

SRV

News & Reviews

ISSN 1932 - 6963

August 2023 • No. 2

www.srvip.org

The major goal of SRV is to create or support socially valued roles for people in their society, because if a person holds valued social roles, that person is highly likely to receive from society those good things in life that are available to that society

SRV News & Reviews

ISSN 1932 - 6963

August 2023 • No. 2

www.srvip.org

ADVISORY BOARD

Erica Baker-Tinsley

Matthew Brennan

Bill Forman

Gareth Lloyd

Jo Massarelli

Sergiu Toma, PhD

Marc Tumeinski, PhD

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

WE BELIEVE THAT SOCIAL ROLE VALORIZATION (SRV), when well applied, has potential to help societally devalued people to gain greater access to the good things of life & to be spared at least some negative effects of social devaluation.

Toward this end, the purposes of this periodical include: 1) analyzing phenomena that have SRV relevance; & 2) fostering, extending & deepening study of, dialogue about, & understanding of, SRV theory, training, research & implementation.

We intend the information provided in this publication to be of use to: family, friends, advocates, direct care workers, managers, trainers, educators, students, researchers & others in relationship with or serving formally or informally upon devalued people in order to provide more valued life conditions as well as more relevant & coherent service.

SRV News & Reviews is published under the auspices of the SRV Implementation Project (SRVIP). The mission of the SRVIP is to: confront social devaluation in all its forms, including the deathmaking of vulnerable people; support positive action consistent with SRV; & promote the work of the formulator of SRV, Prof. Wolf Wolfensberger.[†]

BACK ISSUES OF THE SRV JOURNAL

TO ACCESS FREE BACK ISSUES OF THE SRV JOURNAL, please access the SRVIP website at

[HTTPS://SRVIP.ORG/JOURNAL_PAST_ISSUES.PHP](https://srvip.org/journal_past_issues.php)

SEND CORRESPONDENCE TO

Marc Tumeinski, Editor

The SRV Journal

PO Box 20392

Worcester, MA 01602 US

Email: journal@srvip.org

Website: www.srvip.org

TYPEFACE

Main text is set in Adobe Garamond Pro & headlines in Myriad Pro, both designed by Robert Slimbach.

A Brief Description of Social Role Valorization

From the Editor

IN EVERY NUMBER we print a few brief descriptions of Social Role Valorization (SRV). This by no means replaces more thorough explanations of SRV, but does set a helpful framework for the content of this publication.

The following is from: Wolfensberger, W. (2013). *A brief introduction to Social Role Valorization: A high-order concept for addressing the plight of societally devalued people, and for structuring human services* (4th ed.). Plantagenet, ON: Valor Press, p. 81.

... in order for people to be treated well by others, it is very important that they be seen as occupying valued roles, because otherwise, things are apt to go ill with them. Further, the greater the number of valued roles a person, group or class occupies, or the more valued the roles that such a party occupies, the more likely it is that the party will be accorded those good things of life that others are in a position to accord, or to withhold.

The following is from: SRV Council [North American Social Role Valorization Development, Training & Safeguarding Council] (2004). A proposed definition of Social Role Valorization, with various background materials and elaborations. *SRV-VRS: The International Social Role Valorization*

Journal/La Revue Internationale de la Valorisation des Rôles Sociaux, 5(1&2), p. 85.

SRV is a systematic way of dealing with the facts of social perception and evaluation, so as to enhance the roles of people who are apt to be devalued, by upgrading their competencies and social image in the eyes of others.

The following is from: Wolfensberger, W. (2000). A brief overview of Social Role Valorization. *Mental Retardation*, 38(2), p. 105.

The key premise of SRV is that people's welfare depends extensively on the social roles they occupy: People who fill roles that are positively valued by others will generally be afforded by the latter the good things of life, but people who fill roles that are devalued by others will typically get badly treated by them. This implies that in the case of people whose life situations are very bad, and whose bad situations are bound up with occupancy of devalued roles, then if the social roles they are seen as occupying can somehow be upgraded in the eyes of perceivers, their life conditions will usually improve, and often dramatically so.

If you know someone who would be interested in reading
SRVJ News & Reviews, send us their name & email
& we'll send them a complimentary issue.

A Brief Introduction to Social Role Valorization:

A high-order concept for addressing the plight of societally devalued people, & for structuring human services (*4th expanded edition*)

by Wolf Wolfensberger, PhD

“A long-held rationale of those of us who teach SRV Theory is that the material helps students to see the world from the perspectives of those who receive services & supports, rather than the service provider. Time & again, we hear students describe this as the single most important aspect of taking an SRV Theory course. They talk about how they now have new, or different, eyes with which to see & understand their world. Many describe the realization that *they* first had to change in order for them to address the issues & problems of the people they were assigned to teach or help. When they changed their perceptions of another person, they then changed their expectations of this person, along with their ideas of what the person actually needs & how to effectively address these needs” (from the foreword by Zana Marie Lutfiyya, PhD & Thomas Neville, PhD).



A Brief Introduction to Social Role Valorization

**A high-order concept for addressing
the plight of societally devalued people,
and for structuring human services**
4TH EXPANDED EDITION

Wolf Wolfensberger

Author: Wolf Wolfensberger, PhD, 1934-2011
Publisher: Valor Press (Plantagenet, ON–Canada)

Language: English

ISBN: 978-0-9868040-7-6

Copyright ©: 2013, Valor Press

Available from: presse.valorsolutions.ca

PRESSES
VALOR
PRESS

Resources to Learn about Social Role Valorization

- **A brief introduction to Social Role Valorization**, 4th expanded ed. Wolf Wolfensberger. (2013). (Available from Valor Press)
- **Advanced issues in Social Role Valorization theory**. Wolf Wolfensberger. (2012). (Available from Valor Press)
- **PASSING: A tool for analyzing service quality according to Social Role Valorization criteria. Ratings manual**, 3rd (rev.) ed. Wolf Wolfensberger & Susan Thomas. (2007). (Available from Valor Press)
- **A quarter-century of normalization & Social Role Valorization: Evolution and impact**. Ed. by R. Flynn & R. Lemay. (1999). Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press. (Available on socialrolevalorization.com)
- **A brief overview of Social Role Valorization**. Wolf Wolfensberger. (2000). *Mental Retardation*, 38(2), 105-123.
- **An overview of Social Role Valorization theory**. Joe Osburn. (2006). *The SRV Journal*, 1(1), 4-13. (Available at http://srvip.org/about_articles.php)
- **Some of the universal 'good things of life' which the implementation of Social Role Valorization can be expected to make more accessible to devalued people**. Wolf Wolfensberger, Susan Thomas & Guy Caruso. (1996). *SRV/VRS: The International Social Role Valorization Journal/La Revue Internationale de la Valorisation des Rôles Sociaux*, 2(2), 12-14. (Available at http://srvip.org/about_articles.php)
- **Social Role Valorization & the English experience**. David Race. (1999). London: Whiting & Birch.
- **The SRV Implementation Project website, including a training calendar** www.srvip.org
- **SRVIP Google calendar** http://www.srvip.org/workshops_schedule.php#
- **Abstracts of major articles published in The SRV Journal** <https://srvjournalabstracts.wordpress.com/>
- **International Social Role Valorization Association** <http://www.socialrolevalorization.com/>
- **Southern Ontario Training Group (Canada)** <http://www.srv-sotg.ca/>
- **A 'History of Human Services' course taught by W. Wolfensberger & S. Thomas (DVD set)** purchase online at <http://wolfwolfensberger.com/>

FROM THE EDITOR

OUR FOCUS

WE ARE PLEASED TO OFFER this publication of *SRV News & Reviews*. The core focus of this periodical is to publish material that analyzes phenomena with SRV relevance. This may take the form of brief items, book & movie reviews, book notices, & occasional longer articles & columns.

OUR ADVISORY BOARD

I EXTEND MY GRATITUDE to the members of our advisory board (listed on page 2).

INFORMATION FOR SUBMISSIONS

WE WELCOME WELL-REASONED, CLEARLY-WRITTEN submissions. Topics may include analyses of contemporary human service developments & items in the media, as well as book or movie reviews, or briefer notices of books & movies, from an SRV perspective. We will occasionally publish longer articles on SRV theory & PASSING, training & implementation.

Language used should be clear & descriptive.

We encourage the use of ordinary grammar and vocabulary that a typical reader would understand. The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* is one easily available general style guide. Academic authors should follow the standards of their field. We will not accept items simultaneously submitted elsewhere for publication or previously electronically posted or distributed.

Submissions are reviewed by the Editor or external referees.

WELCOME TO THIS ONGOING SERIES, & we hope that you find the material relevant, instructive & thought-provoking.

Regards,
Marc Tumeinski, Editor

Major Challenges Related to Producing Written PASSING Assessment Reports

Joe Osburn

THIS ESSAY IS THE FIRST of two interconnected papers about written PASSING assessment reports (WPARs). It identifies some of the major issues and challenges encountered in efforts to produce written reports; its companion paper looks at ways to deal with those challenges in order to facilitate WPAR production and use. Neither paper attempts to represent all perspectives on these issues, so it is possible that other thought papers will be produced on topics related to report-writing and to the PASSING training culture more generally. Both papers were originally intended as in-house documents of the North American SRV Council, having emanated from deliberations of the PASSING Trainers Caucus, an ad hoc subgroup of Council-credentialed “PASSING Trainers.”

The PASSING Trainers Caucus was formed to address the fact that so few PASSING events conducted over the past decade and more have met the criteria established by the SRV Council for leadership (Track A) introductory PASSING training. This longstanding reality presents substantial challenges to even the most persevering candidates seeking to advance on the Council’s Trainer Formation Model (TFM). Because having Track A PASSING training is the *sine qua non* for advancing, the fact that such training is rarely offered in effect blocks access to opportunities to meet a major requirement for doing so.

In considering the obstacle this reality poses, the caucus reviewed the criteria originally established by the Council for Track A introductory PASSING training, i.e., what elements together constitute a Track A PASSING training event. These criteria—clearly spelled out in the Council’s credentialing (explanatory) document—form a coherent and appropriately demanding set of logically interlocked rigorous requirements within the Council’s leadership development mission. Among these is a requirement that Track A PASSING events include the production of written PASSING assessment reports (WPARs). While the rationales for including that requirement are nearly incontrovertible in theory, it has hardly ever been achieved in practice in recent years. Thus the caucus’s attention was especially occupied by the viability and validity of this WPAR Track A requirement.

Background Information

WHEN SYSTEMATIC SRV AND PASSING training began circa the early 1980s, there was no distinction between what we now refer to as “Track A training” and “Track B training,” nor was there one for nearly two decades afterward. The distinction came into being out of the Council’s concern with safeguarding the quality of leadership-level SRV and PASSING dissemination on an on-going basis. Doing so requires that there be an on-going continuity

of SRV leaders, with high-level and disciplined understanding of SRV and PASSING, who are committed to the goal of developing other leaders with like understanding, discipline, and commitment. To help accomplish this goal, the Council formulated its “Trainer Formation Model” (TFM) which, among other things, emphasizes that (and why) SRV/PASSING leaders require leadership level training and discipline in order to be able to transmit such training and discipline to other potential SRV/PASSING leaders, and that this process would transpire on an on-going basis. The Council began to refer to such training and discipline as “Track A.” This term came about as a “least-worse” label for training of high rigor and level of challenge that is intentionally designed and conducted to develop leadership trainers of other (future) leadership trainers. “Track A” is a short-hand way to distinguish training of this type and purpose from all other versions of SRV and PASSING training that do not have that purpose, and which, for short-hand, the Council refers to as “Track B.” This terminology is **not** meant to signify that Track B trainings are somehow inferior to Track A trainings, but rather simply that they are different, in that Track B trainings are not consciously trying to develop leaders, nor to incorporate the same rigorous leadership requirements as Track A, but instead are likely to appeal to trainees not necessarily interested in pursuing SRV/PASSING leadership roles or credentialing by the Council. As noted in the TFM paper, the Council supports and encourages Track B trainings, and most Council members and correspondents also conduct such training, including those members who are credentialed by the Council to conduct Track A leadership training.

