**Dr Tegan Brierley-Sollis: Surfing the Waves of Compassionate Accountability within Youth Justice Service**

Prof. Claire Taylor: Well good evening everybody and a very very warm welcome to this evening’s lecture, I’m Claire Taylor, I’m the Deputy Vice Chancellor here at the university and it’s my absolute delight to be hosting this research lecture as part of our ongoing series, so if you’re interested in hearing more from different areas of the university, then do look out for future events as well. It’s fantastic that we have Tegan Brierley-Sollis here with us this evening and you can see the title of her lecture there that’s actually the subject of her doctoral studies of her PhD. But a little bit of background in terms of my personal connection with Tegan because I first came across Tegan when I arrived at the University nearly seven years ago, I think you were in your second year of your undergraduate degree at the time

Dr Tegan Brierley-Sollis: yes

Prof. Claire Taylor: and I thought hurrah, a live student who I can talk to who’s engaging and interested in what’s going on, and Tegan was always one of those people who would put her hand up to engage with staff to get involved with stuff, who was generally interested in making a difference which for me, as a senior leader is a gift, I have to say, a real gift. So I’ve really watched with interest as she’s progressed through her undergraduate studies, her postgraduate studies, her doctoral, congratulations Dr Tegan Brierley-Sollis and has also been an incredibly influential driving force, particularly in relation to our work to become a trauma and ACEs informed university. The great thing about Tegan is what you see is what you get, Tegan is totally authentic, when you talk to her she talks with authenticity in terms of her compassionate approach and her belief in an approach that is rooted in kindness but also in impact. So we have here a young woman who is fantastic in terms of research power and good scholarly work which has incredible foundations, great impact, great work, but also an edge that brings a realism to her work and that kind of applied aspect which is so so important for a university like ours. So without further ado, please welcome Dr Tegan Brierley-Sollis who is going to talk to us for a little while this evening and then we’ll take some questions towards the end. Thank you very much.

Dr Tegan Brierley-Sollis: Thank you so much Claire, thank you very much for coming tonight, I’m so so grateful that you’re all here and I’m excited to tell you about my research so I wanted to start the session with a quote that I love, and I don’t know whether any of you have heard it before but you may have um but it’s from Ramdas, and he said, when you go into the woods, you see all different kinds of trees and some are bent and some are gnarled, some are Evergreen, all different kinds and you look at the tree and you allow it. You understand why it might be a certain way; maybe it didn’t get enough water, maybe it didn’t get enough light, but you still appreciate it for its beauty, you still know that it’s enough and that it has power. So what Ramdas says is that you should practice turning people into trees and hopefully by the end of the talk you will understand why I have used this quote.

But there’s another story that I want tell you tonight and this story is going to be cut from the recording because it’s my own personal story.

I also wanted to thank all of my research participants, both children and service providers whose stories and strengths have shaped this research into what it is, and to the service providers, some of which are in the room, thanks to your ongoing interest and your willingness to assist in any way and the kindness and compassionate which you demonstrated to me whilst I was in your presence. I am eternally grateful to everything that you’ve done for me. I’m also eternally grateful to the children who spoke to me and shared their stories with me and just allowed me a little bit of a glimpse into their lives. Thank you also to the people and organisations who have opened so many doors to wonderful opportunities for me because there have been so many on this journey, this lecture is also for you, and this lecture is for everybody who has attended tonight cause I’m really grateful.

So, I wanted to tell you the story of my research and you’ll notice that there’s a nautical theme to the lecture tonight and all will be revealed just after this slide where I’m going to show you the animation of Navigating the Storm which is nautical, so this is why it’s called The Voyage. Now I started my journey in 2018 and when I first started I originally was interested in trauma informed interventions within youth justice, but what I soon came to realise was there wasn’t anything really specific there wasn’t any specific trauma informed interventions. What people were saying was it was more about the culture of the organisation, so that is what I decided to look at instead.

