

Does prison work?
Stuart: Some prisons work and some don't. If you go into a prison and they've got good education and you've got courses like this one, then it's going to work, but if you go to other places and you do nothing, it ain't going to work. You're just banged up in your cell all day and you're going to go out and do the same again.

Graham: If you get a stiff enough bird to do something constructive with it - yeah. If you get a shitty little bird then it's not really affecting you. If you get a big bird where you are missing years of your life you're going to know about it, you know what I mean?

Marking time

David Kidd-Hewitt visits Aylesbury YOI's Education Department and meets the students and tutor in the Motor Vehicle Maintenance Class.

So what would a 'shitty little bird' be?

Graham: 12 months, 10 months, 8 months. Months - anything that's months man.

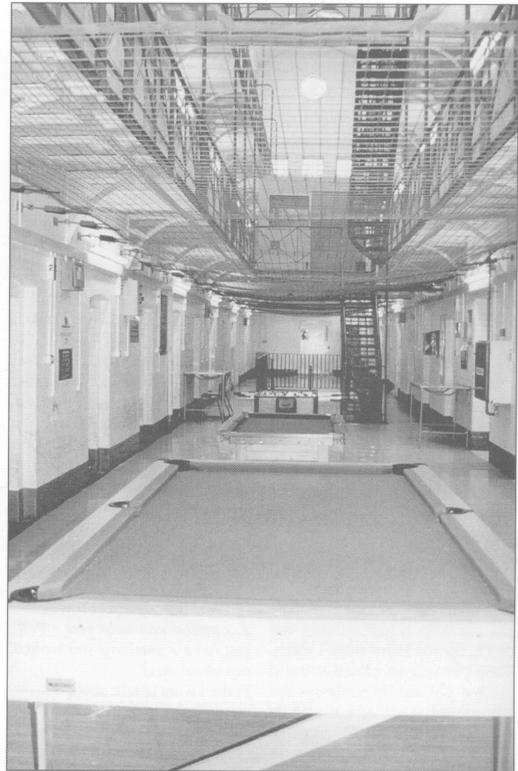
So once you start talking years, real years, 3 or 4 years, that makes you think?

Graham: Like what you're missing, you've just wasted it, do you know what I mean? Two years in here just wasted. You could be doing something a lot better outside, do you know what I mean?

Do you think you are going to leave here with skills that you didn't have when you arrived?

Graham: Yeah of course - but if you've got a few months then you're not are you? You're just coming out the same way you came in. If you get a big enough bird to do something constructive when you are in jail, get some qualifications, then when you

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come out, you're well fixed up.

What should I know about being in this prison, this nick?

Richard: I reckon its changed a lot since I've been in. This place tends to be run like a primary school. It's annoying, but it never used to be like that. Not when we first come in anyway.

What time period are we talking about here?

Richard: 20 months I've been in here.

So it's changed over 20 months?

Richard: Oh yes, a lot, a hell of a lot.

What's the biggest change?

Wayne: They've brought in regimes. For instance when he was talking about primary school, yeah, they've brought in different regimes. Like you get Basic, yeah. Where basically if you're like a naughty boy or bad or you've got an attitude towards the officers, they'll put you on Basic which is just bang up. You don't get no privileges, you don't get your own

trainers, you wear prison two-stripes, this and that. Then you get Standard, what everyone's on when they first come in yeah, and that's just the normal regime, that's just like now. Then you can get Enhanced, like G wing where you get special other privileges like more visits, maybe better food, better videos, this and that.

So as you are seen as better, you go to a better wing?

Stuart: When you come in prison you have got the advantage of working your way up or down, so if you want to be naughty you go on Basic, if you want better conditions then you can work higher up.

Isn't that quite a good idea though?

Graham (and others): Yes, but they do some silly things, like they tell us how to arrange our cell. Like you've got to keep your bed to one side - that's just come in not that long ago. You've got to keep your bed to one side, your table over there.

Richard: Like two tee shirts a week, that is taking the micky. Two tee shirts ain't going to last you a week, not a chance.

Matt: In the kit change you get

every week, you get two sheets, two tee shirts. But the worst thing is, you get three pairs of socks to last you seven days. You can wash your own, but to anyone else that comes in then they get three pairs of socks, I think that's a bit out of order personally. And boxer shorts as well, they give you about two pairs of boxer shorts.

If you could go to the Governor with three things that you feel should be changed and he promised to do something about it, what would those three things be?

Matt: Visits need to be extended on a weekend. Your family and friends come up, and it can be anywhere from the country and you only get an hour's visit. And not even that some times, if you're waiting for ages to get in, you've only got like 45 minutes for a visit and they've taken like 3 hours to drive up. So visits need to be sorted out.