The TFM credentialing process identifies seven statuses. Each successive status is more challenging than the preceding one, takes longer to achieve, and requires acquisition and demonstration of ever higher degrees of SRV/PASSING competence. This simply reflects reality: achieving mastery in any worthwhile profession, vocation, avocation,

trade, or craft requires rigorous progression. Commonly, the challenge of achieving mastery is amplified by many external and non-programmatic factors. One such factor, but only one, is having opportunities available to gain qualifying experiences and competencies. If very few such opportunities occur, then the level and duration of challenge is considerably increased. In terms of the Council’s own TFM guild, the current paucity of Track A PASSING training events places an additional strain on the level of challenge candidates face in moving along the TFM graduated track from status 4 to status 5 and beyond.

Explanation of Issues Related to Written PASSING Assessment Reports

ONE OF THE KEY DISTINCTIONS between Track A and Track B PASSING training is that written PASSING assessment reports (WPARs) are a specified requirement for Track As but not for Track Bs. Writing a report is an excellent learning experience for those who actually engage in doing it, but more than that, it also reveals what the writer knows and thinks: as such, it is greatly to be encouraged for any one who is able to do so. However, “requirement” is more stringent than mere “encouragement.” Accordingly, report-writing is a Track A requirement because it is a crucial TFM leadership competency. Hence, those who wish Council-credentialing as PASSING Trainers need to be aware that writing and editing reports is both encouraged and required.

In spite of the importance of WPARs, the Track A PASSING requirement of producing them has been difficult to fulfill, for many reasons, with the results that exceedingly few PASSING training events get conducted that meet that requirement, and that situation will continue and probably worsen unless something is done to remedy it. No remedy is at all likely unless the SRV Council can take a leading role in addressing the situation, which it may not be inclined to do, but what other credible body would be so inclined, or suited, or obliged?

In both real and advanced practice assessments, written reports are virtually always advisable, expected, required, and actually produced. The problem of not producing WPARs occurs almost exclusively only in the context of introductory PASSING training events, and limits the learning potential of such training. However, while relatively few real PASSING assessments are conducted, the capacity to do so is diminished, at least indirectly, if the PASSING training culture is not teaching people to write reports which, in turn, must surely contribute at least somewhat to so few real assessments ever being done.

It has always been a major challenge to recruit people into the report-writer role. Even when such recruitment takes place, and people agree to write a report, it is very hard to get them to actually produce one, with negative impacts on them, their teammates, and on the PASSING training culture more generally. Yet, it is clear that some parties who do PASSING training these days do not expect or “require” WPARs, nor make any opportunities available for participants who might want them. Indeed, it seems that some reject the idea of WPARs out of hand as not worth the effort or even as undoable. Others seem to assume that the requirement is so out of reach that there is no way it can be achieved. Their reasons for this may vary, but fundamentally it is clear that they do not view learning to write reports as integral to PASSING training, nor as a necessary or even recommendable skill. This presumption in itself may be one of the biggest obstacles to: (a) persistent efforts to produce WPARs, (b) many promising candidates getting the leadership training they need in order to develop their full SRV/PASSING leadership potential, and (c) PASSING training events qualifying as Track A.

To be fair, relinquishing the expectation that WPARs should be an integral part of PASSING training was, for some trainers, a thoughtful compromise—a way that important and needed PASSING practice could be done without having to deal with the difficulty of producing reports. But,

like all compromises, this one has costs. In this case, the cost is to leadership development. The Council’s commitment to SRV/PASSING leadership development, and its distinction between Track A and B training, puts a spotlight on this problem—which has become so embedded in the training culture that not doing WPARs is no longer perceived as a problem at all by most people, and is even seen as the “answer” to a problem by some. In any case, it is a problematic “answer” that has been with us a long time—since the days of PASS.

In Wolfensberger’s model of PASS training, report-writing was considered part and parcel of the learning process, seen as a matter of course, and an element as critical as any other. The standard practice was that: (a) each team in a training workshop conducted practice assessments of two different services, (b) team leaders or team members were designated to write reports on each one, (c) reports were edited by the team leader, floater and/or senior trainer, and then (d) distributed to the assessed services and the team members. He sometimes spoke of a “writing culture” within the larger (PASS/PASSING) training culture. But even though report-writing was established from the very beginning as an expectation within the PASS training culture, it was a desiderata that was only spottily realized. There may have been a “writing culture” within PASS, but it was never large, and it never flourished. But also, it never fully died out. Some, but only some, senior trainers, floaters, and team leaders consistently produced reports as expected as part of the trainings they were involved in; the majority did not. Defaults by people who agreed to write reports but then didn’t follow through on their promise became commonplace.

In response, some senior trainers developed alternative formats for PASS training that did not include written reports. Mostly, these involved doing simulations of service evaluations followed by conducting a practicum assessment of a real service and giving it oral feedback at the end of

the workshop. In time, providing even only oral feedback to practicum sites came to be seen as expendable for various reasons (including its significant drawbacks), and was dropped entirely in most cases. These practices sprouted up fairly early in the PASS training movement, and became dominant soon after PASS trainers other than Dr. Wolfensberger began doing training on their own and he was no longer closely involved in it. Again, to be clear, there were report-writer defaults even during WW's time; yet he clearly recognized that not having WPARs considerably diminished the potential value of the training.

In the transition from PASS to PASSING, the PASSING training culture "inherited" many of the assumptions, protocols, and practices of the PASS training culture from which it evolved. Most of this heritage was fitting and beneficial. But one big part of it that was not at all helpful was the normalization of the practice of forfeiting report-writing requirements and expectations in introductory training events. By the time PASSING superseded PASS, the practice of not expecting and producing written reports carried over into the PASSING training culture as well, like a "pre-existing condition." The vast majority of people conducting PASSING training events in recent decades have not aspired to producing WPARs. Some professed to recognize the importance of such reports but, daunted by the difficulties attached to producing them, have not required reports on the assessments conducted in their trainings. They ceded the issue for a variety of common reasons:

- This makes more work for the trainer: in preparing report writers, and in reading and editing (perhaps multiple times) the reports of multiple writers after the workshop.
- Where the team leader is expected to write the report, this may also make it harder to recruit team leaders, as they have to agree to do more work for their role.
- Also, because so many assessed services are not familiar with SRV and PASSING or PASS, they do not know what they are getting themselves into when they agree to be assessed. They are therefore typically surprised—and very unhappy—when they receive an assessment report that points out weaknesses and documents a low score, as so many assessed services receive. Trainers may not want to deal with pacifying assessed services after a workshop, and with unhappy assessed services perhaps spreading the word to other services, which could make future practicum sites harder to get.
- Some trainers have not been convinced that report-writing is essential to becoming a good SRV, PASSING or PASS trainer. Also, they may have seen people who otherwise show talents for the trainer role get "stuck" on the leadership ladder, either because they refuse to write or are not good writers, and they do not want this requirement to hold up people whom they want to bring along.

Whatever the reasons, the results are that WPARs do not get written and few Track A PASSING training events get conducted. Another problematic outcome is that many, if not most, PASSING team leaders, floaters, and trainers have not only never written or edited a WPAR, but have never even seen one, and thus remain both unaware of the importance and purposes of WPARs, and unequipped to teach others to produce them. It is possible that not having acquired report-writing competency is the reason some PASSING trainers—and those they have trained—have not sought credentialing by the Council.

Given the difficulties of actually getting a WPAR produced, it is pretty obvious that this requirement is a major obstacle to regular successful occurrence of Track A PASSING workshops. This, in turn, impedes progression to and beyond status 4 on the TFM developmental ladder. If the purpose of the TFM is to maintain relevance over the long run, it is obvious that something must be done to improve the flow of qualified candidates to ad-

vanced statuses. Two options present themselves. One is to reduce or eliminate WPAR requirements for progressing above status 4. Another option is to provide more concentrated supports to potential candidates endeavoring to meet the challenges involved in attaining certain competencies, and specifically to identify and carry out facilitators of WPAR production. The latter option is the topic of the next paper in this issue. ☞

JOE OSBURN directs the Safeguards Initiative in Indianapolis, IN, USA ☞ is a member of the North American SRV Council.

THE CITATION FOR THIS ARTICLE IS

Osburn, J. (2023). Major challenges related to producing written PASSING assessment reports. *SRV News & Reviews*, No. 2, 7-11.

A Brief Essay On Written Assessment Reports—Potential Benefits of Such Reports, and Some Ways to Facilitate Their Production

Joe Osburn

THIS PAPER IS THE SECOND of two on the topic of written PASSING assessment reports (WPARs) and report-writing. The first paper dealt with problems; this one deals with things to do about them. Most of the information it contains was previously distributed to North American SRV Council members by the Syracuse University Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership and Change Agency. It is incorporated here because it so closely reflects and clarifies discussions on the topic during meetings of the previously-mentioned PASSING Trainers Caucus.

Reports produced from training assessments, sometimes called “training reports,” “practicum reports,” or “tentative” reports, cannot be considered in the same quality category as reports of real evaluations conducted at greater length and depth by qualified evaluators. Reports of practice assessments are first and foremost a training device. They may be of some benefit to the assessed practicum site (assuming reports are actually conveyed to them), but the assessed service is not their primary beneficiary. The intended beneficiaries of written reports of practicum training assessments are first and foremost the persons most directly involved in producing the report, i.e., primarily the report writer(s) and editor(s). Secondly intended beneficiaries are the other people who were directly or indirectly part of the team and training event that conducted the practice assessment being reported, i.e., the trainee team

members, team leader, floater, and senior trainers. And on the third tier of beneficiaries are people associated with the assessed service, i.e., the board members, director, and other senior staff and program managers.

We believe that an increased awareness of the benefits of both report-writing and written reports would lead to increased awareness of their importance, and thus to an increased incentive to produce them. Some of the main benefits of WPARs and the experience of writing them are summarized below.

Benefits to the Assessment Team Members

1. Written reports can be of tremendous help to team members, as the report usually pulls together the various elements and discoveries of the assessment of the service—which, during its conciliation, the team spends a great deal of time taking apart. Also, what happens during team conciliation is often incompletely assimilated by team members, and a report can help them to do so. Furthermore, a written report typically organizes the material better than gets done by the team during an assessment. Written reports contribute to the learning of team members by providing them a model of the team report-writer (TRW) and report editor roles, and by bringing to completion the assessment itself and the fullness of the introductory PASSING learning experience. Therefore, team members will be able

to learn additional things from the written report that they would not have learned otherwise. In fact, for many team members, a PASSING report is the first time that they have seen a high-level interpretation of any human service, or of important human service issues.

2. Also, reports are typically written by either the team leader, or a team member designated as the team report writer. When other team members receive the report, and especially if it is of any quality, they may be encouraged to want a chance to write a report themselves, both to “show what they can do” and what they know about SRV, and to develop their own SRV teaching competencies. This can even encourage team members to aspire to, and work towards, SRV teaching credentials who might not otherwise have done so.

Benefits to the Report Writers (and Editors)

Writing a report can be of enormous benefit to a report writer.

1. One reason that the writing of assessment reports is important for people who want to progress up the ladder of qualification for conducting training is that only through and by writing will some people resolve many SRV, evaluation, and instrument use issues. The writing itself gives people yet one more opportunity to struggle with concepts with which they may be having difficulty, and—either alone or with the help of a good editor—to sometimes achieve a breakthrough in understanding.

2. Also, report-writing enables a writer to learn to accept and respond constructively to editorial feedback from team leaders, floaters, and senior trainers. Relatedly, through writing and being edited, one learns how to edit written reports oneself, thus encouraging and bringing along neophyte report-writers.

3. Learning how to write clear and constructive analyses of SRV-based strengths and deficiencies of service quality increases one’s ability to constructively explain SRV/PASSING issues to others, and one’s comfort level in doing so. Report writing serves to deepen a person’s knowledge of SRV, increase skills in using the PASSING instrument, promote the capacity to more effectively explain SRV to others, improve writing skills, etc.

