

## PROGRESS REPORT

# Lewes Prison

J. WILLIAMS

THE PRESENT SYSTEM at Lewes has evolved from the various training schemes, for staff and inmate alike, that have operated during the last two rather intense years. Since August 1963 we have changed from a Y.P. prison to a borstal, and then in May of this year to a Regional Training prison with a population of around 220. There is also 'F' wing for remand and trials, which has an average population of about 40. This wing is manned by its own regular staff but it draws on the staff of the main prison for escort and other duties.

Lewes prison, with its division of responsibility together with the organisation and energy which makes it function, affords a comprehensive and reasonable answer to the basic problems which face any training unit, prison or borstal. There may be little that is new and there is much that is being done elsewhere. The system is the outcome of two years of close and intensive work involving collaboration between all members of the staff. My purpose is to state our aims and ideals.

## Involvement of Staff

Everyone will appreciate the almost bewildering variety of trades which are represented on our staffs and how easily they can become cut off from the main stream of the institution and find themselves in a position of less importance, untapped, unconsulted. This inevitably creates inter-departmental discontent, even active opposition. This is particularly likely to occur between those officers directly responsible for the training of men in a wing or part of a wing, where they may be developing new techniques, and those who are not, e.g. works staff, trade instructors. It can also come about when senior officers who are not attached to sections are required to do stand-in duty. So much knowledge and experience can be wasted through misunderstanding of aims and intentions.

## Communication between Staff

This is allied to the first problem and just as vital. If staff are involved in the aims of the institution, it is the proper communication between those individuals or groups

which cements their involvement.

Given the achievement of involvement and communication, how can the talents of a united staff best be brought to bear on those in its charge? In a Regional Training prison, this would be the main objective, yet often this can drift into third or fourth place in the face of the other demands of the institution. We would hasten to add that this is not an argument against anything else functioning but against the priority of functions and the correct blending of them all.

### **The Responsible Involvement of the Inmates**

To put a far from simple problem in its simplest terms: If we assume that the biggest common factor amongst those in prison is not a positive, deliberate force for wrong-doing but an incapacity for doing what is right, then we must ask how can we do anything but train them to accept responsibility by giving them responsibility? If they have found it difficult to see themselves in a proper relationship with others, with the rest of the community outside, what else can we do but create a community within the institution? Here the basic principles of community life operate and from this let them gain the experience of responsible participation, helped by the staff. In those institutions where the climate and the population is less healthy it may be necessary to lower the sights, yet the result

would be at least a lessening of tension, better relationships and closer alliance, between staff and inmates.

There remains the last, but nevertheless important, problem of organising a system whereby the individual prisoner, with sometimes a multitude of problems, can be in direct and continuous contact with one officer who can help him. If the problem is beyond the officer's power, he can see that it is properly dealt with in the right quarter. It is perhaps worth mentioning that this problem cannot operate until the conditions as set out in the previous paragraph are satisfied, i.e. we think that it is impossible to treat individuals successfully unless those individuals live in a climate where the aims of the whole unit are generally accepted.

To sum up, we have directed our main aims to (a) social, (b) individual training, in a community which affords the inmate the maximum degree of social responsibility and gives him experience of relating himself properly to others within that community.

The prison structure is quite simple. What is required is the detailed planning of the organisation communications allowing the institution to function efficiently. Perhaps this can best be illustrated by a brief description of the function and purpose of each unit within it.

\* \* \*

Lewes, a prison of 230, is divided into four sections, each with a Principal Officer in charge and six staff, with roughly 55-60 men. The four sections are further divided into six, each group having one officer in charge of it.

The starting point is the individual inmate within the group of men. The officer is responsible for acquainting himself with the personality and special problems of that individual and taking the necessary action within the limit of his powers and capabilities. When this point is reached he takes the problem to his Principal Officer. The problem may be discussed at the regular fortnightly meeting of staff. Each officer and Principal Officer enter the relevant information in each man's dossier.

The ten men who form a group meet with the officer twice a fortnight. The group can function in many ways—as a group for discussion or for constructive organisation. It can also be arranged as a 'problem' group when the common problem in the group may be that of drink, marriage difficulties or outbursts of temper. The topics discussed might include a suggestion on how to form a bridge club; how to relieve overcrowding in the dining hall; how to use orderlies for the quick collection of those being visited, a discussion of the immediate, sometimes drastic, results of losing one's temper, whether at work or in the home; or a frank discussion on the problems facing

the staff and the inmate within the institution. The danger here is the natural irritation of staff at the initial "give me" attitude of the groups but most have skilfully used this as an opening for a discussion about such attitudes. The officers in the group have thrown much of the responsibility back on to the men's shoulders instead of producing the pat answer. In the absence of the officer on leave or through sickness, the prisoner representative takes the group and submits a written report to the Principal Officer in charge of the section.

