



Early Learning Initiative

National College of Ireland

NCI Research
Day 2024

Developing an Irish Restorative Community — Insights, Lessons, and Theory Contributions

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**DUBLIN
NORTH EAST
INNER CITY**



Introduction & Methodology

- **Restorative practice (RP) is a social science and an approach to building, maintaining, and restoring relationships and community — with ELI leading a community-wide restorative practice project in Dublin’s inner city since 2014.**
- **This project aims to develop this area into Ireland’s first restorative community — to build stronger neighbourhoods, tackle local systemic and structural issues, and avert future violence — by instilling skills in building and maintaining relationships, alongside conflict resolution and transformation competencies.**
- **Secondary analysis of eight years of quantitative and qualitative data — across multiple RP programmes, from July 2014 to June 2022 — will be presented today.**
- **Community Action Research (CAR) was utilised to design, modify, and implement these diverse range of RP programmes that support an integrated system of learning and development, mentoring and support.**
- **Results were analysed within the context of all results in order to generate macro-level and long-term insights, and in an attempt to answer the question “How could culture change be measured in a community?”**



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We have coined the term **Directional-Embedding Theory (DET)** to organise programmes by how they embed RP values and skills into a community, so that we can better analyse strengths and weaknesses of different programme types.

Top-down — programmes that develop knowledge and skills in restorative language, theory, and practices

Examples from our programmes include: Introductory, intermediate, and advanced training for professionals; Relationship Keepers, where children in primary and secondary schools are trained to resolve conflict with their peers; Restorative Parenting for utilising RP within families; and Opening the Door, where corporate volunteers and marginalized young people learn RP together to increase their communication and employability.

Directional Embedding Theory
Embedding values/skill in a community

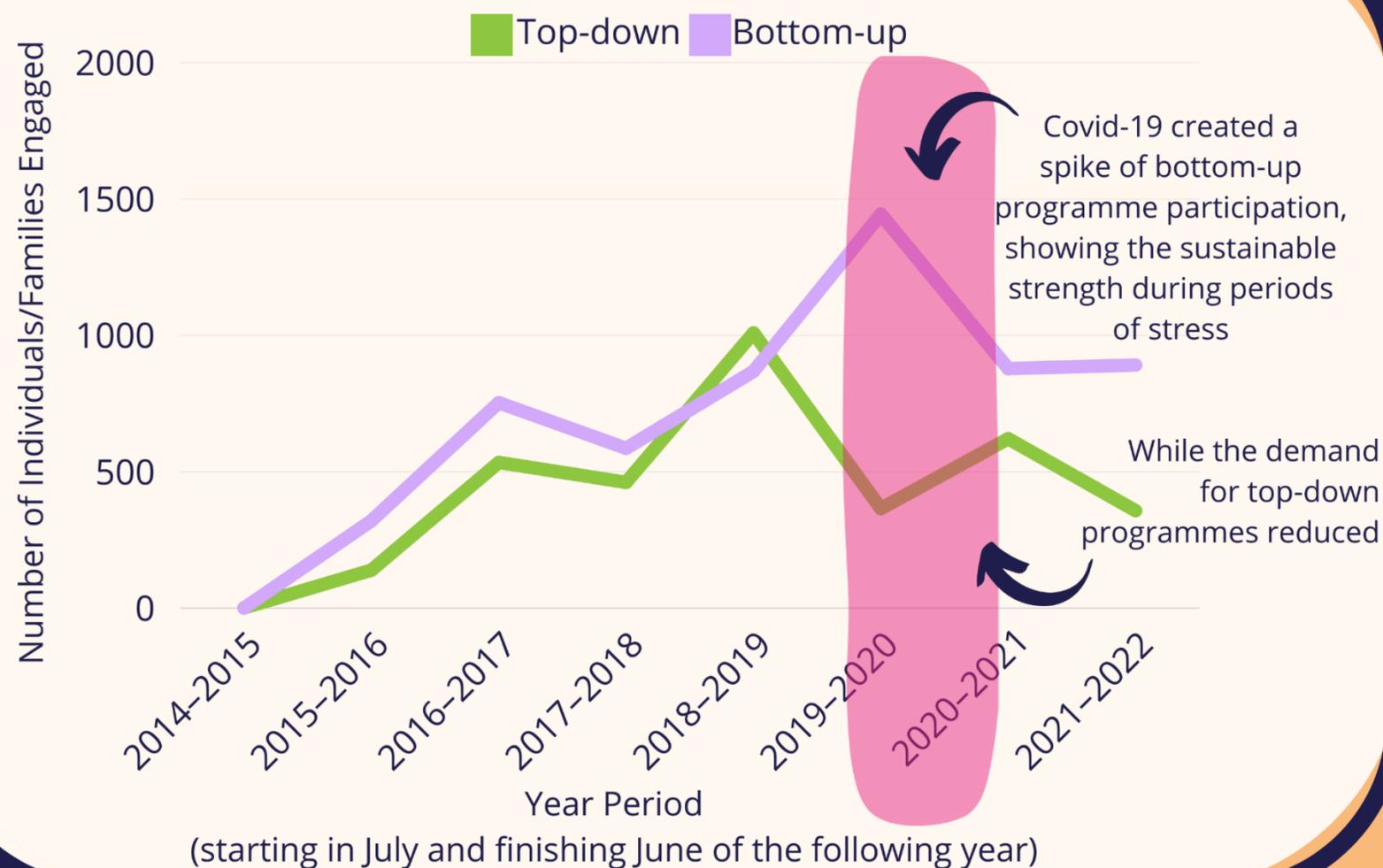
Bottom-up — any programme embedded with restorative practices and principles involving the community