4. At least over time, and as a writer produces multiple reports, it builds up in the writer the habit and the skill of being able to quickly produce well-reasoned, well-framed narratives on many issues of the day in human services—something that SRV leaders may often find themselves called upon to do on fairly short notice even outside of evaluation contexts. One will be much better prepared to do this sort of thing once one has had the discipline of writing assessment reports in which one needs to spell out the rationales for SRV, evaluation, and PASS/PASSING issues, why certain service practices are helpful and others harmful, etc.

5. It is also important to learn to be able to explain the above-mentioned issues to naive readers, because PASSING reports are in part occasions for teaching SRV to service providers. Learning to write assessment reports helps because such reports are to be written on the assumption that those reading them are unfamiliar with SRV, or at least have only a surface familiarity with it. Thus, use of jargon is discouraged, rationales are to be explicated for every recommendation, and so on. This builds a depth of understanding and a skill that can be very helpful should one have to explain the issues, either in writing or orally to other naive audiences—again, a situation that SRV leaders not uncommonly find themselves in.

6. Further, serving as a report-writer provides a role model to one’s fellow team members and oth-

ers, encouraging, maybe even inspiring, them to fill the report-writer role. Also, writing assessment reports also contributes to the building up of competent trainers generally, which benefits not only the specific trainers but also the SRV movement as a whole (see section below on *Benefits to the Long-Term SRV/PASSING Training Culture*). In terms of the report writer specifically, it is difficult to teach other people SRV issues if one has not mastered them oneself, and struggling with issues by writing about them is one important step towards such competence and even mastery. Unfortunately, some SRV trainers, and even PASSING and PASS, trainers have not written assessment reports themselves, and—other things being equal—are therefore less apt to be as sophisticated and masterful in understanding and teaching SRV than those trainers who have undergone the discipline—and yes, for some, the suffering—of writing and re-writing reports.

7. Relatedly, because senior trainers are expected to edit other people's reports, it is important that such trainers have first themselves learned how to write good reports so that they will be able to teach others. If one has not had the experience of writing reports, and having one's reports edited by more senior people, one is extremely unlikely to be able to teach others to do it.

8. Also, seeing and editing a report often gives floaters and other senior trainers deeper insight into the thinking, competencies, weaknesses, and progress of the writer. For instance, it may turn out that the writer is a good writer, or a bad one; that the writer has a very good way of phrasing things; that the writer is confusing SRV or rating issues with each other, or with non-SRV issues, and needs instruction in certain areas; etc. These things may also come out during a conciliation, but not necessarily to a sufficient degree, or at least not during any of the time samples in which the floater—or possibly other senior trainers—is present to witness the writer at work within

the team. Senior people can then work with the writer on these issues both in revising the report, and in the future.

Getting to better know the writer's understanding of SRV and PASSING is particularly important in the Trainer Formation Model, in which mentors play a large role in guiding potential future SRV trainers-of-trainers, and in getting to know their strengths and weaknesses. For some of these processes, there is no substitute to having a writer and mentor/editor work together.

9. Writing a report may also help a writer to resolve whether to further pursue SRV-related roles, including leadership ones.

Benefits to the Long-Term SRV/PASSING Training Culture

IN ADDITION TO THE SPECIFIC parties who might write or read the reports because they are connected with the specific assessment, such reports can also be of benefit to the SRV/PASSING training culture and movement as a whole, and over the long run. In addition to those benefits already touched on are the following.

1. One of the benefits of WPARs to the whole culture or movement of SRV training is that future report writers (including team leaders) can learn a great deal by reading such reports that the assessed services have allowed to be disseminated ("released"). This is the case even if the reports are of assessments that were conducted in a training context, and are therefore not considered to be fully valid, equally thorough, etc. Reading such reports can help future writers in a number of ways. (a) It can give them a sense of what an SRV based assessment entails. (b) It can give them an idea of what is expected in a report, and of themselves as writers. (c) Some reports may contain very good, even model, write-ups of certain issues or certain types of services, which may be very instructive to writers; or writers may even be able to insert modules from model reports into their

own reports, thus saving writing time and effort. The Wolfensberger archives at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha have a deposit of PASS and PASSING assessment reports to which certain interested parties presumably can have access under proper conditions.

2. Apart from future report writers, senior trainers also benefit from having a pool of WPARs in existence and available. They too can examine reports that might be very good or even models, they too can get an idea what to expect from first-time report-writers, and from introductory assessment reports, versus from writers with a lot of experience and reports that are of advanced or real assessments.

3. Further, the existence and availability of released assessment reports enables future workshop and assessment coordinators to supply potential practicum agencies with an idea of what an assessment entails, and what type of feedback they might expect. Some agencies that are interested in serving as practica first want to have a better sense of what they are getting themselves into, and seeing reports of previous assessments may meet this desire on their part.

4. Also, having things written down reduces both the room for, and the likelihood of, misinterpretations. This is because people's memories of what was said may often be faulty, whereas what is written can be referred back to. This is important for the SRV training culture as a whole because as time goes on, it will be important to know how interpretation of issues changed, if issues that were once big issues have largely been addressed and no longer present such a challenge, etc. The existence of written reports, and particularly a continuity of such reports over time, can provide sources for such knowledge for the training movement as a whole.

5. A training culture that emphasizes report-writing instills, teaches, and reinforces the idea that there should be such a thing as written re-

ports; that the discipline of writing reports and editing reports is good for at least trainers and leaders to possess; and that only oral reports, or even no reports, are simply no substitute for written ones. Moving toward mastery in, and demonstrating respect for, the developmental orientation of the TFM, contributes to safeguarding high-level leadership expectations within the SRV/PASSING culture.

6. As mentioned, only by writing reports will one become competent to write and supervise/edit the writing of real evaluation reports, when these are needed. How can one expect to produce a high-quality report of a real (possibly even paid) evaluation if none of the involved actors has ever written or edited practicum reports?

Altogether, it would be a calamity if trainers who themselves had not been required nor learned to write reports then train others, who would also not be required or taught to write reports. and these then train yet others, who train yet others, etc., none of whom has ever written or edited practicum reports.

Benefits of Training Assessment Reports to the Assessed Service

REPORTS EMANATING FROM TRAINING ASSESSMENTS have a different set of benefits than reports that come from real assessments, although some benefits are similar.

1. Written reports of training assessments often record findings that have much potentially useful information for the services assessed, but are not written primarily for that purpose. A report of a specific training evaluation may well come up with valid scores, interpretations, and recommendations. However, it can never be assumed or asserted that this has happened, because the team members were all or mostly novices, and the observation and data collection time was much shorter than would be the case in a real assessment. Thus, even though any report of a training evaluation cannot be interpreted

as authoritative and valid, it does give the assessed service or agency something in return for all its trouble prior to and during the assessment itself. Sometimes, it may even benefit the service and the people served, although it is important to remember that historically and empirically, service agencies have not been responsive to incisive evaluations. There are of course exceptions, but these are few, and sometimes occur in services in which one might not have expected it. Thus, one will often not know in advance how a service or agency will respond to a report, and whether the report will be used to make positive changes. But even where the report makes no impact on practices, the service will have gotten a “payment” of sorts for undergoing the considerable trouble of serving as a practicum site.

2. In cases where a service gets an oral report at the end of an evaluation, the oral report is often hastily prepared, and not of top quality. Also, the oral reporter may pull some punches because of the interpersonal nature of oral reporting. In turn, listeners to an oral report often have very selective perception and/or retention. A written report (at least an in-depth one) will be vastly superior to an oral one, in being prepared better, being more complete, and being objective and more explicit, thereby being of greater potential benefit to the service. Also, a written report can be read repeatedly, can be digested better, and can be shared with additional people later who were not present for any oral report.

Some might decide that personnel of a practicum site wouldn't pay any attention or even read a WPAR if one were given them, so why bother to write and send them one. Of course, such preclusive reasoning becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy eliminating any benefits that might come from receiving a WPAR.

Benefits of Real Assessment Reports to the Assessed Service

IT IS HELPFUL TO BRIEFLY consider the benefits of WPARs resulting from “for real” or “bona fide” assessments. Many of these benefits are

ones that a good written training assessment report might aspire to approximate to some degree.

A real assessment report is primarily intended for the benefit of the assessed service. It should provide an incisive analysis of the overall programmatic quality of the assessed service or service components that were evaluated, and that service personnel can use to guide their programmatic efforts. Derivative benefits include:

- Providing the service with the assessment team's perspective on the existential needs and identities of the people it serves;

- Offering the assessment team's understanding of issues in the service that have a major overriding impact on the programmatic quality of the service and on the experience and life conditions of its recipients;

- Offering direction to the leadership and other personnel of the assessed service in regard to the programmatic strengths of the service and the importance and possible means of safeguarding these;

- Providing a clear and coherent explanation of how service performance on programmatic and non-programmatic issues affect service recipients, which can spur into motion improvements in the quality of service being provided and to recipients gaining better life conditions;

- Providing the service with a quantitative analysis of its overall service performance on a 2001-point scale (ranging from “disastrous” to “near-ideal”), and on up to 70 subcomponent measurements of SRV performance;

- Offering direction to the leadership and other personnel of the assessed service in regard to the importance and ways of improving the programmatic deficiencies of the service;

- Providing feedback to formal or official oversight bodies about the performance of a service under their aegis.

Five Things That Would Incentivize Production of Written PASSING Assessment Reports

IF ONE BELIEVES THAT WPARs are valuable aides to building SRV leadership expertise, then it is helpful to be mindful of what can be done strategically to reestablish and preserve a report-writing culture and to facilitate the actual production of written reports. There are a number of recommendable actions.

A starting point in formulating and implementing a strategy is to make concerted efforts to (re-)awaken awareness within the SRV/PASSING training culture of the importance, rationales, and benefits of WPARs. Consciousness, as anyone familiar with SRV would guess, is the usual starting point. There is a basic need to inculcate, in all PASSING leaders, a positive mindset toward producing WPARs, and to evoke their earnest will to set positive expectations for producing WPARs in the training they do, whether Track A or B. Not every person who is (potentially) skilled in PASSING leadership roles is necessarily seeking credentialing by the SRV Council, and thus may not be interested in pursuing the developmental challenge of report-writing. However, in our view, such opportunities should be routinely offered at each and every PASSING workshop for those who may have such interests. For Track A events, WPARs should be and (as noted) are an expected and “required” component, and this should always be made clear whenever any such training is planned and conducted. It would be prudent to build-in report-writing opportunities for Track B training too. If someone takes up the opportunity, they and others will benefit. If no one takes it up, no harm done, and still there would be the benefit that trainees are at least being informed that there are such things as WPARs, and possibly also of some of the ensuing benefits. It seems to us that making this opportunity available in Track

B training is a practically no-cost option with significant potential benefits which would be needlessly foreclosed by withholding the opportunity.

Second, the Council could and should do more to directly encourage PASSING teachers, trainers, and mentors to incentivize report-writing by: (a) concerted identifying and nurturing potential report-writers, (b) reaffirming the importance of report-writing as a crucial element in developing SRV competency, and (c) spelling out the rationales and purposes served by WPARs.

Third, report-writing guidelines should be specified and promulgated, such as by putting together a report-writer’s “how-to” book. This could be by (one or more) Council members if they were given the necessary support. We say “put together” because there already exists a variety of separate sources with relevant content that could be gleaned and organized into a single handbook for the specific purpose of facilitating report-writers, especially first-timers and other inexperienced ones. If done properly, such an aide could go a long way to reducing any intimidation and reluctance felt by potential report-writers.

Fourth, facilitate the implementation of report-writing competencies and mind-sets, and the actual production of WPARs through provision of seminars, workshops, tutorials, written materials and other pedagogical means. (See appendix.)

Fifth, encourage PASSING teachers, trainers, and mentors to become thoroughly familiar with, and convinced of, the benefits of WPARs (see next section).

Conclusion

IN GENERAL, ONE COULD SAY that the process of writing a PASSING report brings one set of benefits, and the actuality of having a written PASSING report in hand brings another set of benefits.