These are some of the defining moments within my journey, and there was a few that I remember but these are the moments that really made the journey special for me. So I took part in the Visualising Research competition and I created (I mean I’m not going to win any photography awards but) I created the image that you can see on the screen and I called it ‘the serene storm within’ and I wanted to explain how trauma and adverse experiences can feel and be so different for us like bodies of water, and as human beings we are made up mainly of water so I thought that analogy was quite fitting, and that really led to what I did next at the ACE hub conference in 2019. So I was asked to present and I’d never presented before, I hated the idea of presenting I just really got very nervous about public speaking and I remember thinking at the time, I’ve got 10 minutes now so how am I going to explain this piece of research in 10 minutes and make it interesting and engaging and everybody else is so good at presenting and they just seem to do it so naturally. But I do remember hearing people say that they felt really nervous, they could do a really good job, but they felt really nervous on the inside. So it got me thinking we all experience things so differently, it doesn’t, what we show on the outside may not be reflective of what we’re feeling on the inside and so I use metaphors again, I use the water analogy, and that was the start of Navigating the Storm, and then a year later I did the Open House for Research conference and that’s where it really took off. Thank you to Mandy Robbins for the idea of animation because without you it would not be where it is now.

So then steering in a new direction, as steered my research into a new direction when I realised there wasn’t specific trauma informed interventions that I could research but also I steered it in a new direction in 2020 because I started data collection and started to interview children and carry out focus groups with staff but then the lock down happened and I wasn’t able to interview children anymore or indeed carry out focus groups with staff in person, so I had to really think about what I was going to do and I wanted to use a trauma informed lens to do this piece of research so I really thought hard about how I was going to do this and it took a lot of support from my supervisors to really pave the way for my research going forward and I came to this decision to not interview any more children because I didn’t think that it was appropriate to interview children on such a sensitive topic when they may not have the support around them. And to do that virtually as well I didn’t know where they would be, so I didn’t interview as many children as I envisaged interviewing but I did however manage to conduct interviews online with service providers and I was able to do that virtually, but it did steer my research into a bit of a new direction.

And what I also did was I ensured I adhered to the 10 trauma informed principles coined by Elliot in 2005 during my data collection, and these principles were adapted for research with victims of sexual violence by Campbell and colleagues in 2009 so also followed that and adapted as I though appropriate for this piece of research. So I really led with the awareness that anybody can be a victim of trauma, so I needed to apply these principles to focus groups with service providers as well as the interviews I was carrying out with children and that included for example, understanding the coping mechanisms identified by participants and the continued impact which trauma might have on their lives, going through their involvement with the criminal justice system. Another principle is to recognise individuals strengths, resiliency, which I attempted to do through the use of active listening and also picking up on individual strengths when they were talking to me in the research. Particularly when I was talking to children, they didn’t always talk about themselves very nicely but there was just little snippets that they’d say now an then that really demonstrated what their strengths were. It could be that they were really amazing at being brother to their younger siblings or they were really caring in school, all of those kinds of things. And I also tried to ensure that the environment the interviews took place in felt safe because being safe and feeling safe are two very different things. We can all be safe in this room right now but not all of us will feel safe so I really wanted to make sure that everyone felt safe during the data collection.

So now I’m going to play the animation for you, and this animation is a way to explain trauma and trauma informed culture and you can start to apply a trauma informed lens, so this animation is the reason why the theme in nautical tonight so it will all make sense once you watch the animation.

(YouTube link to animation in English: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFSsE2qOnuw&t=3s> YouTube link to Welsh version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ucTbxX083g&t=1s>)

So hopefully that sets the scene nicely for the rest of the talk which I have kept very nautical. That animation is available on YouTube, in English and Welsh, so please, if you’re from any organisation and you’d like to use it, please feel free to use it, I’m more than happy for you to contact me and get the link if you feel it would be useful and yeah we’re happy for you to use the animation to help, and hopefully it does.

