

Tackling Social Exclusion through Positive Pathways to Resettlement

Paul Senior describes a local resettlement strategy on integrated working that could feed into the national agenda.

“Effective resettlement is central to the economic and social regeneration of communities and the protection of victims. Reducing re-offending is not just a criminal justice issue: it is a health issue, a drug rehabilitation issue, an employment issue and a housing issue. Resettlement is, in short, everyone's business. If we get resettlement right, then there will be significant benefits for local communities. A region with effective resettlement strategies would expect to see less crime, fewer victims of crime, reduced homelessness, a larger and more skilled labour market and more cohesive communities. There would also be large financial savings through lower criminal justice costs, health costs and the costs to victims of crimes.” Executive Summary; *Pathways to Resettlement* (Senior 2003).

This is the vision that the Yorkshire and Humber Resettlement Strategy sets out. The publication of the Strategy - '*Pathways to Resettlement*' was the outcome of a 15 month initiative driven by the prison and probation services, involving local, regional and national organisations across the public and private sector with an independent higher education institution acting as researcher, collator, consultant and rapporteur (Senior 2002,

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2003) to produce a strategy genuinely endorsed and supported across the region. It is a constituent element of the Regional Economic Strategy of the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly.

The idea of resettlement, which is focused on enabling those released from prison to move away from crime through a combination of protective, integrative and rehabilitative strategies (see Raikes 2002) has a political momentum which has not been seen for over thirty years. The nature of the task ahead is neither easy nor simple; indeed the complexity around effective delivery of resettlement practices may prove to be its Achilles heel. Resettlement policies do represent an active commitment to what the government has popularly termed 'joined-up thinking'. Crucial to the success of resettlement would be active communities willing to accept, and be involved with, individuals who have been excluded through their actions. Resettlement is thus an example (at least in principle) of social inclusion which should be at the heart of any criminal justice initiative.

The re-organisation of the probation and prison services into the National Offender Management Service (NOMs), and new provider arrangements will force key questions to be asked about who is now responsible for through-care services. Whatever the organisational structure, it needs to be joined-up – at the centre between prison and probation and youth justice services (Home Office, 2001) — and at the periphery through a role for all major welfare agencies (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002).

The Yorkshire and Humber initiative perceives this complexity diagrammatically as a series of concentric circles

(see Figure 1). This is illustrative of the complex nature of resettlement as a policy driver.

Remand and short-sentence prisoners have struggled to access community support services. At the same time, the structures created around sentence planning in prisons for medium and long-term prisoners seem to offer a good strategic basis for effective through-care provision. Sentence planning has often looked good on paper and been more problematic in its delivery.

Through the development of the strategy the region is signalling a much more integrated and inclusive approach. A national push to regions to deliver on this agenda was delivered by *Through the Prison Gate* (Home Office, 2001), a joint thematic review of through-care. The definition of resettlement in that document certainly focused the attention of statutory agencies towards their duties of public protection and reducing harm. But it went on to identify that “*too little attention is being paid to the basics of resettlement - assistance with money; the provision of suitable housing; the preservation or repair of crucial relationships; employment; education; and drug and alcohol problems*” (Home Office, 2001). This directs attention

towards both rehabilitative and integrative drivers for change, and in the consultation process this agenda began to engage and excite many welfare agencies.

It is to the *basics of resettlement* that recognition is being given, to the need to 'join-up' services for offenders, to ensure that not only is the public protected but that effective support for the myriad of social needs which offenders have upon release can be provided and sustained. For example, whilst employment may be a key inclusion goal, unless other actions are taken to address wider barriers to employment around housing, basic skills, relationships, drug treatment or health problems, employment targeting is unlikely to be successful.