Examples from our programmes include: various home visiting programmes targeting marginalized families to promote educational development, support caregivers, and improve emotional skills; all bespoke community-based RP meetings to respond to the immediate needs of the community; Doodle Den, an afterschool programme for children and their primary caregiver(s) to strengthen their relationships and support literacy development; and various Continuing Professional Development programmes.



- Of the 3487 individuals who have engaged in RP top-down opportunities throughout the study, an estimated 73.42% (N=2560) are individuals engaging in initial training courses and workshops and 26.58% (N=927) are individuals engaging in further training courses and workshops
- Of the 5740 instances of participation in bottom-up programmes, 56.50% (N=3243) represents families and 43.5% (N=2497) represents individuals

Directional Embedding Programs Over Time



Participant Demographics	*2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	Totals
Top-down	1	139	534	461	1009	365	621	357	3487
Adult	1	139	534	411	958	331	602	337	3313
Parent	-	-	-	17	87	88	77	60	329
Professional	1	139	534	394	871	243	525	277	2984
Children	0	0	0	50	51	34	19	20	174
Young Child (0-11)	-	-	-	22	-	-	-	-	22
Young Person (12-18)	-	-	-	28	51	34	19	20	152
Bottom-up	0	431	959	897	1260	2531	1413	1492	8983
Adult	0	265	312	492	713	1338	729	763	4612
Parent/Caregiver	-	195	254	384	531	1155	586	643	3748
Professional/Volunteer	-	46	58	108	179	183	133	116	823
Community Member	-	24	-	-	3	-	10	4	41
Children	0	166	647	405	547	1193	684	729	4371
Young Child (0-11)	-	144	522	382	452	1152	619	669	3940
Young Person (12-18)	-	22	125	23	95	41	65	60	431

* Year periods run across Irish school-year periods, July to June of the following year.

Organisational Levels & Thematic Analysis

Organisational Restorative Implementation Levels

Level 1: Getting Started Exploring & Preparing
For organisations at Level 1 of their implementation journey, there are several exploratory and preparatory activities taking place.

Level 2: Starting Implementation Experimenting, Planning & Resourcing
For organisations at Level 2 of their implementation journey, there are several experimental and resourcing activities taking place.

Level 3: Partial Implementation Implementing, Operationalizing and Evaluating
For organisations at Level 3 of their implementation journey, there are several implementation and operational activities taking place.

Level 4: Business as Usual
For organisations at Level 4 of their implementation journey, there are several 'business as usual' activities taking place.

Thematic analysis of qualitative feedback from organisational reviews from 3 years* (2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021)

Themes	Subthemes	Codes	Level 1 (N=7)	Level 2 (N=13)	Level 3 (N=13)	Level 4 (N=0)	Total
Positive Code Total			4	32	39	-	75
The benefits of RP to interpersonal relationships	An increase in skills that leads to stronger relationships	Empathy	0	0	3	-	3
		Conflict resolution	0	5	8	-	13
		Relationships	1	8	6	-	15
		Individual positive change	3	13	11	-	27
		Emotional intelligence	0	6	11	-	17
Negative Code Total			27	27	11	-	65
The barriers to establishing RP in an organisation	A lack of support and/or resources	Pandemic	2	3	1	-	6
		Buy-in difficulty across organisation	6	11	2	-	19
	A lack of organisational RP structure	Staff turnover	2	2	0	-	4
		Difficulty training	5	6	3	-	14
		Lack of organisational RP structure	12	5	5	-	22

* Our year periods run across Irish academic-year periods, July to June of the following year.