Before I tell you about the findings from my research, I wanted to highlight three points that are going to come up quite a bit, so I wanted to talk about trauma and just give you a little bit more information about what trauma is. So the term trauma holds Greek origins meaning wound, and a metaphoric spin was placed on it by Freud to explain how the mind can be wounded too, however, a universal definition for trauma doesn’t exist and this might be because trauma can be thought of as a medical term, it can also be thought of as a biopsychosocial term as well, so there isn’t a readily presented definition of trauma.

And also trauma is subjective, so various definitions do exist in an attempt to understand a complex and broad area, generally, trauma is considered an event or a set of circumstances which are harmful in some way, and leaves an imprint within an individual. I often use a SAMSA definition to explain what trauma is, but we also have a definition in Wales now that I’m going to tell you a little bit about in just a moment. But, the SAMSA definition is an event or series of events, set of circumstance that is experienced by the individual as life threatening or harmful, and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning, emotional, social, or spiritual wellbeing.

There are many different types of trauma, which I won’t go into detail of what they are tonight but things like personal trauma, which can be singular, non-singular, prolonged or a one-off events and it’s based on the individual’s internal world so it’s based on how the individual has experienced that trauma. There’s cultural trauma which is a fragmentation of a particular group system of beliefs which can weaken various elements, it can weaken values, ideologies of a particular culture, and it’s often said it’s the meaning given to that event that actually impacts cultural trauma rather than the event itself for some individuals. And then there’s relational trauma, which is known as attachment trauma as well, and this intertwines with developmental trauma because it can interrupt an individual’s ability to form a secure and trusting relationships, so if an individual experience insecure attachment during childhood they might find relationships quite challenging as they get older and they might lack emotional understanding which is manoeuvred by behavioural and emotional responses to attachment based experiences.

The other point I wanted to touch on before I talk to you about my findings is around the meaning of trauma-informed, so similar to trauma, being trauma-informed lacks conceptualisation and it doesn’t have a universal definition so practitioners in organisations construct their own meaning and this has led to a variety of definitions that interpret trauma-informed practice. It’s person-centred, it’s whole system approach and it differs from trauma-focused interventions which seek to address underlying trauma, instead it adopts a universal approach promoting safety, trustworthiness, support to collaboration, choice, and empowerment. It really flips the switch from ‘what is wrong with you’, to ‘what has happened to you?’, ‘who is there for you?’, ‘what matters to you?’. And trauma-informed is about embedding a culture of understanding, a culture of curiosity and reflection instead of a culture of reaction. It’s relational and attachment and connection focused because after all, we’re all human being, we crave social connections, we know the importance of the. The Harvard study on human development, the longest running study on happiness, started in 1938, shows that emotional and mental stimulation is created through person connections which boost our mood and make us happier.

So as I mentioned, we have our own definition in Wales, we have our own practice framework in Wales, the national framework, and within the framework are 5 practice principles which include being a universal approach that does no harm, person-centred, relationship-focused, resilience and strengths-focus, and inclusive. If we used the animation analogy, being trauma-informed is like being a lighthouse, because a lighthouse is a beacon of hope and represents safety to guide our boats through difficult times. And it also lights the way ahead, it empowers us to continue with our journey. However that might look, whilst remaining a constant source of reassurance that we can move forward when there’s opportunity given to us and where guidance is received if needed. In this way, organisations can be represented as lighthouses, their effectiveness measured by the lens in which they apply. Organisations who understand and are responsive to trauma have worked to apply a lens which enables them to undertake various transformations needed at multiple levels whilst constantly reflecting on their mission, their values, and their work to ensure a nurturing, sensitive service is felt for all. And in this way, their lighthouse lens can be likened to a Fresnel lens which comprises tiers of prisms which retract and reflect the light as it passes through, creating a brighter beam. The tiers of prisms represent the importance of multilevel change throughout the whole system, whilst the reflection of light represents the need for organisations to continually reflect, learn, and grow on their journey.

