

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/adolescent-portable-therapy-still-innovating-10-years-out>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

I joined the [Adolescent Portable Therapy](#) program in 2001, just after its launch. At that time there was a total of four clients in the program. APT was created to fill a need for flexible substance abuse treatment for young people involved with the New York City juvenile justice system. Because that population is so fluid kids moving between facilities and between city and state stakeholders Vera's innovation was to make the therapist portable. We began working with young people in detention shortly after their arrest, following them as they moved through the juvenile justice system and ultimately home to their families.

Those early days were filled with firsts of all kinds: the first kid released home from court, the first time we visited a particular facility, the first portable drug test, the first kid who got rearrested, the first family to complete the program. Everything seemed momentous because none of it had happened before. There was a real sense that we were pushing the program forward every day.

The early staff members who committed pieces of their careers to the experiment of this demonstration project have left their mark. As have the clients who took a leap of faith and signed up for a program that was just taking the first faltering steps out of the planning stage. Their words and experiences populate the stories that I use to teach new staff about good APT practice although the wisdom now seems like mine, it only rests with me because I have been well taught.

I'm reflecting on this because this month marks the 10-year anniversary of APT. In some ways, staff who join the program now have a different experience than I had. Thanks to the efforts of the early staff and the generosity of the families who have allowed us to walk part of their path with them, there's a strong foundation at APT. We're no longer figuring everything out.

But there are still lots of moments with our current team that remind me of the old days. We still have our share of firsts, even if they aren't always program firsts. And there's still tremendous power in the first time a new therapist helps a family complete the program, or the first time that a particular client walks into school without getting high first.

Our current staff is still a tightly knit group that pushes each other to learn new things; they are still learning from the families who invite them into their homes, they are still contributing to the APT lexicon and the collective wisdom in ways that make the program stronger. Even after 10 years of APT, they are still pushing the program forward every day.

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