The most immediate benefits of writing a practicum report in introductory PASSING training accrue to the writer, which is the primary intent. However, as noted, a good many other parties in addition to the writer are likely to benefit from

a written report assuming it becomes available to them in some way. These other potential beneficiaries might include the writer's fellow team members, personnel of the assessed service, hopefully ultimately its current and future service recipients, and the broader SRV/PASSING training culture, including future learners of PASSING and of report-writing. (This was also the case with PASS training.)

Relatedly, the skill of writing is an asset to implementing SRV/PASSING in that implementation is better if planned, and such plans—which should themselves be written down clearly and coherently—can have their basis in the findings that are explained and documented in a WPAR. Thus, such reports can be a major aid for clarifying what needs to be done, as well as provide crucial guidance for parties who can implement the ideas.

Lastly, there is almost always a throng of collateral programmatic and non-programmatic considerations swirling around introductory PASSING training. It seems that the programmatic considerations are clearly supportive of WPARs, while the many and varied non-programmatic considerations are mostly not. Acquiescing to non-programmatic considerations may be practical and expedient, but has a high cost from the perspective of safeguarding the preservation of leadership-level SRV and PASSING training. ☞

JOE OSBURN directs the Safeguards Initiative in Indianapolis, IN, USA & is a member of the North American SRV Council.

THE CITATION FOR THIS ARTICLE IS

Osburn, J. (2023). A brief essay on written assessment reports—Potential benefits of such reports, and some ways to facilitate their production. *SRV News & Reviews*, No. 2, 12-18.

APPENDIX

PROPOSAL FOR A 1-DAY SEMINAR ON PASSING REPORT-WRITING AND REPORT-EDITING, AND GETTING OTHERS TO WRITE AND EDIT REPORTS OF PASSING ASSESSMENTS

The SRV Council has agreed that learning to write and edit PASSING reports is an important developmental step for aspiring SRV and PASSING trainers, and that reading written reports of an assessment in which one participated is also an important developmental step for assessment team members who aspire to develop their SRV competencies, especially of a leadership/trainer-ship nature. For this reason, PASSING assessments—whether training events or “real” assessments—that do not include the production of a written report on the assessment do not qualify as Track A (i.e., leadership development) events. Because report-writing and editing are so crucial to the development of SRV and PASSING leaders, and especially leaders who can and will teach others to continue to perpetuate teaching in SRV and PASSING, the SRV Council is trying to revive a report-writing and editing culture in Track A trainings for the Trainer Formation Model.

Unfortunately, the writing of PASSING evaluation reports has often been very neglected in PASSING training. Indeed, an entire generation of people have been trained in PASSING not even knowing that written reports were once considered an integral part of the PASSING assessment “experience,” and before PASSING, of PASS.

This is a proposal for a seminar on the issue, and on the disciplines that are part of a report-writing and editing culture. It is envisioned that the seminar would cover the following topics.

- a. The rationales for producing written reports; i.e., what it contributes to the understanding and dissemination of SRV, and the development of SRV teachers and trainers.
- b. Why such a culture either never got established or died out in some SRV training circles.
- c. The difference between writing reports vs. writing other things (e.g., essays, book reviews, etc.).
- d. How important it is for workshop leaders and trainers to both (a) arrange conditions (e.g., workshop fee, available time after the workshop) that will allow reports to be written and edited within a short time following the workshop, and (b) develop the habit of relentlessly arranging, pursuing, demanding, and editing reports, and recruiting people who will write and edit.
- e. The essential elements of a written assessment report.
- f. The prepared (“pre-cooked”) standard modules of a report, and how to use them in producing a report.
- g. Some features of a report that lend it quality.
- h. Some of the more common problems found in PASSING reports.
- i. Some of the more common reasons why people who were supposed to write and/or edit fail to do so, and some strategies that might be taken to prevent these.
- j. Some of the disciplines that make for good writing and editing (or at least that make these easier).
- k. Discussion of what has been and can be learned from writing, editing, and getting others to do so (including vignettes).
- l. Why oral reports cannot substitute for written reports, and the desirability of following up a written report with an oral interpretation and consultation.

m. The documents developed by the Training Institute for writers, report-writers and editors.

As time permits, there might also be some discussion of why, whether, under what conditions, and how, to prepare a “short-form” or substitute written report for an assessed agency when a planned, or even promised, written report fails to materialize.

However, ultimately, one learns to write and edit by doing so. Therefore, participation in this seminar will not be sufficient to enable one to produce a good written assessment report; to that end, one will actually have to do so, and do so repeatedly, under good editorship.

Participants in the seminar should be people who expect to have to write and/or edit PASSING reports in the future, regardless whether they have already done so or not. Participation is restricted to those who have either been to PASSING already, or plan to go to a PASSING training soon.

Those who have report-writing experience may also be asked to share their experiences, and contribute suggestions for how to make the writing and editing task easier.

The content of the event would draw on any appropriate materials previously developed on the topic by the Training Institute, and be conducted by PASSING trainers with substantial report-writing/editing experience.

REVIEWS

In *The SRV Journal*, which unfortunately is no longer being published, there were often reviews of books, articles, films, etc. relevant to Social Role Valorization. However, because these reviews can be so instructive, we decided to continue to make them available in this new format, online. Not only is it instructive to read such reviews, but it can also be very instructive, and developmental, to write them, so we encourage writers. Instructors, such as, for instance, college professors, may also want to encourage—even assign—their students to write. Interested parties can submit reviews to Marc Tumeinski (see contact details on page 2). The reviews will themselves be reviewed and possibly edited before they appear.

PUBLIC HOSTAGE, PUBLIC RANSOM: ENDING INSTITUTIONAL AMERICA. BY W. BRONSTON. Conneaut Lake, PA: Page Publishing, 2021.

Reviewed by Susan Thomas

I MET DR. BILL BRONSTON in the early 1970s when he was sent to Syracuse from New York City, in a form of Siberian exile as punishment for his activism in trying to improve the horrific conditions at the then Willowbrook State School/Developmental Center in Staten Island, New York where he was working as a staff physician. Willowbrook was a state residential institution for nearly 6000 mentally retarded people, and was the subject of multiple exposés and investigations in the early 1970s. It was one of the worst of the big bad old institutions (if one can even speak of “worst” when they were almost all of them very bad places), something like a concentration camp for unwanted handicapped people. And, as with the concentration camps run by the Nazis and the Soviets, it left a deep and lasting impact on people

with a lively conscience who worked or visited there. This book is filled with photos of the institution and the people in it in those days, and they are very similar to the pictures of institutions that appeared in Blatt and Kaplan’s (1974) *Christmas in Purgatory: A Photographic Essay on Mental Retardation*, that was such a shocking revelation to many people when it was published.

This book is essentially a cathartic memoir by Dr. Bronston of his time there, the battles he (and other moral warriors) engaged in to try to better the conditions there, the obstacles that were put in their way, especially from the New York state government bureaucracy (Willowbrook was a public, state-run institution), the long drawn-out court fights, etc. Bronston reproduces much correspondence (both “official” and personal), some court documents, and newspaper articles, and tells one vignette after another of his experiences in this struggle. For people who are unaware just how bad the old institutions could be, and how resistant was the system to any change, all this can be very informative and instructive.

One of the most moving parts of the book was a very short chapter on how often the residents of the institution would cluster around the radiator, the only source of heat in those vast rooms that were cold due to their tiled walls and linoleum floors and lack of drapes and comfy furniture—and yet this heat source was itself cold, in the sense that it was hard metal and against the wall.

Bronston also notes that the segregated and congregated nursing homes and “assisted living centers” for the elderly today are very much a form of institution, and contain the same harmful dynamics as the institutions for the handicapped of previous decades, especially as revealed by the Covid pandemic, though the bad conditions of these settings existed long before Covid came along.

However, to this reader, there are some shortcomings or problems with the book. But before I list them, I want to recognize that “cathartic memoir”-type books, as I have described this one, are difficult to critique because one feels and fears (at least I feel and fear) that one is possibly rubbing salt—even if only a tiny grain or two—into someone’s wound.

So with that caveat or apology, now to some of the problems with the book.

It is not a very polished manuscript; at least parts read more like Bronston is just speaking off the cuff. In that way, the book very much reflects and “sounds like” Bronston himself, but still, parts of it are rough and a bit incoherent.

The court transcripts felt like more information and detail than was necessary; perhaps if only sections of them had been reproduced, it might not have felt like too much.

Somewhat peculiarly, Bronston suggests a form of Medicare for all—i.e., publicly-funded health care for all citizens in the US, similar to other single-payer (usually government) medical systems in other countries like Canada and Britain—as a remedy to the pressures that he believes push families to place a family member out-of-home in an institutional setting. Exactly how this is supposed to remedy the problem was not clear to at least this reader—again, perhaps that was due to the rough and unpolished nature of the book. But even if it is clear to others, it still strikes this reader as a rather simplistic proposed solution for what has deep roots in personal and societal values, and in an economy (of which Bronston writes and explains a great deal) that has vast and deep vested interests in the institutional system. In other words, what moves people to place someone in an institution, why a given society provides very little besides institutional options when a person needs extra help and care and support (as US society does in regard to aged people), is due to much more than just the way the medical insurance system in the US is run. After all, there are lots of assisted living centers and nursing homes (and bad

ones) in countries that have a single-payer medical system, and there were scandals about their conditions too early in the Covid pandemic.

Further, there is outright evil behind institutional systems and what they become, regardless of how benign they were to start. And the moral force of evil is certainly not combated by changes in how medical care is funded and provided—in fact, evil is much better at using these than its opponents!

Also, it was amusing to at least this reader that one of the charges levelled against Bronston and a colleague in their early fight (in the 1970s) to improve Willowbrook and other institutions was that they were communists, or at the very least socialists—and here he is some decades later pushing a “socialist” corrective for a problem!

But all in all it is worth reading.

The book is available in hardcover, new, for about \$40 US from a number of vendors.

(Reference: Blatt, B. & Kaplan, F. (1974). *Christmas in Purgatory: A photographic essay on mental retardation*. Syracuse, NY: Human Policy Press.)

SUSAN THOMAS is the Training Coordinator for the Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership & Change Agency, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, USA. She is the co-author of *PASSING*.

THE CITATION FOR THIS REVIEW IS

Thomas, S. (2023). Review of the book *Public hostage, public ransom: Ending institutional America* by W. Bronston. *SRV News & Reviews*, No. 2, 21-22.

• • •

BELLY OF THE BEAST (film by Idle Wild Films). By E. COHN (director). One hour and 22 minutes, shown on US public television, 23 November 2020.

Reviewed by Susan Thomas

THIS FILM IS ABOUT THE involuntary sterilization of female inmates, mostly poor and mostly not well-educated and many black, in California state

prisons. The California Department of Corrections (and now, ...of Corrections and Rehabilitation, but still referred to as CDC) is the “belly of the beast” of the title.

During the eugenics era (at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries), California sterilized twenty thousand people, more than any other state. Later, between 1977-2013, there were fourteen hundred sterilizations in California.

The whole state prison system in California was put under federal receivership because its conditions were so bad, but even the receiver either did not know or did not want to find out what was happening to the women in this regard. Despite a federal ban on the practice, it still goes on in other states.

Numerous women were systematically sterilized in the state’s prisons under the cover of other types of surgery, or they got talked into procedures that left them sterile. This was done to them effectively for birth control purposes, even though it was in violation of both state and federal laws. Physicians who did this defended it as saving the state money, because it was “cheaper than welfare”—in other words, if the women had had children, they would have ended up being supported by public taxes via welfare. Even some nursing staff who had gotten hoodwinked into the procedures, and said they would have resisted if they had known, were nonetheless sympathetic to this argument.

Here is how it was usually done. A woman would be told she had signs of cancer of some reproductive organs, and once the surgeon was “inside” her, it was common to do a hysterectomy or tubal ligation or other sterilization procedure—the physicians would refer to this as an “add on”—but it was done without either full or informed consent. For instance, an inmate might be asked, “If when we open you up, we find cancer, do you want us to do a hysterectomy?” The woman might say yes, but the surgeon might find no cancer and go ahead and do the hysterectomy anyway. And the woman might or might not be informed afterward what had been done to her.