As we gain more experience of this form of group work in which the group is a functioning body working dynamically as a part of the whole system, it becomes more and more apparent that it has certain advantages over the more orthodox 'counselling' group. Group counselling may make its remedial contribution to the life of the institution and to the individual in it, but I feel it is somewhat of an additive which lacks the dynamic function, remedial, social or what you will, of the group as it operates at Lewes.

Each of the six officers, with one prisoner representative from each of the six groups, meet with the Principal Officer in charge of the section once every two weeks. The purpose of these meetings is: To review the points discussed in the group meetings during the previous fortnight and to prepare a section agenda for the Deputy

Governor every other Friday; to discuss section policy; faults in organisation and remedies which can be relayed back to the groups during the following two weeks; to discuss any ideas and feelings which the groups put forward. More often than not, appreciation is recorded for the help and attitude of the staff in a particular activity. The dynamism of this meeting and its effect on the work of the six officers and six men during the following fortnight is one of the corner-stones of the system, giving the section an identity and character of its own. Time at the beginning or the end of this meeting can be reserved for staff only, where individual problems, case-work or staff difficulties can be discussed in the absence of the six prisoner representatives.

The Deputy Governor receives a section agenda every other Friday from each Principal Officer. The four are reduced to one agenda in preparation for the Governor's meeting on the following Monday with the Deputy Governor, Administration Officer, Tutor Organiser, Chaplain, Chief Officer and the four Principal Officers in charge of the sections. At this meeting the Governor, with his senior staff, works through the agenda giving his decisions with explanatory comments in detail if required. He may have some comments or criticism of his own to make and these will be included in the bulletin issued afterwards. This Governor's bulletin is pub-

lished and distributed to every department in the prison every fortnight (forty copies). Sometimes it covers just a single foolscap sheet, sometimes three. Each of the section officers has a copy so that he and his group can discuss it in detail during the following two weeks. The following is an example:—

*Item 1:* Can the visiting arrangements be reorganised if two orderlies act as runners between the gate and the visiting hut and between the visiting hut and the recreation area where those to be visited are located?

*Answer:* Yes—and then the Governor outlined some minor conditions.

*Item 2:* Can a food committee be set up?

*Answer:* Yes, as long as all future food problems are channelled through that committee. Its members must be Deputy Governor, Chief Officer, the Cook and one prisoner representative from each section. The result of the meeting must be published on all notice boards.

One item at the very beginning proposed a weekly scheme for the second period of evening P.E. class. It was much better than the one we had tentatively prepared and it has worked reasonably efficiently ever since.

Four results of this fortnightly Governor's meeting and the publishing of a bulletin are worth mentioning:

- (a) The bulletin has merged into one, the different sources from which an instruction or order can emanate, thereby simplifying and clarifying what in many institutions is rather confusing for the prisoner.
- (b) No independent decision is taken by me, the Chief Officer or the four section Principal Officers; even the Governor largely follows this pattern and rarely issues a 'Governor's Order.' Nearly everything is fed back to the groups and is produced at the end of the fortnight in its original or modified form for consideration by the Governor.
- (c) There is hardly need to state that staff and men together take an active and responsible part in the discussion and development of any detail.
- (d) For me personally the most interesting development from this, and one totally unexpected, is the way in which everyone beneath the Governor, staff and inmates alike, accept the decisions of the Governor as laid out in the bulletin. When the decision is made, everyone works in a combined effort to carry out that decision. Here there is an obvious parallel with normal living in any good community.

This represents a breakdown of the pyramid structure found in most institutions from a functional point of view and a levelling off at

a point immediately below Governor level. Pictorially for me, it is the difference between the old fashioned wooden set of children's blocks built up in decreasing sizes and the rather more modern polythene set which fit into one another, units within a unit.

### **General Section Meeting**

(Section staff and all attached staff (nineteen)—once every six weeks).

All staff, other than the section officers, are attached to each of the four sections. The attached staff include the Chaplain, Tutor Organiser, Works Engineer, P.E. Instructor, Trade Assistants, V.T. Instructors Hospital Officers, Free Workmen, etc. Each section was given as representative a cross-section of the staff as possible. At the moment each section has about twenty 'attached' staff. The Principal Officer in charge of the section, the six section officers and the eighteen or so attached staff meet once every six weeks. There are no prisoner representatives present. Its functions, bearing in mind the institutional problems set out at the beginning of this paper, are obvious. Members of the staff, regardless of what particular work they do, just cannot be allowed to exist in a 'vacuum of less importance' merely because they are not directly involved in section work. Failure to absorb staff into the aims and purpose of the institution as a whole and to knit them closely to, and give them identity with, the