The final thing that I wanted to touch on was the therapeutic relationship. So I believe that you can create a home for people in the relationship that you share with them. You can fill a space with love, soul, character, and creativity and you will be met there with gratitude, even if it takes a while. The word therapeutic comes from the Greek word ‘therapeuin’, to attend to another, and in this sense, a therapeutic relationship is like no other. One individual offers presence, care, compassion, and any act that manifest healing that expects nothing in return. And this is unlike most personal relationships we have that require a mutual balance of give and take. No matter who the individual is, the purpose of the therapeutic relationships remains the same – to connect with another person in order to facilitate their healing. Therapeutic relationships exist in many settings and often associated with counselling and therapy, but also in healthcare. However, I found in my research that service providers within the youth justice service field viewed the relationships they had with justice involved children as therapeutic.

There are many hundreds of theories of therapeutic relationships, Carl Rogers put forward one which involves three active components, um congruence which is a condition in a therapeutic relationship that refers to the accurate matching of a person’s experience with awareness, genuineness, authenticity, and transparency. So it means understanding their feelings and thoughts accurately. Empathy, so to walk in another person’s shoes, and unconditional positive regard. When you have unconditional positive regard for somebody, nothing they could do could give you a reason to stop seeing them as inherently human and inherently lovable. It does not mean you accept each and every action taken by the person but that you accept who they are much deeper than surface behaviour. Within a therapeutic relationship it becomes quite natural for stories to be shared, particularly trauma narratives, which I am going to come back to in a little while.

The title of my talk was ‘Surfing the Waves of Compassionate Accountability’, so what do I mean by compassionate accountability? Well trauma-informed practice is knitted into the foundations of many organisations and spheres within the criminal justice system and research does suggest between trauma and those who have interfaced with the criminal justice system. However, confinement within such a system is designed for those who offend rather than those who have experienced adversity. Many practices and procedure which exist within the criminal justice system, such as disciplinary approaches, strip searches, and restriction movement may be traumatising or re-traumatising for individuals, and in turn this can lead to an increase in behaviour reflective of trauma, such as aggression, which can be really challenging for staff to manage. Trauma-informed practice may be seen as beneficial however the challenge lies is managing perceptions of viewing offending via a trauma-informed lens as overly sympathetic whilst disregarding the victim. Instead, the context of the offending should be considered alongside trauma histories. Miller and Najavits suggest that despite challenges and careful considerations, which must be made, trauma informed practice can enhance the criminal justice environment in terms of safety, result in better outcomes for individuals who interface with the criminal justice system and help them to develop pro-social coping skills. Trauma-informed culture within the criminal justice system does not mean individuals will not be accountable, because they will, but this happens in a compassionate way, so working through a trauma informed lens means employing gentle curiosity around an individual, their behaviour, and responses and also developing a culture, and indeed intervention which supports the development of emotional regulation skills and personal ownership of change whilst also contextualising their behaviour.

So, now I’m going to move on to tell you some of the findings in my research and there are three themes that I wanted to talk to you about today. So the first theme is behaviour as communication. So these are some of the quotes taken from participants in some of the research. This was from a child who I interview, who said “I was bullied all through primary school, I had an abusive dad, and abusive stepdad and when I was in my dads, if I didn’t drink with him at a stupid age I would get beaten up.” And this child stated that these experiences were one of the reasons they started offending in the first place because they really struggled to manage their anger. They had a lot of anger that had built up from these experiences and they really struggled with that so that is how they, that’s what they attribute their offending to. And likewise, the second young person stated that their pathway began on the offending trajectories when their mum went to prison which triggered a lot of trauma for them.