The film also revealed a large number of other, smaller indignities inflicted on prisoners. For in-

stance, at least lawyers, but probably other visitors too, are restricted in the colors they are allowed to wear when they visit prisoners. So everyone ends up wearing black and white, and they have to submit to an invasive strip search whenever they come.

At women’s prisons, male officers can look into the cells and see the women using the toilet, dressing and undressing, etc.

Staff who were simply decent to inmates, and tried to see that they got needed care, would be derided by other prison staff as an “inmate-lover,” similar to the epithet “nigger-lover” of old.

The project Justice Now that does legal advocacy for women in prison, and appears to be run and staffed entirely by women, has some board members who are inmates, thus giving to these inmates a valued role—and probably an unusual one. Board meetings are held by conference call so the inmates can participate.

The Central California Women’s Facility, as it is called, is the largest women’s prison, housing 3000 inmates. There were several overhead shots that showed the modular cross-shaped prison design, the history and meaning of which is explained in the Training Institute’s two-day workshop on the history of human services (see <https://www.wolfwolfsberger.com/video-audio/a-history-of-human-services>).

SUSAN THOMAS is the Training Coordinator for the Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership & Change Agency, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, USA. She is the co-author of PASSING.

THE CITATION FOR THIS REVIEW IS

Thomas, S. (2023). Review of the film *Belly of the beast* by E. Cohn. *SRV News & Reviews*, No. 2, 22-23.

• • •

COLLEGE BEHIND BARS (four-part film). By L. NOVICK (director). Four hours. Shown on US public television, 25-26 November 2019.

Reviewed by Susan Thomas

THIS UNNARRATED DOCUMENTARY FOLLOWS SOME of the enrollees in the Bard Prison Initiative program, run by Bard College of Annandale, New York. BPI, as it is known, offers college degree programs to prison inmates. The film focuses on one program at Eastern State Penitentiary for men (maximum security) in Napanoch, NY, and Taconic Correctional facility for women (medium security) in Bedford Hills, NY.

The film makes clear how relevant and beneficial is such a program for those inmates who want to be in it, how competency-enhancing it is, but also how controversial it is, despite its shown success in reducing the recidivism rate for its enrollees (successful graduates have a four percent recidivism rate compared to over 50 percent for other inmates). Some of the controversy is due to resentment of such programs by prison guards, most of whom do not have a college education, and they do not like having to guard inmates who are better-educated than they, and who (so the guards think) may think they are smarter than the guards. This being the mind-set of the guards, they can sometimes be on special lookout to catch an inmate-student in an offense, so as to take away his/her school privileges, even books and papers. As well, many taxpayers resent paying for prisoners to attend college, essentially free of charge to them, while the taxpayers' own children may not be able to afford to go to college.

Of course, even the graduates of these programs do not have an easy time finding jobs once they are released, the devaluation and prejudice against ex-cons is so great. But, as Dr. Wolfensberger wrote (see Wolfensberger, 2012), and as the film makes clear, the education makes the prisoners' time in prison and their experience of imprisonment less onerous.

There used to be many college programs of this type in US prisons, prior to the federal crime reform bill of 1994, and now virtually the only ones left are privately-funded.

The acting commissioner for the New York State Department of Corrections, Anthony Annucci, said his biggest challenge is preventing suicides in pris-

on—not even homicides, but suicide. Many of the inmate students stay up late at night studying and writing, long into the wee hours, because that is the only time they have quiet. One said, “I don’t want to be up all night, but it’s worth it.” This is a parallel to how some participants experience Training Institute workshops with their demanding schedules!

Without using the term role (usually people in the film talked about “identity” instead), there was much commentary on roles, especially by the inmate-students. One said he was balancing two identities, those of prisoner and student. He sees himself as a student all the time, but the guards see him only as a prisoner.

One said, “I’m a college student, ... a brother, a son. I’m not that identity of a prisoner.”

Another said, “I’m someone who is doing research, I’m a scholar! That’s a big deal.”

It was not the focus of the film, but it was clear (at least to this viewer) that being a corrections officer is a very difficult job for someone who wants to be or become “gooder,” as we teach in Training Institute workshops on How to Function With Personal Moral Coherency in a Disfunctional World. (Gooder-becoming means essentially functioning in a way that is moral, virtuous, and one’s character and identity thereby becoming more good: less selfish, more patient and generous, etc.) After all, most officers despise the people they guard—and how can that be good for one, to be in such a situation day after day after day?

(Reference: Wolfensberger, W. (2012). “The application of Social Role Valorization principles to criminal and other detentive settings.” In *Advanced issues in Social Role Valorization theory* (pp. 347-421). Plantagenet, Ontario, Canada: Valor Press)

SUSAN THOMAS is the Training Coordinator for the Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership & Change Agency, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, USA. She is the co-author of *PASSING*.

THE CITATION FOR THIS REVIEW IS

Thomas, S. (2023). Review of the film *College behind bars* by L. Novick. *SRV News & Reviews*, No. 2, 23-24.

Social Role Valorization News & Reviews

Susan Thomas & Gareth Lloyd

THIS IS THE SECOND INSTALLMENT of the “News & Reviews” column on-line under the auspices of *The SRV Journal*. This column is not sequential, so it is not necessary to have read earlier columns, either on-line or print, but they are all available at http://srvip.org/journal_past_issues.php.

I always like to remind readers at the start of the column of its multiple intents:

(a) To present brief sketches of media items that illustrate an SRV issue.

(b) To present vignettes from public life that illustrate or teach something about SRV.

(c) Especially, to point to and analyze with items that relate specifically to SRV implementation.

(d) To document certain SRV-related events or publications for the historical record.

(e) Hopefully, by all the above, to illustrate and teach the art and craft of spotting, analyzing, and interpreting phenomena that have SRV relevance.

And, aside from being instructive (“c” above) to readers, it is hoped that people who teach SRV will find many of the items in this column useful in their teaching, and that people who try to implement SRV may also find something helpful, perhaps to imitate or avoid.

To Start ...

*We always like to keep our eyes peeled for the use of the word valorization, because at the time Dr. Wolfensberger invented the term Social Role Valorization, it seemed to him that it was an

uncommon word, and therefore people would not come with preconceived ideas about what it meant. But it does show up every once in awhile. For instance, an article on research into business practices said the research “raises this interesting question: Could America’s valorization of hustle be a cause of failure?” (Useem, *Bloomberg news*, SPS, 7 Jan. 2018). The phrase refers to the fact that the most successful people in business do not necessarily work the longest hours, but rather are more focused, avoiding non-essential things and even “obsessing” on just a few important ones, while those who hustle are not the most successful.

The Cultural Relativity of SRV

*SRV emphasizes that whether an image, activity, role, routine, etc. will be role-valorizing depends on the value attached to the image, activity, role, routine, etc. in the culture at issue. What is valued and devalued, and what is culturally normative practice, varies across cultures and times. And of course, there are sub-cultures within any society that may hold different values about at least some things than are held by the larger society. That is why implementation of SRV must take account of who are the observers/perceivers whose valuation of a particular party one wants to affect. For instance, the roles that are valued by teachers in a high school are not always the same as those valued by each clique of students in that school, so what might improve a given student’s

valuation in the eyes of teachers may not always improve that same student's valuation in the eyes of other students, or not all other students.

A good example of this relativity is that the activity of assisting police to solve crimes may be seen as commendable and a civic duty in the larger society, but not among gangs, particularly gangs in neighborhoods that feel especially targeted by police. There, that activity is called "snitching," and is viewed so negatively, as an act of treachery, that the "snitch" or "rat" may be killed. That is why it is supposed to be kept secret by the authorities that a witness will be cooperating with prosecutors at an upcoming trial—but there are nonetheless often leaks of witness statements, resulting not only in witness intimidation but sometimes witness assassination (e.g., *SPS*, 23 August 2020). This is obviously of great relevance to those who might want to implement SRV to some degree or another among gang members—and gang member is an identity that is indeed widely devalued in society, though it may be positively valued among the gang member's narrow sub-culture. Are efforts going to be made to valorize the gang member vis-à-vis other gang members, vis-à-vis prisoners (where the gang member may very well end up), or vis-à-vis the larger society? Of course, much more than an activity—"cooperating," or "snitching," however it may be interpreted—is at stake and would need to be addressed: roles to which activities could be attached, and roles that the person might occupy afterwards, etc.

*Another example: in Zimbabwe, the native Shona language refers to what the Western world calls depression as *kufungisisa*, or "thinking too much." (They may have something there.) And so, benches have been set up there called "friendship bench" on which sad people can sit and talk with elderly women who have been taught to listen to people near despair (*ODB*, 12/2019 & 1 & 2/2020). The universal underlying these differences is that of being listened to and comforted by a trusted and wise elder, a grandmother or grandfather, aunt, etc.

*The situation of military veterans is an interesting one from an SRV perspective and, as noted in the preceding items, their situation too will vary from culture to culture and time to time. At least in the US, much lip service is paid to any military position as a valued role, especially when a war is being prosecuted—but many veterans complain of being ignored, disrespected, deprived of needed services, and worse, upon their return to civilian life. And this is reported to be especially the case if the veteran suffered a major wound, either a visible one like loss of one or more limbs, or an invisible one such as some traumatic brain injuries are and "post-traumatic stress disorder." And the camaraderie that many veterans experience in their military units may not be present, or not nearly so intense, in civilian life as it was when they were under arms.

These things help to explain why so many veterans organize agencies to assist wounded vets that draw on military culturally valued analogues, including uniforms and ranks and looking out for the other members of one's group—and why a good number of veterans could be expected to respond positively to these cues.

For instance, Clear Path for Veterans was founded to assist wounded veterans and their families, mostly over meals at their own restaurant, which they call a "canteen" just like in the military. Its founder is a vet who obtained a culinary degree and is now the head chef. He also hires other vets; one has become the pastry chef and creates desserts from recipes he has created himself, even though, as he said, "The government says I have post-traumatic stress disorder and that I'm unemployable." Given the role of its founder, the agency also offers cooking lessons, and training with "service animals." Many of the participants remark on the fact that all the people who attend "speak the same language" of the military (*SPS*, 24 June 2018). Again, many interesting issues for SRV analysis here.

*A group of medical students and their friends have taken to strolling and playing music (guitar

and violin) and singing in a hospital, its halls, lobbies, and courtyard, and around a piano in the hospital's cancer center. They do this both for their own benefit, to relax and take their minds off their rigorous studies, and for their listeners who include many patients (Upstate Health, spring 2018). Thankfully, and even remarkably given the hospital setting, no one refers to this as "music therapy." How would an SRV analysis "dissect" this? In terms of similarity to culturally valued analogues, imagery, competency-building for patients, etc.?

A Few History Lessons

*Benjamin Franklin, inventor, statesman, ambassador, printer and publisher, signer of the US Declaration of Independence, and more (note how easily one falls into using roles to identify and describe someone!), wrote in 1750 a set of four rules on how even "a man of wit and learning may nevertheless make himself a disagreeable companion." They are: making oneself the center of attention; dominating all conversation; ignoring and interrupting others, and demeaning what they say; and even humiliating them but in an amusing way. He concluded that the man who does this will please others everywhere he is not, whereas the polite man can only please others where he is (AP in *WT&G*, 4 Nov. 2016). It seems that Franklin identified a number of areas of competency dealing with social graces and civility, which are so important especially for people whom others generally find it hard to approach and to be with. Politeness and thoughtfulness and not being pushy and making others comfortable are very winning traits.

*An interesting question is whether some images or symbols that have come to stand for something have acquired such an identification with that something that they could ever be perceived without that association. An example is the "equilateral cross with its legs bent at right angles," otherwise known as the hooked cross or (in German) hak-

enkreuz or ... swastika. It turns out that the symbol was widely used for millennia by various indigenous groups all over the world, and in certain religions as a symbol of peace and good fortune, and some of these people now want to reclaim it: as the article explaining all this was headlined "Asian faiths try to save swastika symbol corrupted by Hitler" (Bharath, AP in *SPS*, 4 December 2022). The word swastika comes from Sanskrit and means a mark of well-being. But its adoption by the Nazis prior to and during World War II has so tainted it that few people not only in the Western world but all over the world—it was, after all, a world war—might ever be able to see it and think anything other than "Nazis and everything they wrought," including the systematic murder of millions. A historian of design, Steven Heller, even wrote of "Swastika: Symbol **Beyond** Redemption?" (emphasis mine). Yet prior to World War II, even in North America, the word swastika and the symbol were used as the name for many towns, housing developments, streets, etc.