section, inevitably leads to 'separation,' frustration and antagonism. Ironically, it is those members of the staff working with their charges up to eight hours a day who often have a greater contribution to make in properly assessing the individual inmate. It may often have been said before, but it can certainly bear repetition, that in prisons and even in some borstals, a vast untapped source of information and experience is largely wasted. The seriousness of the problem was underlined when, during the first few general meetings of the sections, many of the staff were indifferent or even hostile to the work of the section, and for no other reason than that they just did not know how or why the section was working. The majority accepted the new arrangements gladly with such comments as "It's about time we were brought into the picture." Communication does not end here, for during the six-week interval between each meeting, section officers visit the shops and parties regularly and the attached staff pass information to the sections about work and inmates. As an illustration of this: A T.A. plasterer had an inmate working with him who was unmarried and hoped to return to Stepney. He had had several jobs in the building trade, was a driver on his arrest but he wanted to settle down as a plasterer. In the two months that the T.A. had had this man, they

had done a great deal of intensive plastering converting 'B' wing into an education block. The T.A. submitted a comprehensive report to the Principal Officer in charge of Norman section after discussion with the man's group officer. The Principal Officer discussed the problem with his staff at a section meeting and telephoned the Chief Welfare Officer at N.A.D.P.A.S. Headquarters in London who, as a result is (a) interviewing the man on the day of his release; (b) in collaboration with the N.A.B. providing some plastering tools (c) says that it will not be difficult to find the man work as a plasterer in North London; and (d) is already locating lodgings for him. The subject of communication with N.A.D.P.A.S. will be discussed later. But to conclude, the other functions of the general section meetings are: To review the progress of the section during the previous six weeks; to discuss methods of strengthening liaison between the section officers and its attached staff; the dissemination of policy and information to the attached staff, and to receive information from them; to discuss any individual and his problems.

### **The Governor's General Institution Meeting**

The members are the Governor, Deputy Governor, Administration Officer, Tutor Organiser, Chaplain, Chief Officer, Works Engineer, four section Principal Officers and four prisoner representatives (one

from each section) who are periodically changed. The meetings are held once every two months.

The exact function of this meeting was not clear for some time and it was the last of the cogs to be brought into action. A meeting of this type is the logical conclusion of all that has gone before, capping it all with the seal of the Governor's authority. It has become apparent that it is not the subject matter of the meeting itself that is important, which is a general review of the previous two months' progress and an outline of the aims and policy for the next two, but the fact that the Governor is recognising in precise form the work that has gone on and is forcibly expressing to the whole institution that he is lending it all the weight of his authority.

There is one staff committee that functions on its own apart from the various inmate committees—Television, Sports, Food and others. This is the Casework Committee consisting of the Deputy Governor, Chaplain, Chief Officer and the four section Principal Officers. It considers the problem of each inmate roughly one month after reception, reviews his case half way through his sentence and one month before his discharge. Each section Principal Officer is responsible for the 'casework' of every one of his men in his section helped, of course, by his six staff. Through the Governor he is in contact with all the outside welfare agencies. Each has in his office a

directory of all the agencies. Soon we are to receive a Welfare Officer and we look forward to close collaboration between him and the four sections.

I have room only to list the ancillary training of staff which, in the development of a system involving new techniques must run parallel to it.

### Group Work Training

Monthly courses with five officers on each course was organised by an Assistant Governor, who has since left, the Chief Officer and me. These took the form of a discussion of institutional problems at Lewes against the background of the development of the prison service as a whole. The last half-hour of each meeting was usually taken up in analysing and interpreting the attitudes adopted by the group and relating them to the problems the officers themselves would face in their own groups.

Two officers attended the two-week course in group work at Portsmouth borstal, and two officers attended the week-end course at Rochester borstal.

Between January and April 1964, a comprehensive programme of in-service training was organised which included visits by our staff to a probation hostel, an allocation centre, probation office in Sussex and to Rochester borstal. Various speakers gave talks and held discussions at Lewes, includ-

# ERRATUM

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ing Mr. Foster of Borstal After-



Care, the warden of a probation hostel, a headmaster of an approved school and a psychologist, while probation officers came singly and in groups for discussion with our staff.

The Assistant Governor and the Chief Officer ran courses for those officers taking the Principal Officers' examination which have since proved very successful.

The immediate results of this system are apparent: There is no tension but a more tightly knit, socially minded and responsible population. There have been very few breaches of discipline (five incidents involving white sheets in the last three and a half months), whilst the staff are far happier and active and give an

impression of movement and purpose.

We have a long way to go at Lewes; there are many problems still to be solved. At least we feel we are doing something to give practical effect to that word 'rehabilitation' within and without the walls of the institution. When you boil it all down, are we not just thinking clearly of our aims, choosing our methods, welding *all* the members of our staff together so that each is contributing his maximum share, and then involving them directly with our charges in an adult, responsible, constructive climate?

Is not this the least we can do? Is this not the whole purpose of our work?

## Contributions

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