What the consultation found was a raft of good initiatives in the region; a Prison Service committed to linking with voluntary and community based agencies and developing targeted resettlement services for their inmates; positive implementation of offending behaviour programmes, and high quality basic skills work for both prison, probation and youth justice services. The importance attached to a seamless and integrative approach between prison and probation programmes and other agencies including Job Centre Plus (Fresh Start and Progress to Work), National Treatment Agency (Models of Care), the prison health agenda, learning and skills councils (basic skills targets), and the voluntary and community-based sector and faith communities was evident.

However, what the consultation also showed is that, despite pockets of excellent practice, there is a lack of coordination and consistency across and within the region. Attending to the

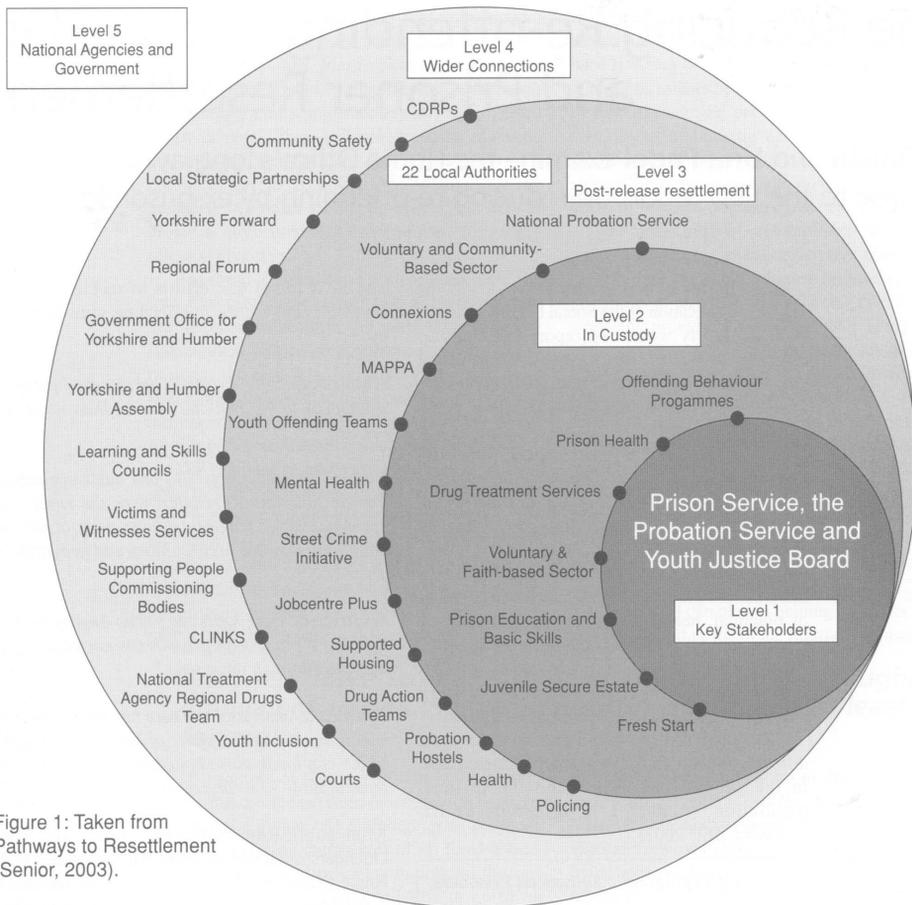


Figure 1: Taken from Pathways to Resettlement (Senior, 2003).

basics of resettlement demands a much more 'joined-up' approach to resettlement thinking and the work in developing this strategy has highlighted how important major agencies dealing with housing, education, employment, training, work with families, drugs and health are to an effective reintegrative response. Resettlement has now reached the point where it could be offered as a template to 'joined-up thinking' in criminal justice practice with a central commitment to a more inclusive society. Four key principles emerged:

- continuity of care
- communication
- customisation
- cash-flow

Continuity of Care

The importance of coordinating services so that the right things happen at the right time cannot be over emphasised. There are many examples where this coordination simply does not occur, including discontinuities between prison initiatives and follow-up upon release, repetitious assessments as each offender visits a new agency, ineffective links between drug rehabilitation and GPs to maintain drug-free lifestyles, and training started in prison not recognised upon release. The remedy, enabling coordination and continuity, is integrated case management, an

example of which is Models of Care in the drugs context, (Department of Health, 2002). This will be at the heart of the new offender manager roles in NOMS.

