

Understanding the nature and needs of a particular prison population is a cornerstone of sound professional work with people in custody. This understanding should inform, rather than contradict, the need to focus on individual difference. In 1994 the Prison Service commissioned the Trust for the Study of Adolescence (TSA) to produce specialist training for staff who work with young women in custody. The training was developed in partnership with staff at all levels in the Service, women prisoners and allied agencies committed to improving the quality of work with young women. Its launch in October 1996

Young women in custody

Juliet Lyon focuses on the particular needs of the female population in prison.

by Richard Tilt, Director General, marked the start of gender-specific training. Applied research at HMP Drake Hall in association with HMP Holloway and five other women's establishments, gave TSA the opportunity to explore basic questions like:

Who is in custody? What is

known about the young female population? Is working with women in custody different from working with men? Is working with young women different from working with older women? Can you women change for the worse while they are in prison? Can they change for the better? What is the staff role? What are staff trying to do? How does the work affect staff? What training and support do they need?

As they emerged, each difference, each point of comparison, had implications for professional practice.

Gender difference

Women represent just over four per cent of the total prison population. They are more likely than men to be in prison for the first time, to be accommodated far from home, and to be affected adversely by custody. They have different criminal profiles and differing social histories. Their most common crimes are theft and property-related crime, with a rising incidence of drug-related offences and crimes of violence against the person. A significant number of women in prison are victims, as well as perpetrators, of crime. Many will have experienced domestic violence and/or sexual abuse. They are more likely than men in prison to depend on medication or to injure themselves. The majority of women in prison have dependent children, for whom many retain considerable responsibility. Women in general, and black women in particular, are likely to face discrimination on release when trying to find housing and employment.

Age difference

Young women are more volatile and more vulnerable than older women in custody. They are more likely to reoffend. Just over one third of all women in custody reoffend within two years of release. This figure rises to just over a half, fifty-two per cent, of women under twenty-one. Reports of adjudications and incidents, show that young women are more likely to challenge authority, to commit assaults on prisoners and staff, and to harm themselves. Unpublished research conducted by the Psychology Department at Holloway indicates that young female prisoners have lower self-esteem, more difficulty in coping with custody and a poorer sense of their own future than older women.

Younger and older women are accommodated together. One

probation officer interviewed by TSA commented: "The care of young offenders in an adult prison poses some particular problems such as: their higher energy levels; being easily impressionable; their learning and educational needs; their over-representation on the prison assaults figures."

A young woman prisoner said: "Some of them older women mother you too much. Some just think that they can clamp you down. Some bully you because you are young and that and they can bully you."

Opportunities to spend time with other young women such as the 'chill and chat' group at Holloway and special pre-release training for young offenders at Drake Hall were valued.

There are significant developmental differences between younger and older inmates and their care and custody should vary accordingly. Differentiating between groups in institutions is never easy. It is particularly difficult to do in a prison where so many of the young population have been propelled into early adulthood.

Growing up fast

In society the transition from childhood to adulthood is lengthening with the earlier onset of puberty and later age of leaving home. A number of young people are economically dependent on their families in their late teens or early twenties. Many young women in custody differ markedly. For example, numbers are not recorded accurately but it is estimated that between thirty and fifty per cent of young female prisoners are, or have been, in local authority care as compared with two per cent of the general population. A recent survey of over one thousand mothers in prison found that women prisoners had become mothers at a much younger age. Over half (fifty-five per cent) were teenagers when their first child was born, compared with a fifth of women in the general population. Many young women will have experienced homelessness and lived in poverty prior to imprisonment. Some very young women become involved in prostitution, often through adults who offer accommodation and an introduction to a drug habit. The Children's Society estimated that at least five thousand children under the age of sixteen are used for prostitution in Britain. The number of girls aged sixteen and under convicted between 1989 and

Peter Dainymple



1994 was up by seventy-nine per cent.