Qualitative data (N=33) from three years was analysed, with high-reported codes (frequency > 10) shaping the themes and subthemes

- **Theme 1: The Benefits of RP to Interpersonal Relationships**
 - **Subtheme: an increase in skills that lead to stronger relationships**
- **Theme 2: The Barriers to Establishing RP in an Organisation**
 - **Subtheme: a lack of support and/or resources**
 - **Subtheme: a lack of organisational RP structure**

If an organisation wishes to become fully restorative, strong organisational RP structure is likely essential. Strong RP structure would mandate bottom-up RP experiences and top-down training through organisational policies.



Organisation Descriptives & Quantitative Results

Organisation Demographics	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Total	1	23	68	69	75	46	63	67
ELI	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Primary Schools	-	4	15	19	19	12	12	12
Secondary Schools	-	1	1	2	4	2	8	11
Early Year and After School Services	-	10	23	20	23	10	10	9
Youth Services	-	6	10	10	6	12	13	11
Community Services	-	1	18	17	22	9	19	23

Note: Organizations have the highest rate of continuing participation throughout the years, so no totals for the overall study duration have been collated. This breakdown includes all organizations in Dublin, not just in the NEIC area.

Organisation Level	2017-2018	2018-2019*	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Total	46	12*	56	60	43
Level 1	17	*	21	21	22
Level 2	19	5*	17	18	13
Level 3	10	7*	18	21	8
Level 4	0	*	0	0	0

* Only self-reported levels were recorded, so this year was excluded from overall trends.
Note: Organisational reviews have lower numbers of participation as only those in the NEIC area of Dublin were evaluated.

For the most recent year of overall Dublin organisation participation, 34.33% were schools (n= 23), 29.85% are children and youth-targeting services (n=20), and 35.82% are community organisations (n=24).

