sectors to respond adequately, collaboratively, and with appropriate urgency, in the face of mounting, concrete evidence of compound and acutely elevated risk situations, and in the face of multiple inquests that reveal this very habitual practice for its full and ultimate dangers?

Now, I recognize we are not here tonight to litigate those or other opinion-based practices.

But, we must recognize their implications, their lessons, and their costs, if we are to continue moving forward in our socially innovative directions in CSWB.

Where Are We With Evidence in Collaborative CSWB?

Let's consider where we are headed in that journey. Our private firm completed and published the first Canada-wide Account of Hub/Situation Table Adoption two months ago. That's just one model, as we all know, but the rate of its proliferation is both impressive and daunting at the same time. To date, the evaluations and data analytics tracking that model have been strong in their own right, but they have also been limited to qualitative studies and formative, developmental, and process-related insights. All good, but we will need much more if we are to support practitioners who know all too well that like any socially innovative practice, it is a model that yields a lot of predictable stress points in its early going. We hear a lot about those stressors in our advisory work, and we've talked a lot of adopters "off the ledge", so to speak. These stresses may derive from uneven privacy interpretations, or from uneven commitment or energy invested at the table, or in the interventions and follow-through. Whatever their nature, only predictable, consistent and evidence-informed practices will permit this model, with all its promise, to survive the inevitable reactionary pressures that will most certainly arise from time to time in each and every jurisdiction.

It's also worth noting that to date, two particular forms of evidence have yet to appear to any great degree. One of those is what we might call the '*lived experience outcomes*'. Our colleague Dr. Nilson recently published a commentary in the November issue of our Journal of CSWB, and fruitful conversations are well underway in that regard. Enough time has passed that meaningful things, both the positive and negative lessons, can and

must be learned from the actual subjects of those 8500+ interventions that have occurred across the country.

Another form of required study goes to the *quantitative and economic impacts* of the model. I am very proud to announce tonight that the March issue of our Journal will feature the first comprehensive and quantitative study of this nature. The paper is co-authored as an adaption of a recent Masters thesis by the original researcher, Murray Sawatsky, who retired almost two years ago from the Sask Ministry of Justice, jointly with his two research advisors from the U of R, Dr. Rick Ruddell and Dr. Nick Jones. Murray applied well-established costing models for determining the savings to the City of Prince Albert from measurable reductions in specific categories of crime, following the introduction of the first Hub model in Canada. He and his collaborators have subsequently, and only recently, updated his calculations using the costing models released just weeks ago by Public Safety Canada. Editorial guidelines restrict what I can say about the paper before its upcoming publication. But, suffice to say, the calculations, based on policing data alone, reveal *significant difference* outcomes in most of the crime categories studied, with resulting savings to the PA Police measured in the millions of dollars over the period from 2011 to 2015. We believe this first study will set the stage for more such studies, as the appetite for economic evidence will continue to grow, not just for that model, but for all collaborative CSWB initiatives and programs.

Where Are We Headed in Collaborative CSWB?

Stepping into my private role for a moment, while conducting our nation-wide account, and in our continuing professional support to many communities, my colleagues and I are increasingly hearing the “what comes next” question. With a nod to our own Global Network clients in Durham, Halton, PEI, Brantford, Barrie, North Bay, Brandon and Surrey, and with respect to the bold initiatives of the OPP, MCSCS in Ontario, and BPRC in

Saskatchewan, the phrase my colleagues and I have adopted to frame “what comes next” is *CSWB in Action*. Kind of speaks for itself, right?

We’ve all heard and read a lot about CSWB Planning as a general concept ... we look forward to speaking with more and more communities and provinces about how these early adopters are starting to put the ‘Action’ into that concept. And, just to be clear, by the word “action” I am referring to defining, pursuing and implementing the highest priority data-driven and evidence based opportunities and solutions for systemic reform and collaborative programming that will achieve the measurable CSWB outcomes that communities need most ... and need most urgently.

The Editorial Vision and Commitment of Your Journal of CSWB

So, to close, let me return to my Editor-in-Chief role, where on behalf of CSKA, our publisher Multimed, and our team of Section Editors and professional staff, I would like to make this commitment and express my promise to you tonight. Our Journal is committed to advancing the social science ... and thus informing and shaping the public policy ... that will be necessary to conceiving, launching, proving concept, proliferating, funding and sustaining progressive and socially innovative practices ... policies and practices that are born of research, evidence and scientific knowledge where it can be found or created, supported by data where it is or where it can be mined and shared, and at all times, anchored in a renewed collaboration among all parts of the public service system to meet the Community Safety and Well-Being ambitions and outcomes that all our citizens deserve.

If you haven't yet read the Journal's first 3 issues, please do so when you can. Please look forward to reading our March issue, where the interactive dialogue continues, framed by 7 very strong and diverse new articles.

And, let's recognize the importance of sharing with others your work together here this week and in the collaborations to follow, and all the great work you're all pursuing in your respective day jobs. And so, I would ask this of you tonight. Whether you've published many times before like some of the people in this room have, or if you've never before seen yourself as an author, please join us in this mission. We publish original research, social innovation narratives, practice guidelines, commentaries, editorials, and even letters to the editor. Be bold. Be controversial. And, if you should choose to go with that last category and express your thoughts in writing to the Editor-in-Chief, please be kind.

Thank you. I'm happy to take any questions or discussion about my remarks or about the Journal itself.