Challenges for staff

Working with young women whose chronological age and life experiences are so out of line presents real challenges to staff. One young woman said at interview: "They can't understand it. If they haven't been sexually abused, they haven't a clue... It just does my head in when people sit there and say, 'I know, I know'. They don't. They don't know. I'm twenty-one and I've been through more in my twenty-one years than what they've been through in their sixty years, and they sit there and try to tell me they know."

A number of young women interviewed complained about 'being treated like little kids'. This was a particular frustration for those who had entered early adulthood through negative experiences in care or young motherhood. More than anything they wanted 'to be listened to' and 'to be treated with respect'. Some young women recognised gains such as kicking a drug habit, time to think and calm down, understanding and practical help from personal officers or probation staff. Many felt strongly that in a prison you have to resort to extreme measures to gain staff attention: "They don't take no notice of you unless you cut up, or start a fight, or smash up your cell. You just have to kick off."

Staff have a critical role to play with this vulnerable and volatile population. These young women are still open to change and adults can exert a positive influence. Striking an appropriate balance between care and control, difficult enough with teenagers and young adults, is particularly hard when working with young women in custody. There are needs for love, care and protection beyond the professional parameters of the job as well as challenges to authority and powerful rejection of staff. To maintain security and boundaries, and to work closely, but not intrusively, with young women, to recognise the possibilities, as well as the limitations, of the role and setting, prison staff need good consistent management and supervision and on-going training.

Understanding and Working with Young Women in Custody is the first of a number of training initiatives in work with women scheduled by the Prison Service. It emphasises that, within the context of understanding the nature and needs of the population, staff should develop positive,

professional relationships with individuals. In the face of rapidly rising numbers, it is difficult for staff to treat each young woman prisoner as an individual. The Prison Reform Trust has documented a sixty-eight per cent rise in the female population between 1992 and 1996. In its current Inquiry into the use of prison custody for girls, the Howard League has charted a steep increase in the number of under-eighteen year olds received into prison custody. Questions about the appropriateness of custody, or about alternatives to custody for some young women were outside the remit of the applied research and training project. They are, however, questions which should be asked.

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"UNDERSTANDING AND WORKING WITH YOUNG WOMEN IN CUSTODY"

by Juliet Lyon & John Coleman

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With Swampy and Animal becoming almost the countercultural answer to Noel Edmunds, you could be forgiven for thinking that there have been more than enough words written recently about the world of the eco-rads. But is tunnelling, building tree houses and playing aerial hide-and-seek with Costain security guards the whole story? Perhaps not.

At the end of the 1980s I found myself selling off a flat with nega-

Rebels with a cause?

Alan Dearing surveys the countercultural scene.

tive equity. In other words I was broke, and still owed about £10k. I was looking for a bit of a change to cheer myself up, and a friend came up with a creative rescue package, offering me a narrow boat to live and work from. For nearly three years in the early nineties I slowly cruised around the 'cut' as the canal and river system is known to its inhabitants. I was earning a reasonable amount of money writing books and articles and commissioning new books for Longman and quite mainstream publishing houses. Trouble is, pubs, the National Rivers Authority, police and the like, take you on face value. And trying to be a water Gypsy for real isn't one of the lifestyles many of them find acceptable.

"So, you're one of them New Age Travellers, are you?" was a familiar greeting, often followed by a none too polite invitation to leave the premises/area, and to spread the word to 'my friends' that they were not welcome. Trouble was, who were my friends meant to be? I was on hello terms with a couple who lived in a bender; I knew a few people who worked with festival welfare services and I'd re-

"So, you're one of them New Age Travellers, are you?"



outside their window every day - and I'm one of those people.... If we were in cities, in houses, we'd probably still be on the dole, you know. It doesn't mean to say that our job prospects would go up if we were living in houses."