So emotional dysregulation resulting from psychological distress was considered in relation to police call outs by service providers, they really recognised that children who were presenting as aggressive, were actually probably an individual who was really scared, distress, afraid, fearful, and anxious, so service providers recognise this. Anger as an outward mechanism for what they were really feeling on the inside. When we’re distressed as babies we cannot self-regulate and we rely on attunement from a regulated and predictable adult to soothe us and get us back to calm regulated and balanced state. Adolescent as we all know is a period of massive growth and development where self-soothing mechanisms can develop in either a healthy or unhealthy way, depending on our experiences. So these things that we do to self soothe, may provide comfort and relief in the short term, but they can be damaging in the long term. We self sooth to help us reach equilibrium after a difficult time, but also to get our needs met. So we might not be able to process how we respond to environmental stressors, so we use avoidant or unhealthy coping mechanisms, which might influence our behaviour or stem from emotion which we’re unable to regulate at the time. So as a result of our emotional needs being unmet, we might feel shame, we might feel shame, we might feel unworthy, and we might feel unlovable. And so we seek to feel that abandonment externally. The construction of behaviour as a form of communication through coping mechanisms has implications for wider understanding and responses to criminal behaviour, for example if we were to apply a criminological lens, whether there’s a perceived coping mechanism or not, where trauma has been experienced, it would allow us to start to understand an individual’s behaviour and what they are presenting. Behaviour is already understood as a form of communication, but my thesis adds to the argument that criminal behaviour can also be viewed as a form of communication signalled as a distress flair of an unmet need. We communicate when we are in survival response, which manifests in various ways, but others around us or we ourselves may not even realise that we’re doing it. So, for example, dissociation is an adaptive survival response that allows us to function in survival mode and it means that we appear zoned out or relaxed but internally we’re experiencing a severe disconnection from ourselves and others. And sometimes it’s because we’ve experienced dysregulated adult relationships that make us feel not lovable. Or we personalise events in order to keep that bond. This makes us feel unsafe, and it makes us feel like there’s no one there to help us when, makes sense of what is happening to us. Sometimes, the trauma that we experience which is stored in our bodies starts to reveal itself in our relational connections with other people, for example, if the love we experience is conditional, and taken away based on our behaviour or taken away based on something that we’ve said, then we start to turn into people pleasing as a safety mechanism in order to protect ourselves. It’s our fawn response in action where we appease others in order to avoid danger.

Another theme I’m finding within my research when creating a trauma-informed culture within youth justice was the importance of viewing the child holistically when forming meaningful relationships with them rather than criminalising them. So some of the children involved in the research considered the relationship with staff as the most important thing, as you can see from the quote on the screen. However, it was appreciated by service providers that actually building safe relationship with justice involved children could be quite difficult and have challenges because children might not experience relationships like we experience relationships and they may have relational trauma and so trusting relationships with adults may feel really uncomfortable and difficult to build. So in the study, in my study it was acknowledged by service providers that trauma experienced by children might be interpersonal and it might lead to problems regulating emotions for the children, behavioural changes, and relational difficulties, which in turn could impede the child-practitioner relationship as well. Some of the children when I was interviewing them discussed impaired maternal caregiving and this is associated with the relational model of trauma. So some of it was direct, where there was neglect experienced and some of it was indirect where the mother was imprisoned and therefore not able to care for the child. When trauma is interpersonal it becomes relational, and Dr Karen Treisman who’s a clinical psychologist and specialist in, specialises in trauma suggests that healing focused on relational repair must take place where relational trauma has been experienced

So relational practice holds the relationship at the centre of all work by facilitating reliable and supportive connections, but also empowering individuals to participate in decision making processes. This practice gives the opportunity for the building of trust and respect, which engenders feelings of belonging, connection, feeling cared for an valued, so it acts as a scaffold for future relationship experiences. Child-first philosophy is advocated in youth justice and it has four practices within child-first philosophy so to view children as children, to develop a child’s prosocial identity to elicit positive outcomes, to collaborate with children, and to promote diversion. And this really speaks to trauma informed philosophy as it advocates a human centred approach whereby each aspect of the child is considered and focused upon rather than simply focusing on their behaviour or their experiences. And the study found that children perceived the youth justice practitioners really taking an interest in their lives and also focusing on their strengths rather than simply their behaviour, and service provider participants discussed the idea of being child-centred, child-friendly, which suggests an emphasis that it remained child-first and viewed children as children rather than labelling them as offenders. At the same time, it was recognised that care had to be given when working with a trauma-informed lens that children were not stigmatised and labelled based on their trauma experiences as well, so they weren’t labelled as a passive victim or labelled based on research which suggests a correlation between trauma and a negative life trajectory because correlation and causation are two different things, and we’re not defined by what happens to us, these experiences are simply a tesserae in our lives mosaic. It’s recognised that trauma histories are prevalent in children accessing youth justice services and those in custody, and this was reflected in the current study. I didn’t ask children about their personal experiences of trauma but interestingly, every child that I spoke to opened up and told me their story. So I mentioned therapeutic relationships earlier and how this study concluded that the child-practitioner relationship may be viewed via a therapeutic lens. So when working in a relational and therapeutic way, space is created which allows for the sharing of trauma narrative which can encourage healing for the child.