Graham: I reckon they should just forget the piss testing and let us get on with it because at the end of the day cannabis is just calming you down, do you know what I mean. They put you on closed visits if you've got any in your system when really all it's doing is calming you down, it's not like you're harming yourself or anyone else. So no more piss testing.

How long have such tests been carried out?

Graham: Years mate, years.

Right, we've got two requests for the Governor, weekend visit extensions and no more drug tests. What's the third?

Pete: They should let you have accumulated visits where your people come in and you can have a family day, maybe show them round the prison, show them what you are doing with yourself. Your work, motor mechanics or this or that, you understand what I'm saying? Where you're living. Accumulated visits man.

Jason: They should let you have conjugal visits sometimes, when you can have time with your girlfriend or your wife. So you can get more close to them as well. It would stop a lot of relationships breaking up, because the family does the sentence with you.

Stuart: That's why your missus leaves you. After a certain amount

of time because you can't get close to her, can't cuddle her and whatever. If you could be close to her, say once every two months plus your normal visits, then things would work out better.

What is the food like?

Ricky: All we basically get to eat like is spuds. Potatoes every single day, it's a bit boring.

They're full of vitamin C.

Richard: They're full of lumps as well.

Pelle: They give you potatoes every day like, every meal like. The only time you don't basically get them is breakfast. You get it at lunch, you get it at tea time. But there is advantages to having potato because they've got certain proteins or whatever in them and if you're doing weights and want to get bigger, you can eat potato and get tank like.

Looking again at whether prison can help you - Pelle, you have something you want to say about this?

Pelle: I want to talk about whether prison helps you in the long-run, and my views on that is that the only thing you are losing and I know it's a big thing, is your freedom. That is a big thing you're losing, maybe your girl or you're not getting sex or whatever. But I think basically that prison doesn't really do nothing for you, it doesn't reform you.

I was in boarding school, yeah? and this is just like a boarding school to me, the only difference is that I can't go home at weekends or whatever. You can do a course, you can do weights, you can get bigger, look after your body and that, yeah? but basically it ain't strict enough here. I am not saying I want it to be strict, but it ain't really doing nothing for you, it ain't teaching you right from wrong. It gives you time to think like what you want to do with yourself. Do you want to be in prison all your life or whatever. But basically, it ain't doing nothing for you.

How long have you got until you go out of those doors?

Pelle: I've got five years. I've got about another year and a half still.

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Right, so on the basis that you wouldn't want to come back?

Pelle: No, I wouldn't want to come back but that's because I enjoy my freedom and other things yeah? But like me being in prison like, every day I'm happy. It doesn't put me down, it doesn't put me on a down yeah? like some people can ride their bird, yeah? I can ride my bird. Every day I'm happy making jokes with my friends. I've been in prison before, I was out 2 months and I come back here, I finished a 3 and now I'm doing a 5 yeah? I know that sounds kind of bad but I didn't actually do nothing.

Does it worry you that you're going to go out and be back in two months again and do a 7 or 8?

Pelle: I won't be back in 2 months again. But even if I did come back, it wouldn't bother me 'cause I can ride it like. It's nothing to me, you get me? I don't see my girl, I don't see my family, I see them on visits but apart from that it's nothing yeah. There's disadvantages to being in jail, but there is advantages like you meet new people, you make new friends, so it's not exactly a downbeat.

Some of you wanted to talk about criminal justice. What concerns you in particular?

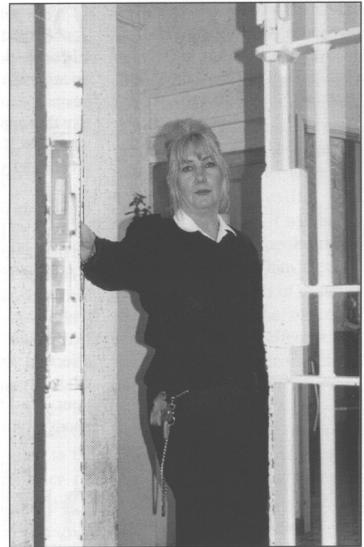
Graham: The court system. Juries should be trained because they are just everyday people. The judge should try you because he goes to court everyday, he knows what he is doing. He knows what he is talking about, it should be him that finds you guilty.

So the judge is someone you would put your trust in rather than a jury?

Graham: Oh yeah, I'd rather the judge find me guilty or not guilty. Do you know what I'm saying? You get a dumb jury, they haven't got a clue about f....g criminals and the rest of it, at least the judge knows what he's talking about. Do you know what I mean?

Yes, but I am surprised to hear it.

Matt: Magistrates are just



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everyday working people aren't they? They just get called up to the bench, but I don't think magistrates should be on the bench. They should be trained magistrate court people, court judges, not just everyday people. We should have trained judges on the bench.