In 1994, the published police estimate for new Travellers was that there were 2,000 live-in vehicles and 8,000 people involved all year round in England and Wales. However, organisations like Save the Children (SCF) and Friends and Families of Travellers (FFT) believe that the figure is closer to 50,000. FFT announced in 1996, "...there may be as many as 100-150,000 nomadic people in the UK. The majority whether housed, on official sites or camping illegally suf-

Telephone Legal Advice Service for Travellers (TLAST) have been in increasing contact with new Travellers in the last three years and have built up a picture of very different responses to Travellers across the UK. In some areas multi evictions, especially by the police have forced Travellers to leave their nomadic way of life. But in other areas, these tactics have resulted in Travellers becoming effectively trapped in a single county as they run out of money for fuel or essential repairs. Everywhere, sites are hard to find even in local authorities where efforts have been made towards making site provision. It's a confusing situation with lots of different local patterns.

Paul, a Traveller from Waterhall, near Brighton, said in 1996,

cently begun to get involved with Fiona Earle and others who ran the Skool Bus and were involved with site education for travellers. The unfriendly responses fuelled my interest and in the period through to 1994 and the passing into law of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, Fiona and myself worked with literally hundreds of other so-called New Age Travellers to tell our tales. These were published in a substantial book, *A Time to Travel? An introduction to Britain's newer Travellers* (Enabler Publications). It was full of accounts, pictures and tales of travelling life which gave a set of positive reasons for the lifestyles of travellers and the underlying belief that a *right to travel* and a *right to stop* should be a cornerstone of British society.

The impact of CJA

By the time that book was published in 1994, in time for the Glastonbury Festival at Pilton, the countercultural scene had already undergone a number of metamorphoses from the days of the Peace Convoy in 1984 and 1985. Ravers and party people had increasingly joined in the summer festival scene, with Castlemorton Common, 1992, being a symbol of this union in the media and politi-

cians mind. Free Festivals were increasingly being replaced on the scene with Rave Parties, which at first were equally exciting, before they became commercialised and run from within the corporate club culture. Police surveillance operations were mounted in 1992: Operation Nomad, and 1993: Operation Snapshot. The aim was to collect information about Travellers and their vehicles and use it to make their movements more difficult. There was also increasingly close police liaison with the DSS/Benefits Agency. An appropriate slogan of the time was: *Necessity breeds ingenuity.*

This apt phrase certainly described the regrouping of Travellers in the face of a political and media campaign almost unparalleled in its vehemence. For instance, the Daily Telegraph referred to new Travellers as "hordes of marauding locusts". But, as many writers have argued, for many new Travellers, the truck, bender, tipi or van can represent a very settled way of life. A Traveller named Claudia summed it up rather well on the BBC programme, *Roaming Free* (1993): "*It is not an unnatural instinct to be nomadic. A lot of people have got a nomadic spirit in them - they don't want to see the same thing*

fer prejudice and difficulties which show few signs of abating."

In reality, the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (CJA) had forced some Travellers to find smaller, more protected places to park up and get on with their lives. Others found some protection from harassment, staying in larger groups, which the local authorities and police found harder to evict. And others left the UK and sampled what was on offer in Europe, North Africa and India. Em, one of a breed of new world Travellers wrote to me very recently from Goa, saying:

"Goa attracts the biggest ever collection of the world's individuals. It is a shock to the system to those accustomed to being the bizarre one; to suddenly become just one of a few thousand larger-than-life characters. Egos are bolstered, riding bigger bikes faster after having done more drugs, while wearing the most outrageous clothes and having every conceivable bodily part pierced. Heaven and Hell meet here. I love it and hate it." (1996)

The CJA was an attempt to further criminalise a way of life with its outlawing of groups of more than six vehicles travelling together, increased sanctions against outdoor music and unauthorised camping, and the introduction of 'aggravated trespass'. But it was still up to the police and local authorities to implement this and other legislation regarding health and planning. Organisations like FFT, the Children's Society and the