*It was a common practice at mental retardation and psychiatric institutions to bury residents in a cemetery on the grounds, often in unmarked graves or graves that had only a number. As many of these institutions were closed over recent decades, the location of the graves was lost—the grounds became overgrown and weedy, there were no markers, as noted—and as these properties were sold or otherwise taken over for other uses, the graves might be unintentionally violated in digging for water lines and building construction. In December 2020, this happened on the grounds of the former Central State Hospital in Indiana, USA, and even after the remains of three people were found in a backfill pile, the digging continued. A state Medical History Museum is trying to find a place to respectfully re-bury the former inmates. RIP.

*What was then called the New York Idiot Asylum was erected in 1854 on a hill overlooking

Syracuse, NY, USA. It underwent many name changes over the years, and was expanded and rebuilt; in mid-1998 it ceased operating as a residential setting but continued to house state offices, until it closed entirely in the early 2000s. Ever since, the state has been trying to sell it, and there have been many potential buyers—one early bidder wanted to use it as a congregate residential setting for impaired veterans, another proposal was to turn it into a vacation resort for mentally handicapped people! But it has been empty, and—important to the county and state—not bringing in any tax monies, for nearly 20 years. Interestingly, a 2019 newspaper article reporting another potential sale (that also fell through) was headlined “City wants to sell 47-acre plot near Tipperary Hill” (*SPS*, 10 Oct. 2019). It sounds like it finally occurred to someone that imagery matters, in this case referring to it as a “47-acre plot” and in a desirable neighborhood, rather than as the grounds of a former state institution. (That actually was mentioned but later in the article, and it was called a former “home” for handicapped people.)

As of mid-2023, it has been sold once again, the land to be the site of apartments and townhouses.

*Even as old institutions for people with various mental conditions are being closed, new institutions for people with other conditions are opening. A private human service company opened one for people addicted to drugs in April 2018—and where? Yes, at a former institution for mentally retarded people! It was begun with 50 beds but even before opening announced plans to enlarge (*SPS*, 8 April 2018). Considering what so often gets put into these abandoned mental institutions, Syracuse can be considered fortunate to have had the site of its former institution not yet put to any other use—and considering what happened at them, perhaps that is how these sites should remain, mute and abandoned testimony to their past uses.

*The eugenic era (1904) medical textbook *Nervous and Mental Diseases: A Manual for Students and Practitioners* (Nagel & Pederson, series editors; Lea Brothers & Co., Philadelphia & New York) contains an entire section, Part V, on “Psychiatry (Diseases of the Mind),” which goes beyond mental disorders and also treats of “idiocy and imbecility.” According to this book, there is no question but that “Insanity should be regarded as a physical disease—a disease of the brain” (p. 192); and “Regarding the question of institutional or home-treatment, the decision should in all cases be in favor of the former” (p. 203). In **all** cases!

*At Ellis Island in New York harbor, where immigrants to the United States were screened for admission from 1892 to 1954, arrivals in the early 20th century who hoped to be admitted were administered a simple and non-verbal mental test to see if they were fit for admission. The test was a wooden puzzle that had to be fitted together. Its purpose was “the sorting out of those immigrants who may, because of their mental make-up, become a burden to the State or who may produce offspring that will require care in prisons, asylums, or other institutions”—clearly casting potential immigrants into the burden of charity role, and possibly the menace role as well (*Smithsonian*, May 2017).

Contemporary Unwanted People

*From consideration of what happened to unwanted people in the past, we now turn to our own day.

We have reported before on the plight of one of the most devalued groups in the world at present, the Rohingya people who live in the border region between Myanmar/Burma and Bangladesh and are virtually stateless. Being made stateless—that is de-naturalization, or depriving people of citizenship—is one form of distantiation, and jeopardizes people because they are not protected by any rights of citizenship and because members of no nation identify with them as fellow citizens.

The Rohingya are Muslims whereas Myanmar/Burma is predominantly Buddhist, and they also speak a minority tongue (Bengali). They have been repeatedly and systematically attacked by mobs, their villages burned, they themselves raped and murdered. They have been forced into very crowded refugee camps, and in poor areas where the local population has few resources to help them. This has been going on now for years, and no resolution of their sad situation is in sight.

*In India, there are nearly two million people living in the state of Assam whose ancestors originally came there from Bangladesh to work on the British tea plantations. But when Bangladesh became independent in 1971, anyone who came afterwards was declared an illegal resident and eligible to be deported. Like the Rohingya, these people are Muslim in a majority Hindu state, and also speak a minority tongue (Bengali). Current Indian prime minister Modi's government has been trying to get them all ruled stateless and detained or deported. An article reporting on this called them "nowhere people" (Bagri, in *Time*, 11-18 Oct. 2021).

*In 2018, the first Hindu woman from the lowest caste was elected to the senate in Pakistan, which is a majority Muslim country. She said "It is like for the first time in history we have been taken out of a ditch. Finally, we are seen as humans" (*Time*, 19 March 2018). In SRV terms, her achievement of a positively valued role helped her escape the non-human role—and not only her, but by extension her fellow caste members.

*In June 2022, the US Supreme Court ruling on *Dobbs v. Jackson* overturned the earlier (1973) *Roe v. Wade* decision that had legalized abortion. This new decision did not outlaw abortion, as many people apparently mistakenly believe, it only returned the issue back to each individual state (50 of them in the US) to decide. But there have been many, many reports and stories in the

media since then to recruit sympathy and support for abortion and to justify it. And among the things that is happening is that many kinds of impairments are being interpreted to the woman with child as fatal and terminal conditions, so that she will consent to an abortion for medical reasons. For instance, spina bifida is being interpreted as fatal, as is even Down's syndrome. True, the child will have this condition life-long, but terminal disease is usually understood as a progressive malady that will grow and kill if untreated and that, in this instance, cannot or can no longer be treated. The only thing that makes spina bifida and Down's syndrome "fatal" conditions is when those who have them do not receive available treatment, or even food and water.

Note that the reason this item is under this heading is that being an unwanted child still in the womb is a very devalued condition in our society today. Such a child is cast into the non-human, or already dead or as good as dead, roles.

Competency Enhancement

*We (meaning I, but I like the way "we" sounds) have serious concerns about our society's infatuation with high-technology, and what it is doing to the minds and even the entire world-view of those who are captured by it, not to mention what it is doing to social relations more generally. But technology can be a useful tool for enhancing people's competencies. For instance, robotics and digital signal processing are allowing prosthetics (which are replacements of missing body parts) to be much more lightweight, easier to wear and use, and more and more capable of mimicking the capacities of the body part they are replacing. Hearing aids are becoming similar to smartphones, capable of doing much more than assisting hearing just like phones can be used for much more than just talking to someone at a distance; they can come equipped with heart monitors and can be connected to a computer and phone apps. There is now an electronic version of braille, and a wi-fi-

enabled device that gives instant audio feedback to braille readers (all these reported in *Time*, 21-28 Nov. 2022).

*CreatiVets was, as the name suggests, founded by a former soldier for former soldiers. But they draw on generic resources to teach these vets art and music; for instance, taking art classes at prestigious art schools, such as those of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Art Institute of Virginia Commonwealth University, and flying them to Nashville, Tennessee, the hub of country music, where they collaborate with songwriters (*Time*, 20 Nov. 2017). The use of these valued generic resources is likely to be socially integrative, but of course, whether these classes are translated into valued roles—such as painter, sculptor, songwriter—is another question.

*An Army surgeon who was badly wounded in the 1991 Persian Gulf War said that despite her injuries, she surprised her psychiatrists by focusing on how she had gotten better, not on how she had been hurt. This has now been termed “post-traumatic growth,” and obviously is very consistent with the developmental model that encourages growth rather than focusing on what a person cannot do. Now, the US Army makes every soldier go through “resilience training,” so as to reduce—which it reportedly does—resort to drugs and alcohol, and increase people’s “coping skills, adaptability, and character strength.” Such training and the skills it imparts has reportedly been shown to decrease the “fear center” in the brain that triggers flashbacks often associated with post-traumatic stress disorder. Many people who have survived a life-threatening illness, serious injuries (whether gotten in war or elsewhere), a major bereavement, etc., have reported the paradox that their now intimate familiarity with vulnerability has made them stronger in many ways (*Yes!* magazine, 3 September 2018). Of course, this will not happen if the social environment emphasizes only the harmful effects of the “trauma” they have suffered.

*Even before Covid struck, the empire of shrink-dom was announcing that “American teens are anxious, depressed, and overwhelmed,” and that their rates of these conditions have been steadily rising since 2012. (By the way, I am intentionally calling psychiatry shrink-dom in an effort to shake the common mind-set—mind-sets and expectancies is one of the themes of SRV—that accepts whatever that field says as authoritative.) In 2015, about three million American teenagers were reported to have had “at least one major depressive episode,” more than two million depression serious enough to impair their daily functioning, and as many as 30% of girls and 20% of boys—totaling over six million—had an anxiety disorder (all these figures from federal government departments). And “experts” call these figures low, since not all teens will “seek help” for what ails them; in fact, many intentionally try to hide their distress. Experts further claim that the rates continue to rise, and that the age of children with these problems continues to go down. The distress these youngsters experience can lead them to hurt themselves, and even attempt suicide (*Time*, 7 Nov. 2016). Of course, once Covid hit and lock-downs were implemented, this meant many people (of all ages) felt isolated and lonely, being no longer in the physical presence of friends and companions.

Thankfully, at least some analysis of this problem notes that it is the conditions of the world in which these youngsters are growing up—with all the societal discord, concern over environmental disaster, endless connectivity and input from computers and phones, and especially immersion in the internet—that are behind so much of this, rather than blaming it on the teens’ genetics or biochemistry. Note that SRV focuses very much on adapting and re-arranging the environment, even situating a person into a new environment, so as to eliminate cues and expectancies for devalued behavior and roles, and to give out cues and expectancies for valued behavior and roles. Thus, much could be done to assist such youngsters to feel less anxious and

depressed—even to be secure, outright happy and in high spirits—by changing aspects of their environment that lead them to feel so low. For instance, being less connected to and dependent on phone and media connections; indeed, not surprisingly, some youngsters report that hard as it may be to make the break, they are glad to be cut off from phone connection because of the pressure and the bullying it may subject them to. Also helpful would be to assist them in gaining for themselves valued roles that separate them from these pressures and influences, that demand creativity and imagination, perhaps contact with nature. For instance, under a project in Maine, one teen wrote, directed, and produced a short film—she thereby became a writer, director, and filmmaker. Thirty of her peers also worked on the project—but unfortunately, the topic of the film was anxiety and depression in teens. How about films on what steps individuals can take to preserve a healthy environment, or what it is like to be out in nature without phone and internet connections?

*For several years now, the Special Olympics has been running print ads that show a straining weightlifter, with the caption “We challenge you to deadlift 375 pounds.” The picture and the caption are certainly testimony to the athletic capacity of at least the young man shown (and by extension, meant to apply to all participants in Special Olympics), and he is identified as “weightlifting champion.” If he is so good, why not have him compete with non-impaired athletes in regular competitions? He is further identified as an “inclusion advocate.”

Segregation and Congregation

*A 2014 newspaper opinion piece (Gerson, *SPS*, 15 February 2014) reported on a small Special Olympics competition in a village in Malawi, Africa. There, devaluing attitudes are common about the source of the impairment, for instance, that it is parental punishment for having broken a taboo, or that the child is a changeling. He fur-

ther noted that all the words in the local language for intellectual impairment are negative, meaning crazy, mad, even small evil being, and that “Without a positive word, it is hard for the mind to hold a positive image,” showing the connection between mind-sets and language imagery. The athletes’ relationship with their coaches may be “the first non-related adults they encounter who do not view them as useless,” and the parents too, who are apt to have been ostracized, are seen with their children “in a positive context—the Olympics no less. And it is harder to pity an athlete.” But surprisingly, he wrote that the competitors are “a mix of abled and disabled children,” which sounds like they are playing integrated games rather than “special” segregated ones.