Pelle: This is a deep subject here but I think that the justice system for black people isn't very good yeah? White people get good justice because obviously it is a white country, but take me for instance, I went to court, I got sent down for something I didn't do, yeah? Basically I was there, my friends done it, now they tried to say to me that I should have rung the police on my own friends yeah? Grassed up my own friends yeah? That's not me, I wouldn't do that, so I went down for something I didn't do, now that's not very good justice. They never had no forensics on me, no witnesses, nothing, yeah? but because I'm black, because I've got a gold tooth, because I look like a ruffian, to them I look like a gangster - they looked at me and they just think that instantly I'm guilty. I don't agree with that, do you get me? They are looking at you and judging you by your appearance.

Ricky: I feel the same way as Pelle.

Pelle: I got 5 years for a robbery yeah? and obviously I'm black because I said that on the tape. I have seen white people come in who have done 3 or 4 different robberies, yeah? and they've got two years, they've got community service and that's not right. We are meant to have equal rights, they are meant to treat everyone the same.

But they don't. They say when you go to court, oh there's no racism in this court but you can see it on their faces when they are looking at you, when they are talking to you.

What about in here? There is a notice when you come in that says racism is not tolerated here.

Pelle: There's a lot of racist officers in here, but it's best I don't name no names. They try and go on that they ain't racist but I can read people, I can see, you get me? By the way they talk to you. There's racism everywhere you go, you get me? but definitely in here mate, definitely in here.

I am getting the impression that apart from all the regrets you have about not seeing girlfriends, wives, not having sex, lack of freedom, this place seems to be working for you. It seems OK as prisons go - is that what I'm getting?

Matt: It's not really any prison that affects you, it is the loss of freedom. So you get on the way you get on in any prison. It's not the actual prisons or the rules.

There must be differences surely?

Matt: I think prison is prison really.

This is a young offender institution so there should be a greater emphasis on education compared perhaps to adult prisons - what do you think of the educational facilities?

Richard: I reckon the education department here is all right. Compared to other nicks, which didn't really have much to offer, up here it's okay. Trouble is, when a couple of reporters reported on this (car mechanics) course, they

twisted it around a bit.

Tell me about that.

Richard: Anyone who's got a bit of brain in their head knows that from what they are learning they can always twist it round and take it to their advantage - they could steal cars, course they can - you learn all about that. You're learning how to fix it, but you are also learning how to dismantle it and they are teaching us how to put this knowledge to good means instead of a bad means. But when it's reported it gets twisted round.

So you're learning skills, particularly car maintenance skills, and the media have come and listened to what you've learnt and they've gone away and reported it in a negative light?

Andy (course tutor): Before I actually started teaching here, they had somebody come in to actually write an article on this place, about the fact that a lot of the big car manufacturers got involved in helping us set it up for the rehabilitation of young offenders. Basically, for all the good points we put forward, all the paper done was twist it round and said that we were trying to teach young offenders to pinch cars. Well, my feeling on that is that most of these guys in this room here would actually teach me how to pinch a car. All we can try to do is to channel something they are very interested in into something constructive that they can use on the outside. It just annoys me at times that we get so much bad publicity for the good that we try and do.

(Applause from the lads)

Thanks to the staff and inmates of Aylesbury YOI's Education Department.

CATCHING UP

On his visit to Aylesbury David Kidd Hewitt also met Millwood, sentenced at 15 to 4 years. He is now 16 and catching up on a lost education.

DKH: Are you going to be the same Millwood when you get out?

No, no, I'm trying to fix up my life. I never left school. I never got kicked out of school, I just walked away from school, yeah, when I was about twelve, and now I've come here. Teachers have told me that I've got enough time here to fill that time back in, yeah? I can get all what I would have got back in school, so I'm doing it now.

Juveniles to stay in jail

Paul Cavadino regrets the postponement of a pledge.

On 27th November 1997 the Government published the White Paper 'No More Excuses', which contains an impressively wide-ranging set of proposals to reform youth justice. These include welcome measures to cut pre-trial delays; to extend constructive programmes of diversion, reparation, supervision and bail support; and to establish a national Youth Justice Board and local inter-agency 'youth offending teams' to put youth justice services on a more consistent and effective footing.

Yet alongside these proposals and without prior consultation, the Government has further postponed ending the practice of holding remanded 15 and 16 year olds in prison service custody. This will dismay everyone working with juvenile offenders inside and outside the prison system. Sending juvenile defendants to penal establishments has long been regarded as a recipe for criminal contamination, intimidation and, all too often, self-harm and suicide attempts.

The last 20 years

Since the mid-1970s there has been bipartisan agreement that remanding this age group to prison service custody is undesirable and that, when remanded juveniles need secure conditions, they should be held in local authority secure units staffed by residential

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