CONTACTS CONTA Alternative lifestyles/travell

Big Green Gathering 1997, PO Box 123, Salisbury, Wilts SP2 0YA

Charter 88, Exmouth House, 3-11 Pine Street, London ECLR 0JH

Children's Society, 92B High Street, Midsomer Norton, Bath BA3 2DE

Conscious Cinema, PO Box 2679, Brighton BN2 1UJ

Diggers and Dreamers (communes UK and elsewhere) annual directory, PO Box 1808, Winslow, Buckinghamshire MK18 3BR

Dongas Tribe, 6 East St, West Coker, Somerset BA22 9BE

Earth First! and Reclaim the Streets, PO Box 9656, London N4 4JY

Exodus Collective, Long Meadow Community Farm, Chalton Cross, Sun-down Rd, Luton, Bedfordshire

Festival Eye, BCM 2002, London WC1N 3XX

Freedom Network, PO Box 9384, London SW9 7ZB

Friends and Families of Travellers, Top Floor, 33 High St, Glastonbury BA6 9HT

Frontline magazine, Victoria Rd, Yarmouth, Isle of Wight PO41 0QW

National Council for Voluntary Organisations Rural Team, Regents Wharf, 8 All Saints Rd, London N1 9RL

"The CJA actually did some good. It made local authorities question what they actually thought about Travellers, whereas before they just moved us on. Now they are having to think about human rights and what they actually believe." (quoted in Squall, 14, 1996)

Full on and wicked

The period from the CJA's implementation to the present day has seen a vast explosion on the counter cultural scene. It is a growing phenomenon of counter cultural activity which is drawing together issues and people from animal rights groups, road protests and environmental campaigns. It has, almost unbeknown to the rest of society spawned its own radical set of DIY media. These are not the

photocopied fanzines of the Punk era, but instead are the counter cultural alternatives of the Independent and the Guardian. Amongst the main media channels of resistance are: SQUALL, Frontline, SchNEWS, Earth First!, Action Update, the Stonehenge Campaign Newsletter, Festival Eye, Undercurrents, Conscious Cinema, FFT Newsletter, TSC Newsletter, the Right Track and Travellers' Times. SchNEWS has made typical rallying calls to its largely disenfranchised readership to make holistic connections between a whole gamut of subjects ranging from road building, the Job Seekers Allowance, Liverpool dockers, the International arms trade, body piercing, the McDonalds' Trial through to international issues in Brazil and Bourgainville.

"Making these links, destroying the myth of 'single issue' politics is probably the most important step we've taken over the past year. And it's about time - because if things are gonna change then such movements have to grow." (1996)

The eco protesters, the ravers and the Travellers have indeed started to get their shit together. In the words of their own socially excluded culture, they want to experience the whole 'full on and well wicked' experience offered by street parties fuelled by Reclaim the Streets, Earth First! and the Land is Ours. More and more angry and disenfranchised young and not so young people have got involved in direct action protest and the making of a new DIY culture. Two quotes from Colin Clark (1997) express the attraction of the world of living at the margins and challenging the status quo.

"New Traveller lifestyle in a world of crisis has shown a way out of the darkness for those who are part of it..... The DIY culture threatens the very socioeconomic and political fabric that makes up sedentarist Britain."

At a personal level I'm finding the whole change an exciting and mostly positive one. The current level of activity amongst young people is almost entirely outside of the official political arena, yet already has had an impact. The road protesters of Twyford Down, Newbury and Fairmile have gained some favourable media coverage and made a number of allies with locals along the way. Because they have been living in benders, tipis, and vehi-

"The challenge for the welfare, education and justice services in the UK and beyond is whether they react positively or negatively to this precious (but unprotected) species."

cles and their dress makes them indistinguishable from the Traveller communities, a certain level of cohesiveness has resulted. Older Travellers have started to get involved in direct action such as the Critical Mass cycle blockades of city centres and have helped to organise Reclaim the Streets and Reclaim the Valley type of actions. In most instances these show that direct action can be serious and fun all at the same time.