*A parallel to Special Olympics are what we might call “special proms” or “special Valentine’s Day dances,” that are held for handicapped teens and young adults and give them an occasion to get dressed up in gowns and formalwear. But the other attendants at the dance are usually older adults, such as their parents or church members. One such dance was described as treating guests to “a full night of fun and a celebration of uniqueness” (*SPS*, 12 Feb. 2017). It is great fun to get decked out in elegant clothing, and even dance all night if one can last that long, but surely a more integrated way of doing so can be imagined.

*One domain in which many people do not question the merit and appropriateness of congregating together people with a specific devalued identity is in regard to those who go by the initials LGBTQ (for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning). For instance, there are emergency shelters specifically for runaway and homeless LGBTQ youths, defended because “they need to be protected and kept safe,” as they may either flee or be forced from their family home by parents who disapprove of their LGBTQ-ness (e.g., *SPS*, 29 April 2018). SRV teaches that all the recipients of any service image the other recipients,

and this can be for good or ill: as more or less competent, as having multiple devalued conditions. It also emphasizes as much valued social integration with valued parties as possible, but at the same time, it holds that a coherent recipient grouping is more likely to lead to focused competency address, and therefore to competency enhancement. So, should a shelter, or even all shelters, for people presently without homes be for people with only one specific identity or problem—e.g., homeless veterans, homeless drug-addicted people, homeless young people, homeless old men, homeless old women—or only some shelters, and if so, why? This is an area that a model coherency analysis would explore in the domain of underlying assumptions, and would ask whether those assumptions hold up. Many fundamental assumptions tend to be unconscious, but perhaps this is an exception because it was stated outright that such youths “need to be protected and kept safe.”

Foster Care

*A 2019 documentary *Foster* examined the workings of the largest child protection agency in America, that in Los Angeles county, California. The film shows dedicated workers, but also how non-programmatic constraints tie their hands and rule out some of what would be culturally valued practices for disciplining wayward children, such as an in-home “grounding.” Instead, once children are in care, they are subjected to punishments prescribed in law, rather than to the good sense and loving concern of parents. The film depicts what a critic called “the infrastructure that must be built when a family collapses,” a phrase that is worth some long and deep meditation: how it takes a cumbersome and complex system to try to replace what something so common and so fundamental (an ordinary family) can do, and that replacement so often fails. At heart, what at least the normative functioning family—even with all its shortcomings, as every family has—does, at the least, is give the child the valued role of beloved son or daughter, often brother or sister, niece or nephew, and grandchild as well.

*Much of foster care involves short-term placements (called “short stays”), ten days or fewer, before the child is returned to the parental home—but so often, this is a repeating cycle of removal-and-return. Obviously, this inflicts the wounds of physical and social/relationship discontinuity, and does so repeatedly; one child said it felt like “being luggage,” and other children describe it as feeling like a kidnapping. Also, the removals often take place with no notice in the middle of the night, which must be terrifying for the children. At the same time, some children are relieved to be taken away from homes in which there was no food or in which they were beaten. Such short stays happen most often in high-poverty areas. In some locales, the child may be removed for as little as 48 hours while the parents are being investigated. Some states do not even keep records of how many short stay removals they make, nor do some even require a police warrant to remove a child.

A very positive development in this field is trying to place children who have to be removed from the parental home with relatives or family friends, so that they are not with strangers, though of course this is not always possible nor desirable, as when the relatives’ situation is as bad as or worse than that of the parents (Hager, February 2022).

Aging

*The last item under “Segregation & Congregation” above raised a question of model coherency of service and here is another one. A “senior care center”—it offers a nursing home, independent living, assisted living, and short-term rehabilitation, all on the same grounds—was originally begun as the Jewish Home for the Aged. Its entire campus is kosher, and its on-site bistro—which aims to make “them feel like they are in a restaurant”—is the only fully kosher restaurant in the entire city, and even offers kosher catering off-site. It closes on Friday afternoons and reopens on Sunday, after Sabbath is concluded (Weaver, in *SPS*, 22 March 2018). The possible incoherency is that while still many

of the people it serves are Jewish, now anyone may be admitted to its services. These non-Jewish recipients who do not keep kosher can get bacon cheeseburgers, but with tofu cheese, and “bacon” made from beef. As is the case widely across human services, admitting non-Jews was done for non-programmatic reasons of bringing in more money and expanding by the payment (and/or government-subsidies) these non-Jewish residents would bring.

*An article predicted a future job in services to the aged, but did so in 2018—and Covid threw a wrench in many things, so we are not sure whether it has already or will still become a job, but here it is: walkers and talkers for “seniors who may be widowed or live far from family.” The report said that people may need Uber or Lyft to take this job, presumably to get to those places that are “far from” others. Likely salary was then predicted to be \$10 to \$13 per hour (*Parade* magazine, 22 April 2018), though again, largely due to some of the grim situations in human services that Covid has brought to the public eye, those figures would now be too low. What is the culturally valued analogue for this, and how does paying people by the hour to do this job affect its social image and the image of the old people who are walked with and talked with? What role(s) does it cast them into?

Another predicted future job was “A.I.-assisted health care technician” that will use high-tech to diagnose and prescribe treatment for ill people, and is likely to pay \$100,000. Of course, since Covid, there have been numerous reports of robots substituting for human beings; for instance, a robot that is said to “chat” with lonely elderly people is to be called a “personal sidekick” (*Time*, 21-28 November 2022), and presumably—unlike the human walkers/talkers—it would work for free.

In a future column, we will take up A.I. more systematically.

*Relatedly, driverless vehicles are being promoted for elderly people who can no longer safely, perhaps

due to sight problems or loss of coordination and reaction time, themselves drive a car. The benefits include greater independence and flexibility than relying on mass transit, and are of course said to go beyond just aged people, but to include people with hearing and vision impairments, people with autism and those with Down’s syndrome, according to the National Down Syndrome Society. Issues in the design of the vehicles have to be worked out (e.g., accessibility for people in wheelchairs, ease of “interface” with the vehicle’s progress and controls to adjust temperature, etc.), not to mention cost and whether all the impaired and restricted people who might want to use such vehicles could actually access them (Halsey, *SPS*, 26 November 2017).

A Few Miscellaneous Role Vignettes

A reminder that, as the introduction to this column says, it is hoped that readers will not only find these stories instructive, but also find something in some of them to imitate in service to other vulnerable people.

*We continue to remind readers that four years of college, usually accompanied (in the US, at least) by the accrual of huge debt, is not the only option after high school graduation. Many jobs, and good-paying ones at that, do not require a college degree. For instance, automotive technicians are in high demand and well-paid, and most receive their training in high school. Students may even be paid by a future employer while they are being trained. Some high schools now offer technology-oriented programs that take five years (rather than the typical four years) to complete, and on graduation the student has to take only one more year of training at a community college for mechanical or electrical engineering technology jobs. Of course, we recognize that the situation, and the opportunities, may differ in different countries.

*A little boy began to notice in kindergarten that he was different from other children: they

had two arms and hands while he had only one. He was teased and his feelings hurt. But shortly after, his mother discovered a 14-year old boy in another town in the same state, who had become an internet sensation from videos of him slam-dunking a basketball--and he too had only one arm and hand. The two boys got connected in person, and the older taught the younger one some advanced basketball tips. That instilled confidence in the little boy, and two years later he took up another sport (*RD*, September 2018). In this instance, having a competent model to imitate was the avenue to some valued athletic roles for the youngster.

*A boy born deaf had surgery that restored some hearing, but he spoke with a stutter. He also had a vitamin deficiency, and ended up in a wheelchair for awhile after breaking some bones. Not surprisingly, he was devalued by his fellow students in school and bullied by them, and became very withdrawn, hardly speaking at all. Then at 10 years old he learned to paint, in his instance in imitation of his mother. He won first place in a school contest for a portrait of the school principal--a new valued role, winner. By the age of 14, he had completed more than 500 portraits, many of famous people from whom he takes inspiration--more new valued roles, artist and portraitist. He gained a lot of attention when celebrities began to notice his work and commission him, and he started to give virtual painting classes on Instagram--the new valued roles of teacher and model. He is still occasionally bullied, but has grown in confidence and even speaks in public now--growth in competencies due to occupancy of valued roles (Waxman, in *Time*, 14 Dec. 2020).

*While in prison, a woman worked in the welding shop building barbecue grills and trash cans for state parks (in a number of states, prison labor provides equipment and furnishing for other state facilities). Upon her release, she took an adult education welding/fitting course, got a job

as a welder, which she still holds six years later, and represents her employer and other welding firms at trade shows. She has also married and become a home-owner (OCM BOCES, winter/spring 2020-21). So, one competency-enhancing role inside prison became the stepping stone to a better competency-enhancing role in the same domain outside prison, and to other valued roles as well.

**Seven Songs for a Long Life*, by Amy Hardie (made in 2015 but broadcast on Point of View on PBS, 30 January 2017), is a film about the Strathcarron day hospice in Scotland. They have an in-patient service, but the film focused on people who are still living at home but come there once a week. There are people with cancers, and one with multiple sclerosis (there is a high incidence of MS in Scotland). Patients at its in-patient service can go home after their symptoms are under control, so entering hospice there does not mean leaving only in a hearse. Relevant to roles was one bit of conversation in which a nurse said, "Did you know [this patient] was in the Stirling Opera Society?"--in other words, bringing to the attention of others a past valued role. The patient replied, "That was in my other life." Singing is a very social thing, particularly in Scottish culture.

Another patient was a former motorbike rider, and he got married a year after entering the hospice, so again, being treated by a hospice service need not mean being cast into as good as dead roles.

*A restaurant employee returned to the eatery as it was closing up, intending to rob it. He shot and killed two co-workers, and attempted the life of two others. He was convicted and sentenced to life in prison, but in the two years since the crime, he had "worn out his welcome at the last ... jail that would take him." He had been in four separate facilities; he had already accumulated a 60-page incident report, and was written up three dozen times in less than two months for serious infractions of rules (including threatening to kill and

mains guards and their families). With all available state facilities refusing to have him, he was transferred to a federal prison, though being further away, that made contact with his legal team more difficult (McMahon, in *SPS*, 2 February 2020). It is hard to imagine how much worse a reputation someone could accrue, and in so short a time, and equally hard to imagine any positively valued roles that he might actually be willing to fill while he is incarcerated. Perhaps this is one of those situations in which the SRV strategy of substituting a less devalued role for a more devalued one might be the best that is achievable, at least at present.

*A woman who became paralyzed after receiving cancer treatment as a young child has been in a wheelchair since then. She writes about her experiences, how people ignore her or assume that she is helpless and offer her “good deeds” and “kindness” (which she does not like). Unfortunately, many of her essays spend a lot of time on the latter (the things she does not like). She is now married, a mother, and a writer. Near the end of a 2020 essay she wrote, “If you want to be genuinely, actively ‘kind’ to disabled people, invite them into your organizations, businesses and programs. Allow them to perform in more roles than the grateful recipient of generous philanthropists. Recruit disabled engineers and dancers and office administrators and comedians and lawyers and speakers and teachers to participate in your world, and do your best to make that world accessible to them” (Tausig, in *Time*, 31 Aug.-7 Sept. 2020). Very nicely put, and we would only add that SRV would emphasize not only recruiting people who already fill valued roles, but helping people with impairments or other devalued conditions to achieve those roles in the first place so that they can offer themselves in these roles and so that others will be happy to recruit and accept them.

To Conclude...

*There is so much to be said about what the Covid pandemic has done to, and has revealed

about, the world of human service. Perhaps we might devote most of a future column to this topic. But here is one item along these lines.

Many, many members of devalued classes around the world are dependent on government subsidies of some kind for their sole (or sometimes supplemental) income. In the US, Social Security disability benefits is a federal program but is administered by the states, and each state (50 of them) has its own rules, and must review claims to see if they qualify. Prior to the pandemic, the time from application to decision on a case took about three months; now, in most states it takes anywhere from seven to nine months, and in some states more than a year. Meanwhile, applicants may have no or insufficient income even as their medical conditions need attention, and may even get worse.