Life experiences, both positive and negative move beyond the sense and become organised into stories which help individuals to narrate who they are and reflect on the complexities of their life events. Both children and service providers involved in the study alluded to the crisis management of youth justice, so they spoke about talking through the challenges, talking through previous trauma which might lead to catharsis for the children. One of the children in the study discussed how attending youth justice actually really supports their wellbeing because they can discuss issues and they can express their feelings to somebody. But perhaps most applicable to the child-practitioner relationships is the process of being an empathic witness of injustice. For practitioners, this requires providing a space for the child to tell their story and respond in a way which is sympathetic to the moral trauma which has taken place. So allowing space for the child to share their trauma narrative and respond to it with understanding and compassion is akin to mooring a boat at a harbour, allowing time for rest and repair to reach a state of equilibrium before setting off on sail again. Therapeutic relationship which involves the retelling of trauma narratives has been considered as beneficial when it comes to enhancing reflexivity in children and enhancing their self-evaluative processes, and this can be particularly useful in youth justice as it can encourage children to reflect and understand their behaviour in relation to what they’ve experienced, but it can also help them reframe their adversity as well. So an example from the current study stems from the children’s account, who recognise through their interactions with youth justice, their behaviour and subsequent coping mechanisms such as substance dependence might be connected to what they have experienced, which was really interesting. Children also alluded to behavioural change resulting from conversations shared with youth justice practitioners around consequential thinking and collaborative problem solving, and also simply the act of youth justice practitioners being present and listening whenever challenges arose for them, and also moments of contingency.

However, when working in a relational way, trauma absorption is a risk to practitioners. So clinical supervision may be available to staff via the enhanced case management model which is rolled out across youth justice teams in wales, however, practitioners also recognised the support within the office amongst staff as beneficial, but they also said that this informed support could not always happen because of the intensive workload experience and also the time didn’t always allow this to happen.

So I want to just talk to you about vicarious trauma but before I do that, I thought it would be helpful to consider how we process our experiences. So we all have mobile phones in the room, probably, if we think of the frontal cortex , so the front part of our brain is like a vacuum, it picks up everything in its path, some stuff we might not even realise we are picking it up because we’re so young, we might not be consciously aware at the moment. And it involves all of our senses, so we’re consciously aware of about 5-10%, the other 90% is subconscious, but that doesn’t mean we aren’t processing what we take in in that 90%. And it all gets processed in the hippocampus, which is like our brain’s phone manager, so it helps us sort and store information and the experiences that we have, are different apps on our phone and the phone manager sorts and puts away those apps in different groups, and when they’re sorted, it sends a message to our amygdala, which is like the anti-virus on our phone, and it tells the rest of our body how to respond to that information. So some information gets processed and stored pretty well, whereas others might end up overwhelming the phone manager and it’s unable to be stored, so in that case, the app is just shoved onto the desktop and not stored anywhere. But what that does is it alerts the anti-virus system, aka the amygdala, of a threat, so then our amygdala sets off one of our trauma responses. When we experience trauma in childhood, it can turn into those apps on the phone, on the desktop, unable to be stored, meaning that if we experience anything related to that app, directly or indirectly, then our brain will not be able to differentiate between real adversity and perceived adversity, which means that our alarm will be going off all the time, whenever adversity is perceived, which then amplifies our emotion and dysregulates our behaviours. If this happens to often, being unaware of these adverse apps lingering on our phones desktop, we utilise unhelpful stress responses. They may help in the short term by numbing feelings for example, but can lead to issues long term. So you can see how this relates to vicarious trauma because we may have to support an individual who has experienced something very similar to us, which makes our phone manager panic and sends a stress response to our bodies.