Born from this evolving set of cultures are groups such as the Dongas Tribe, who formed at Twyford Down, but now move around the UK using horse and human drawn transport and are a living celebration of a back-to-the earth consciousness. The seasoned veterans of Travellers sites, road, airport, quarry, nuclear and animal rights actions seem to be more aligned together in one cultural group. Certainly this was evidenced at the 1996 Big Green Gathering where protesters from Fairmile, Trollheim, Newbury and Selar were well represented, along with planning protesters like Simon Fairlie from the low impact bender village at Tinkers' Bubble, Travellers from TSC, workers from the Children's Society and FFT and many, many more. It's a culture which is making its mark and its own history, even if not everyone has noticed!

Welfare agencies

As a final postscript, it is interesting to note that the development of the wider based DIY culture has also been an increasing area of interest to academics and commentators. 1996 saw the publication of *Senseless Acts of Beauty: Cultures of Resistance since the Sixties* (Verso) by George McKay and *Fierce Dancing - Adventures in the Underground* (faber and faber) from the Big Issue/Guardian's C.J. Stone, and *A Traveller's Guide* (FFT). This year has seen the publication of my own book *Youth Action and the Environment* (Council for Environmental Education/RHP) and Thomas Acton's *Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity* (University of Hertfordshire

Press) with the chapter on new Travellers from Colin Clark. Other books are in the pipeline including my own compilation of new Traveller writings from Europe and beyond, entitled, *No Boundaries* (contributions still welcomed!)

It has also been mirrored by a growing, if unequally distributed, range of self-help services such as the support offered by FFT, TLAST, the Travellers' School Charity (TSC) and the support of concerned voluntary and statutory services including Save the Children, the Children's Society, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, the Travellers' Education Service, the Big Issue and local initiatives such as the Taunton Detached Youth Work Project, which has offered a whole range of support for local Travellers including free showers and distribution of food donated by Marks and Spencers. In addition to offering support and advice to Travellers, there are also an increasing number of conferences being held on Traveller issues, for example, NCVO's *Land, People and Freedom* in June 1997. TSC's *Insights into new Traveller culture* in July 1997, and TLAST's *Traveller Law Reform* conference back in March. Research and subsequent reports and findings are also being generated, for instance, the Children's Society, *Impact of the CJA on the lives of Travellers and their children* (Lyn Webster, Children's Society, 1995).

The counter culture of Travellers, raves and free festivals, road protest and the direct action scene seems much like a chrysalis evolving into a butterfly. As it learns to fly it will undoubtedly display new forms. The challenge for the welfare, education and justice services in the UK and beyond is whether they react positively or negatively to this precious (but unprotected) species. ■

Alan Dearing is a Research Fellow at the University of Luton, Centre for the Study of Crime, Neighbourhood and Social Change, and author of a number of books.

CTS CONTACTS

ers/road protest/parties

Rainbow Circle Camps, Sampson's Cottage, Seven Leaze Lane, Edge, Stroud, Gloucester GL6 6NL

Rainbow International Events, Eur-Asia-Bus, Postfach 4016, CH-8022, Zurich, Switzerland

Right Track, 84 Bankside Street, Leeds LS8 5AD

Road Alert! PO Box 5544, Newbury, RG14 5FB

SchNEWS, Justice?, PO Box 2600, Brighton, East Sussex BN2 2DX

SQUALL magazine (for sorted itinerants), PO Box 8959, London N19 5HW

Squatters Handbook, Advisory Service for Squatters, 2 St Paul's Rd, London N1 2QN

Stonehenge Campaign, c/o 99 Torriano Avenue, London NW5 2PX

Taunton Detached Youth Project, TYCC, Tangier, Taunton, Somerset TA1 4AY

The Land is Ours, Box E, 111 Magdalen Rd, Oxford OX4 1RX

Travellers School Charity, PO Box 36, Grantham, Lines NG31 6EW

Travellers' Times and the Telephone Legal Advice Service for Travellers, Cardiff Law School, University of Wales, College of Cardiff, Cardiff CFI 1XD

Undercurrents Videos, 16b Cherwell St, Oxford OX4 1BG