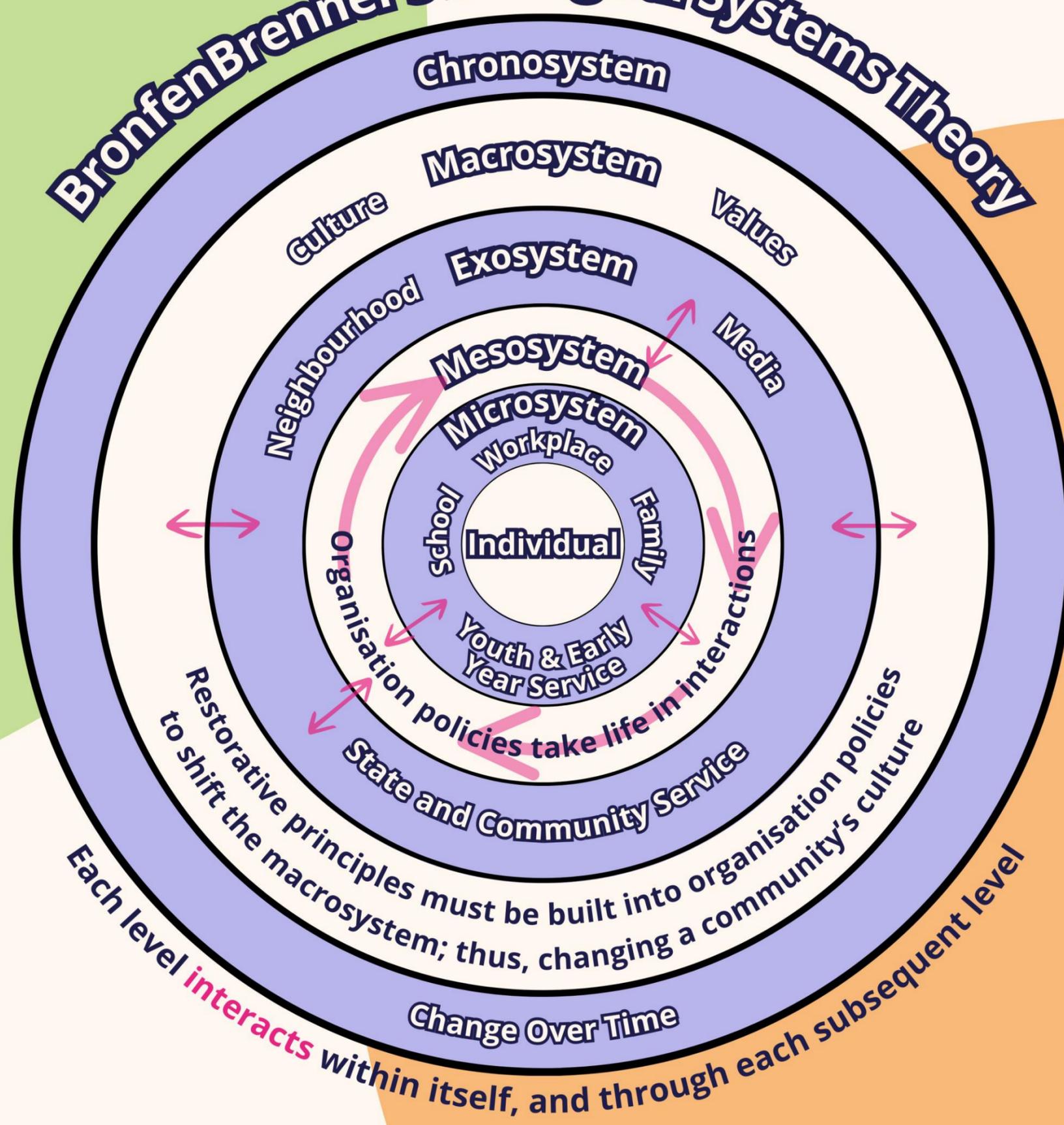
- 47.76% of organisations support children and young people, with 52.24% supporting adults, or a mix of children, YP and adults
- No organisation reported as being at Level 4
- For NEIC organisations there was a steady increase in commitment with organisations progressing through organisational levels throughout the years, up until 2021-2022 where there was a severe slide back
- Overall trends suggest that some participating organisations have devolved to an earlier post-pandemic level, if they did not stop participating in 2021-22 altogether.



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Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



How can culture change be measured?

While traditionally utilised to understand development, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST) also maps the different systems and interactions that build into a community's culture.

Why does measuring culture change matter?

Restorative community efforts have previously assumed that RP embedded within specific Micro- and Exo-systems (such as families, schools, and workplaces) will "ripple out" into other areas of involved individuals' lives. This is not supported in research. Thus, we propose utilising EST to map restorative efforts and developments within a community. If enough of a community is embedded with restorative ethos, then a community's culture is successfully changed.

Change Over Time



Conclusions

- **Given that top-down and bottom-up efforts are equally essential to developing a community into a restorative one, both embedding tactics have strengths and weaknesses that should be considered within each community context.**
- **ELI's research findings show positive changes related to increased levels of communication, comfort, and motivation, and decreased experiences of conflict, allowing people to better participate and benefit from community.**
- **The implementation of restorative practices at an organisational level has been reported internationally (Blood, 2005; González et al., 2018; Hopkins, 2003; McCold & Wachtel, 2001) as a paradigm shift, in both thinking and practice, that requires strategic and structural change within an organisation. ELI research suggests that barriers to establishing organisational change in the NEIC relate to difficulties in achieving organisational buy-in, staff turnover, and a lack of organisational RP structure.**



Conclusions

- **Restorative practice is grounded in a theory of relationships, community, and culture. Culture is built into the structural policies of micro- and exosystems, taking life in the interactions in the mesosystem, and until restorative principles and practices are built into these, RP cannot live in the mesosystem long enough to shift the macrosystem; thus, changing a community's culture.**
- **Communities, like the NEIC, are striving to build restorative cultures amidst uncertain conditions and shifting landscapes, in spite of insufficient or unstable resources, and against a backdrop of seemingly intractable structural and societal challenges. Culture change, at community or societal level, is both shaped and influenced by individual and collective human behavior. To engender a cultural shift within a community, rather than merely implementing a programme or intervention, it is the community who influence and implement the structures, practices, and cultures that correspond to their way of dealing with the micro- and exosystems. If enough of the community pledges its commitment to RP and RP culture, the macrosystem will be rewarded.**



Thank you for listening!

References

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