

DSPD Units at HMP Whitemoor

Jamie Bennett describes the work being done with offenders identified as DSPD at the pilot treatment project at HMP Whitemoor.

M*anaging Dangerous People with Severe Personality Disorder*, the July 1999 Green Paper, identified a group of people who presented a high risk of very serious offending and whose needs were not adequately met within existing services (Home Office 1999). It was estimated that about 2000 people were within this group; 1400 in prisons, 400 in secure hospitals, and 300-600 in the community.

This group present a serious challenge for the community, health services and criminal justice agencies. Those identified as DSPD are often very disruptive. Paradoxically, many respond positively to the structured regime of a prison but staff are not equipped to deal with other aspects of their disorder and experience difficulty in getting assistance from *health service professionals. Some receive help in therapeutic communities, but there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that these are effective for the most severely disordered. There is a general need for further research into effective interventions, not least because some research has suggested that some interventions actually increase the risk of those identified as DSPD. The lack of a consistent, long-term, multi-agency response led the Home Office, Department of Health and the Prison Service to initiate this programme.*

The criteria for identifying people who are suitable for the DSPD programme has been developed (Thornton 2001). The dangerousness criteria is "more likely than not to commit an offence that might be expected to lead to serious physical or psychological harm from which the victim would find it difficult or impossible to recover". There are two main instruments used in the assessment of personality, the Hare Psychopathy Checklist (PCL-r) and the Diagnostic & Statistical Manual (DSM-IV). Someone with a severe personality disorder will meet the following criteria:

- PCL-r score of 30 or above or;
- PCL-r score of 25 to 29 plus at least one DSM-IV personality disorder other than anti-social personality disorder or;
- Two or more DSM-IV personality disorder diagnosis being met.

Whitemoor's DSPD Unit

Pilot projects have been established at four sites, two in prisons at HMP Whitemoor and Frankland and two in high security hospitals at Rampton and Broadmoor. However, at the present time, only HMP Whitemoor is operational, with the others opening over the next year. The first unit opened in HMP

Whitemoor in September 2000 and currently provides a 36-place Assessment Unit and the first of two 28-place Intervention Units. All prisoners on the Units come from the high security prison estate and are volunteers.

The assessment programme currently runs for approximately four months, and is delivered by a multi-disciplinary team including prison officers, psychiatrist, psychologists, teachers, nurses, probation, workshop instructor and administrative staff. The assessment includes psychometric tests, clinical and actuarial risk assessments, psychiatric assessment and structured observations of interactions. A final report is produced that identifies whether the person meets the DSPD criteria and what specific needs each individual has. The report also indicates how those needs can be met within existing services, including the Intervention Unit, and includes behavioural guidelines that advise on the management of day-to-day behaviour.

Although the Intervention Unit is in the early stages the treatment strategy is emerging. Underpinning all of the work is a therapeutic milieu or living environment including staff-prisoner interaction, community meetings and group activities. The prisoners also engage in employment either on the wing or in an education-led activity centre. The third element is clinical interventions based on a cognitive interpersonal model. These will be delivered by the multi-disciplinary team in group and one-to-one settings with some elements core to all prisoners but others tailored to individuals. The programme works together with the aim that prisoners will develop the skills and ability to better manage their personality and reduce their risk of re-offending.

Staff performance & development

The importance of staff-prisoner relationships has been highlighted particularly as a result of the work of Alison Lieblich and David Price of the Cambridge Institute of Criminology (Leiblich and Price 2001). However, severely personality disordered prisoners can be extremely difficult to build relationships with. Staff are required to develop relationships with this difficult group in order to get the basics of prison life done but also to maintain prisoners on the units and maximise the effectiveness of assessment and intervention.

In an internal evaluation, 80 per cent of prisoners commented positively on their relationships with staff (Hancock 2001). Comments included:

"I had an excellent relationship with them... The calibre of staff was very good.... They cared and

wanted to help you make progress.”

“Prison Officers were unique, unlike any others I’d ever met before... More patient, more understanding, more time for you, always in your cell, chatting to you, having a laugh and a joke..... They’re more concerned on Red Spur about how you are as a person, how you feel.”

External evaluation has also identified this:

“[It] is clear from this pilot investigation that the assessment programme itself, though not designed to have an effect, is having a significant effect upon prisoners and staff alike, by virtue of the type of relationships which they are purposefully developing.” (Rutter 2001).

This does not exclusively reflect a qualitative change in the role of prison officers and other staff, it is also a reflection of the increased staff levels on the units, which affords the time and opportunity to make the best use of their skills.

Appropriate selection, training and support are essential. All members of staff are interviewed prior to starting work on the unit. This is a two-way process, so that they know what is expected of them and to ensure that there is evidence of both appropriate performance and positive attitudes. All members of staff receive basic training in PD awareness and the specific work of the Unit. Refresher and development training is carried out in a weekly training session for all members of staff. This mirrors professional training and supervision in other organisations and disciplines. All members of staff receive mandatory counselling once every two months. This is confidential and is carried out by qualified, independent counsellors. This is critical to ensuring that staff well-being is maintained over time.

Multi-disciplinary and multi-agency partnerships

This project is founded on collaborative working both within the unit and with other agencies. Within the unit, the nature of the work involves closer relationships between a range of disciplines. This area needs close and constant attention in order to ensure the appropriate level of communication and collaboration is maintained. There are various forums for communication to foster this, including extended briefings/debriefings, weekly training sessions, weekly multi-disciplinary team meetings on each unit, multi-disciplinary senior management and steering groups, ad hoc away days and teambuilding events.

One of the most significant developments is that staff are not exclusively employed through the Prison Service. In addition to the Prison Service, staff are employed through two NHS trusts, the Probation Service and the local education contractor. This arrangement is not without its complexity and challenges. However, in order to ensure that the right people with the right skills are involved this experimental, innovative approach to human

resources is essential.

Although in its early stages, this project is taking shape and is providing meaningful work with a difficult group whose needs have not previously been met. The project is also carrying out work that could inform the future development of prisons, the prison officer profession and multi-agency collaboration. The outcomes and lessons may have implications beyond the DSPD Programme, for the wider development of the criminal justice system. ■

Jamie Bennett has been project manager and head of DSPD at Whitemoor since April 2000. He has worked with the project through planning, initial implementation and subsequent development.

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