So vicarious trauma occurs through a transference of emotional residue from those who have experienced trauma onto those who engage them in an empathetic relationship. And vicarious trauma is directly connected to typically detailed and sometimes graphic disclosures of trauma. And in that case, negative changes can occur via vicarious trauma including cognitive, emotional, and physical changes. Often, vicarious trauma is associated with therapeutic and clinical roles, but it’s relevant to youth justice practitioners due to the long term relationship formed with children, which is holistic and takes into account everything they have experienced. It is different from secondary traumatic stress, secondary traumatic stress is more common with frontline emergency service workers because there isn’t that empathetic relationship that is built with individuals but they are still witnesses trauma first hand and listening to trauma narratives as well. So service providers within the study described roles within youth justice service as counsellor oriented, in order to acknowledge and empathise with the child lived experience of trauma, and also because they create an emotional bond with the child. And so vicarious trauma was alluded to a more relational, trauma informed way of working with children and therefore required careful management and support mechanisms, including supervision, and informal debriefing between staff in order to maintain wellbeing. In the study that I carried out, both supervision and informal debriefing were discussed, however, it was recognised that resourcing implications may influence the delivery of clinical supervision, and the fast paced environment of youth justice may not allow for informal debriefs to take place as often as required.

In relation to this, organisations who do provide intensive support for individuals with trauma histories might start mirroring trauma symptoms known as trauma-organised, so if we imagine an organisation as a living breathing being, we can really understand that some trauma organised symptoms can develop because of internal external dysfunctions, and so emotional distress becomes embedded in the culture which results as stress as a segment of its defining feature. Much like us as individuals, organisations can display trauma responses, so they can display fight, where conflict is rife and punitive measures are relied upon to remain control. They might display flight where there’s an avoidance of certain role aspects and absenteeism, and also freeze which involves a disconnect between colleagues and systems. Practitioners themselves may also be working through a really difficult period or ay have experiences of trauma which they may subconsciously be struggling with. Service providers in the study that I conducted certainly alluded to their own personal experiences of trauma and adversity so trauma organised systems might respond to stress by implementing more structure, which unfortunately might result in inflexibility, a culture of blame, and negative experiences. Therefore, negative memories event are created and embedded into the organisational scaffold, which paves the way for a stress inducing rather than a stress reducing system.

So embedding trauma informed systems within the criminal justice system presents unique challenges due to the organisational culture embodying justice and the historical focus on punishment, however, the benefits of working through a trauma informed lens should drive changes to combat such challenges and help organisations to work towards becoming the lighthouse.

So in conclusion, the study found that some offending behaviour is seen as a strategy to communicate distress, which may be through coping mechanism such as substance use which may lead to altered behavioural states. It may also lead to occasions where powerful emotions are difficult to articulate, therefore expression occurs through behaviour. In order to work through a trauma informed lens, a culture shift is required in order to embed values, policies, and practice across all levels of youth justice. A further practical concept includes the need to work through a child-first and trauma informed lens which complement each other through a strengths based foundation, however, care must be taken not to label from an offending perspective or indeed a perspective based on trauma experiences. And the space and relationship shared between children and practitioners involves elements of therapeutic processes and techniques often used by counsellors. However, also considers with the repercussions of forming healing relationships which includes vicarious trauma which this study did find to be an important issue and requires addressing at a strategic level in order to adequately support staff and the children that they’re working with.

So I wanted to end on a quote as I began on a quote. This is one of my favourite quotes which bring us back full circle, “we are not the survival of the fittest, we are the survival of the nurtured”. And I’m grateful to say that I am now being nurtured too, so thank you all so much for listening.