Such a system ensures that a case manager embeds continuity in the service provisions accessed by the individual. Timely access to provision can only be achieved if there is a single reference point to ensure coordination and continuity. A reintegrative orientation demands enhanced interaction between agencies to create an 'inside-out' and 'outside-in' commitment to bridge gaps in continuity and enhance the potential for a seamless provision.

Communication

Given that the delivery of adequate services to offenders in prison and on release from prison demands the engagement of a large number of agencies, clarity on communication protocols is absolutely essential. Currently, the concerns of confidentiality often produce miscommunication or no communication at all. It is wasteful of professionals' time and certainly of an individual offender's reintegration if they have to continually repeat or review work they have done with one agency whenever they meet a different one.

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Customisation

Managing the diversity of needs that offenders present means that a system in place for one group will not necessarily work for another. Also, whilst attention is being paid to the longer term needs of individuals through sentence planning and the development of structured programmes of intervention, it is still the case that a crisis intervention capacity is needed. Timely access to facilities will help prevent a drift back into offending behaviour. This is particularly the case in relation to support for drug treatment and prevention, attaining accommodation upon release and in responding to the needs of short-term prisoners. Custody Plus sentences sharpen this issue considerably.

Cash-flow

There are a number of ways in which funding regimes can be improved in order that voluntary and community based agencies can play their part more effectively in delivering community based services. For small organisations, the uncertainty of funding and the contract culture is often a disincentive to get involved in the process of bidding for and delivering services. Sustainability for funding streams needs to be found so that projects that are functioning well can continue to do so over a longer period of time. This may mean more creative use of funds than currently exists.

There are many challenges ahead in the resettlement agenda. Communities have to be actively engaged if ex-offenders are to be reintegrated and protected from the potential for communities to exclude problematic groups. We wait with

interest to see how these regional strategies for change in the resettlement area will help to produce an effective framework for the next decade.

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Rethinking Offender Education

The British Library, London – Monday 18th October 2004

With the creation of the National Offender Management Service, and the postponement earlier this year of tendering for prison education contracts, this major Conference will examine the future of offender education policy and practice.

Speakers include

- Anne Owers CBE, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons
- Janice Shiner, Director General, Lifelong Learning Unit, DFES
- Barry Sheerman MP, Chair Education & Skills Select Committee
- Prof David Wilson, Chair of the Forum on Prisoner Education
- Julia Braggins, Consultant and Author of 'A Time to Learn'
- Paul Mackney, General Secretary of NATFHE
- Harry Fletcher, Assistant General Secretary of NAPO
- Chris Barnham, Head of the Offenders' Learning & Skills Unit
- Trish Smith, Education Manager at HMP Wandsworth

This Conference will be of interest to prison education staff, those working in probation, civil servants, campaigners,

academics, students and former prisoners. Delegate rates have been kept low to encourage wide participation.

A workshop session will include presentations on children in prison, barriers to learning, motivating offenders to learn, and distance learning. An exhibition area will host a range of statutory and voluntary agencies.

Delegate rates start at £80, and a limited number of bursaries are available to those who could not otherwise attend.

The Conference is being organised by the Forum on Prisoner Education, a registered charity working to advance the quality, availability and consistency of education and training in the criminal justice system. Members receive generous discounts on all our events and publications. Visit the Forum website for further information, at www.fpe.org.uk.

For further details of the Conference, please visit the website (below), call 020 8525 9599, or write to the Forum on Prisoner Education, PO Box 42039, London E5 0YZ.

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