Much as was the case with nursing homes and assisted living centers for the elderly, the pandemic did not cause but only revealed their many and deep shortcomings, so too here. “The pandemic just exposed the problems,” said the director of one state’s office. The system has had difficulty retaining workers; both the number and the complexity of claims have been increasing (from an average 160 pages a few years ago to 940 pages on average now); the workers themselves are overwhelmed by the discrepancy between what they are expected to do (review complex medical records of hundreds of pages) and what they are trained and able to do (they have no medical expertise); and yet more (Rein, in *Washington Post*, 8 December 2022).

And, as happens so often, it is the devalued people in need who suffer from all this.

Part II

We are pleased to introduce a new writer who we hope will make occasional contributions to the “News & Reviews” column. He works for Community Living Association of Owen Sound and District in Ontario, Canada, where, among other things, he tries to get and keep SRV ideas in the

minds of his fellow service workers. He is also a member of the editorial board of *SRV News & Reviews*. Please welcome Gareth Lloyd, who authored the following items.

*SRV for the Newly 'Initiated'. Given the comprehensive scope and all-encompassing nature of Social Role Valorisation (SRV) theory, it can be difficult, upon returning from the training, to consider the most efficient way to disseminate the information to peers and co-workers without undermining the necessity and relevance of the current educational model, which is roughly 35 hours of in-person learning, spread across four days. For example, how does one create a precis of something as profound and extensive as the discussion of the eighteen wounds? How can so much of the training content be summarized when attempting to describe the concept of the culturally valued analogue to a colleague, for example? How can one appreciate the importance of deviancy image juxtaposition without a series of pictures and accompanying analysis to demonstrate the theory?

The newly SRV-trained individual therefore finds oneself in a difficult position. The desire to explain the philosophical and social tenets of the theory and the benefits of its implementation to fellow employees is overwhelming, yet the danger of doing the facilitators of the SRV training and Wolf Wolfensberger a disservice by being too pithy and simplistic weighs heavy on the shoulders. Part of the difficulty is that the theory, when presented in a concise, conversational manner, appears commonsensical. There are few clearer truisms than saying something like 'in order to achieve the good things in life and be perceived as having value in the eyes of others, people need to have competencies and a social image that is valued by others'. There are two major ways, therefore, that the individual can start to make one's peers think in more detail about how it can apply to their life, their work and their community.

Firstly, beginning to use language and concepts learned at the training in every day conversations

can be extremely effective. Working with people with developmental disabilities, for example, the SRV-trained individual has added confidence to consider how the image of a man in his mid-20s will be harmed when playing with a child's toy in the local coffee shop, or whether a woman in her early forties should be signing up for a Special Olympics team because her friend, whom she regularly went swimming together with at the local pool, moved to another city. These, and many other issues, may have been concerning to the staff member before the training, but the knowledge garnered creates an empirically-evidenced platform for people who have learned about SRV to stand upon when voicing their opinion. Similarly, if the organisation is attempting to improve their approach to Person-Directed Planning, or creating a new report, the opportunity is there to utilise SRV to help guide the process.

Approaches and discussions that previously would have seemed fairly benign suddenly take on a new weight; they become opportunities to see and help others see things through a different lens. The way in which people and their homes are referenced may begin to feel like nails on the proverbial chalkboard—support staff referring to the women they support as 'our ladies' or the home they work at as 'my house' may seem fairly innocuous and part of the human services lexicon, but for the SRV-trained individual there likely exists an urge to redirect that into a more positive, appropriate phrase. Working with people in the community and seeing how they are spoken to and spoken about becomes remarkably illuminating, often in a negative way. Supporting someone to buy a few groceries in a local store, a sales clerk said to him, 'wow, you're doing such a good job carrying those chips!' He is a forty-year-old man. One begins to notice such devaluing remarks more often, which also creates a greater desire to assist people in achieving valued roles within their community.

Another approach is to simply model one's support and approach with SRV theory at the centre

of what a staff does, which comes naturally if the SRV-trained individual is ruminating upon what has been learned. If working with people in their home, for example, there may be more of a focus on the appearance of the home and the people who live there. How does it 'fit in' with the aesthetic, the feel of that particular street? What is the reputation of the residents within that neighbourhood? Would they be invited to the neighbourhood potluck? Are they seen to be actively participating in the life of the community?

Furthermore, the person who has embraced SRV is likely to make competency-building a central priority. Making breakfast for a person despite them having some skills in the kitchen because it is easier, quicker, and may result in fewer bran flakes on the floor becomes less tempting, almost to the point of being offensive in its connotations of devaluation, both historically and contemporarily.

Thus, we have to improve our own image—through language, appearance, and approach, as well as our own competencies—through modelling and greater self-awareness, to help improve the image and competencies of those we support. By doing this and considering information garnered from the SRV training, we all can move closer to having more good things of life.

*In 2018, the Canadian Down Syndrome Society launched a campaign to highlight the issues people with that impairment face; one of the measures was to apply to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature to have people with Down's Syndrome added to their 'Red List of Threatened Species'TM. [Ed. Note: we continue to refer to Down's Syndrome, rather than 'Down Syndrome,' in this publication. The term acknowledges the historical identification of the condition by the British physician Langdon Down in the 19th century. Dr. Wolfensberger wrote persuasively about the issue of language in his 2011 article 'Needed or at least wanted: Sanity in the language wars' (Wolfensberger, W. [2002]. *Needed or at least wanted: Sanity in the*

language wars. Mental Retardation, 40, 75-80.). In this article, Wolfensberger cautions against imposing language changes for often unexplicated ideological rationales that fly in the face of natural language rules and the dynamics of imagery.] The Association issued images, including on posters, of children and adults with Down's Syndrome dressed in animal costumes—including a polar bear, panda, and rhinoceros, as if they were an endangered species just like the animals they were dressed as. This did cause some controversy and pushback at the time amongst advocacy groups, and is worth considering from a Social Role Valorization perspective.

Medical advances have made it possible for a baby with Down's Syndrome to be identified as such very early on in pregnancy, and it is remarkably common for this testing to result in the pregnancy being terminated—indeed, an *Atlantic* article from 2020 detailing the state of affairs in Denmark states that when a mother is informed her unborn child has Down's Syndrome, 'more than 95 percent choose to abort', which is hugely concerning, but certainly not an anomaly when compared with other statistics globally. With this in mind, one can see why the word 'endangered' may fit, and why this striking campaign began. However, having devalued people not just juxtaposed with animals but actually wearing animal costumes, and also labelled as a 'species' (implying one that is separate from the human species) are some problematic and deviancy-imaging issues at play.

*SRV has much to say on image, role signifiers, and how these are communicated to and understood by individuals and groups. What a person wears sends messages to others, just as the outside of a home reflects upon the person(s) living within it. One wonders if this idea was considered by the skincare company Kiehl's, whose employees are kitted out in white lab coats and medical-style name tags, as a classroom skeleton looks on from the corner of their store.

Kiehl's was established as a pharmacy in New York City in the late 19th century, and this staff uniform is an homage to these origins. However, the simple white lab coat adds a legitimacy and authority to their products and the people who work there, just as it creates confidence and trust when visiting your doctor. The simple act of wearing this coat means that the staff are viewed in a more valued way, and therefore the products the company sell are believed to have more preventative and restorative properties. This phenomenon is referenced in a Soul Pancake (now Participant) YouTube series entitled 'The Science of', in which the presenter is wearing a white lab coat, and when asking the viewer to try an activity about gratitude, says 'Trust me, I'm in a lab coat'. Many customers of Kiehl's probably also trust their employees when discussing their products at least partially for the same reason.

*The 'early days' of the pandemic have been partially forgotten, in part due to the seemingly increasing 'mildness' of the symptoms for most people. However, we might remember 2020, before vaccines and before a more comprehensive understanding of the virus. In June of that year, Canada's national newspaper *The Globe and Mail* reported that 81% of people who had died from Covid-19 in Canada lived in long-term care. This is a remarkable statistic and speaks to how low-quality service practices and certain mindsets may contribute to the endangerment of service recipients. Elderly people are often seen as less valuable, and therefore less 'alive' than others.

A man who lost both parents to the virus is quoted in the article as saying, "I believe the province [of Ontario] treated my parents and the people in long-term care as not full citizens, so they didn't fully protect them". This idea of less valued people being treated less well has been taught at SRV workshops for over 35 years, yet it would be hard to argue things have changed much in that time when thinking about people living in such congregate settings. The poor conditions many

people find themselves in reflect society's opinion about those who are old and unwell.

This is evident in developmental services too; people are often not considered 'fully human', are even considered expendable, live in inappropriate environments, have choices taken away from them, and have many wounds inflicted upon them throughout their lives. Indeed, we heard of people breathing a sigh of relief as the virus 'only really kills old and unhealthy people', as if one life has more value than another based on the person's age or particular medical circumstances.

*Over the last few years, the term "microaggression" has become fairly common parlance, and is defined by Merriam-Webster as 'a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group'. One group where these comments or actions are commonplace is towards those with impairments. From Social Role Valorization theory, we learn that people with impairments are devalued in many ways, throughout life, often from a very young age. This devaluation is expressed in many ways—most notably through the numerous wounds that are inflicted upon people, such as rejection, loss of control, and the absence or loss of freely-given relationships. This is a central concept to SRV, one that is very helpful in understanding the immense abuse that many people experience. Much has been written, taught, and continues to be discussed in schools and developmental service organizations, about the increased likelihood of physical, sexual, and financial abuse of people with impairments, the horrific things that occurred in the segregated institutions until well into the 21st century, and continued bullying and mistreatment regularly faced.

Without in any way downplaying the enormity of such events and actions, we must also recognize that this devaluation also occurs in smaller, more nuanced, "micro" ways—often through the words someone uses, their tone of voice, or how

they approach someone. An example might be when a staff member accompanies a person with an impairment to an appointment at a doctor's office. The staff member may be required to take a large red binder with the person's name on it, full of their medical notes, information about the medications they have been prescribed, and other documentation. A large red binder is an unusual thing for a fellow patient to see while in the waiting room and could add to the stereotypes already in play, marking the person as different, so medically vulnerable and reliant on other people that they have so many reports needing to be carried around. The staff, instead of the person they are providing support to, may be spoken to by the nurse, and asked to answer questions that this person is perfectly capable of answering for themselves, such as date of birth, address, etc. Once in the doctor's office, there may seem to be an odd eagerness to prescribe inappropriate medications, or perhaps a refusal to consider a referral to another healthcare professional to investigate an issue further. The assumption may be that the person has an impairment, therefore they don't have access to the same things as a valued person, so it's not worth spending time and money to help that person be given important surgery, or acute treatment. This is just one example focused on the medical field, but of course similar things happen in human services, the grocery store, the school playground.

The World Health Organization reports that people with disabilities are 'four times more likely to be treated badly in the healthcare system'. Yet one wonders if the example above would qualify for such a statistic, given there was no obvious 'bad treatment' in play and many people would not consider reporting it as such. However, we have to recognize that the types of interactions discussed take place every day, often multiple times a day, and may be very difficult to address in the moment for fear of confrontation or social embarrassment. Of course, and as the dictionary definition states, many of these "microaggressions" are unconsciously enacted upon someone, perhaps from a place of sympathy or compassion for someone seemingly less fortunate than themselves. This does not reduce the problematic nature of such comments or actions, but does provide some context to the fact that this is a societal, attitudinal belief that we need to continue to acknowledge and work hard at changing in our professional and personal lives. ☺

SUSAN THOMAS is the Training Coordinator for the Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership & Change Agency, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, USA. She is the co-author of PASSING. GARETH LLOYD is Team Leader for Accommodation Supports at Community Living Owen Sound & District, Ontario, Canada.

THE CITATION FOR THIS COLUMN IS

Thomas, S. & Lloyd, G. (2023). Social Role Valorization news & reviews. *SRV News & Reviews*, No. 2, 25-39.