

Planned and Unplanned Aftercare

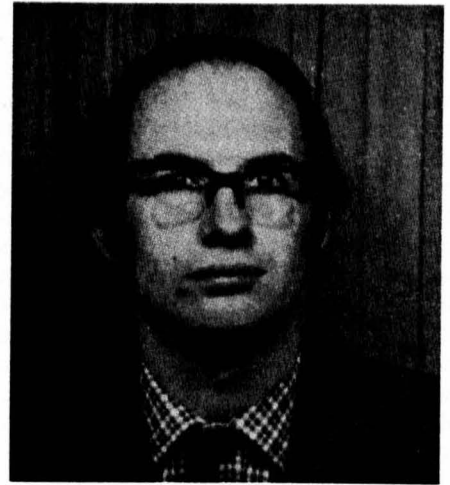
KEITH SOOTHILL

THERE is a danger that one of the shibboleths of the 1970s in relation to the rehabilitation of prisoners is the concept of "through-care". It is fair to add that Martin Davies (1974) has considered the matter in some depth regarding through-care as "an important movement in involving the probation officer even more actively in prison".¹ Similarly, as Pendleton stresses, the intention behind the through-care approach is that "by early intervention (at sentence or before) with concern and help being offered to both the offender and his family by maintaining their contact during sentence, his chances of effective transition and resettlement are enhanced".²

This sounds all very hopeful and enterprising but Pendleton perceptively notes that if Davies's view of the deleterious effects of imprisonment is correct, "through-care is probably only a more humane and sophisticated way of seeking to ameliorate the total separation and emptiness of custody by reducing the polarisation between outside and in".³ Certainly the evidence of the supposed effectiveness of any form of through-care in reducing recidivism is sparse. In a carefully constructed investigation, under the auspices of the Apex Trust (an employment agency for ex-prisoners) the present author⁴ has considered, for example, whether an active policy of interviewing men several weeks prior to release with a view to obtaining employment interviews for men to attend immediately on their release from prison had the effect of lowering the reconviction rate of this group compared with a control group who were not offered this specialist service.

In the event there was really nothing to suggest that there was any difference in the subsequent reconviction rates of the two groups at least after a follow up of one year. However, it could be reasonably argued that this is hardly the sustained through-care of the type envisaged by most enthusiasts of the concept.

Enthusiasts can certainly take some heart from at least two carefully controlled experimental studies. The Scandinavian project reported by Berntsen and Christiansen⁵ has for some time stood like an oasis among the barren lands of the negative findings of most other studies. Berntsen and Christiansen maintain that "socio-psychologically oriented supporting therapy combined with relatively comprehensive welfare conditions lead to significantly lower recidivism than does the traditional treatment of Danish short-term prisoners".⁶ After a follow-up when all the prisoners had had an opportunity of being in freedom for at least six years, 41 per cent of the experimental group had had further experience of some form of penal incarceration compared with 58 per cent of the control group. While there were apparently no major methodological flaws in the research design, in the face of several less promising results from other studies it seemed difficult to accept the major finding at its face value. However, more recently, Margaret Shaw's monograph, *Social Work in Prison*,⁷ seems to give a similar message to the earlier Danish study. In an experiment in the use of extended contact with offenders which in reality amounted to 12-15 forty-minute interviews held by welfare



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officers during the final six months of their sentence, the results compared with a group of controls who simply had normal access to welfare officers were favourable—57 per cent of the "treatment group" were reconvicted within two years of their release from prison as compared with 76 per cent of the control group of men who were in fact serving sentences at the same prisons of Gartree and Ashwell.

What seems to be emerging from these various studies is that offering employment in isolation is unlikely to have significant effects in lowering the reconviction rates for the general run of the prison population, but sometimes, perhaps when allied with other forms of help, finding employment may make a contribution. Hence, in recent years APEX has liaised much more closely with other social work agencies involved in assisting the offender. In addition, from 1st January 1970, APEX has concentrated in trying to find suitable employment for white-collar and sexual offenders who approach the organisation, for these prisoners often have specific employment problems which could perhaps be ameliorated by the intervention of a specialist employment agency.

There has been concern at APEX regarding the enormous amount of placing effort expended on behalf of the clients but which has quite limited success. For example, 18,575 letters

and telephone calls on behalf of 474 white-collar offenders produced only 173 actual placings where the clients started work,⁶ although of course, these clients were often not the easiest placing propositions. However, what I wish to consider here (again using this consecutive cohort of 474 white-collar persons who came to APEX over a three and a quarter year period) is the importance of the *source* and *time* of referral for producing the most effective placing service. In other words, we want to find out whether it makes much difference when and how offenders arrive as clients of APEX.

Although APEX has increasingly become geared to accepting referrals from other organisations, still one in five are self-referrals. What we wanted to know at APEX was whether it was worthwhile dealing exclusively with offenders referred by other organisations, such as the probation officer. Rather than making a somewhat arbitrary decision, we decided to consider the various results. However, as Table 1 indicates, the proportions eventually placed by APEX (just over one third) are virtually identical whether they are self-referred or referred by a third party. The similarities are really quite striking.

TABLE 1
Self-referrals and third-party referrals—Percentages placed by Apex.

	No. of referrals	Placed by Apex	
		No.	Per cent
Self-referrals			
Letter to Apex while in prison	51	16	31.4
Letter to Apex after court appearance/release	9	4	44.4
Called at Apex offices	5	3	60.0
Telephone call to Apex	28	10	35.7
	(93)	(33)	(35.5)
Third-party referrals			
Prison welfare officer/governor	235	97	41.3
Local probation officer/social worker	83	26	31.3
Local employment exchanges	13	1	7.7
NACRO and other voluntary aftercare organisations	18	5	27.8
Other*	32	11	34.4
	(381)	(140)	(36.7)
TOTAL	474	173	(36.5)

*"Others" include various miscellaneous sources (such as personnel managers, citizen advice bureau and bishops) as well as relations of the offender.

What, however, is crucial to the concept of "through-care" is not so much who made the referral, but when the work actually starts in trying to assist a person. For APEX the distinction can be made between first interviewing a client *before* release compared with *after* release, for obviously one of the fundamental aims of "through-care", if it is attempting to go beyond simply ameliorating the total separation and emptiness of custody by

TABLE 2.
Success of Apex placing work in terms of the nature and time of referral.

Nature of referral	Column (A) Total No.	Column (B) No. placed by Apex	Column (C) No. staying at job for one year or more	Column (D) Per cent placed by Apex	Column (E) Per cent of total staying one year at job	Column (F) Per cent of those placed staying one year at job	Column (G) Per cent three or more pre-cons
Self-referral interviewed <i>before</i> release	31	10	6	32.3	19.4	60.0	51.6
Self-referral interviewed <i>after</i> release	62	23	13	37.1	21.0	56.5	24.2
Third-party referral interviewed <i>before</i> release	233	98	42	42.1	18.0	42.9	32.2
Third-party referral interviewed <i>after</i> release	148	42	19	28.4	12.8	45.2	35.8
TOTAL	474	173	80	35.5	16.9	46.2	33.5

reducing the polarisation between the world outside and the world inside prison, is to prepare the offenders more appropriately for release while in custody so that he can more effectively settle *after* release. Certainly in terms of the effectiveness of APEX in finding employment, it does make some difference whether offenders are seen by APEX *before* or *after* release. Where the first APEX interview was held *before* release, 41 per cent were eventually placed, but only 29 per cent of the ex-prisoner clients first interviewed

before release (42 per cent) and is least effective when there is a third party referral *after* release (28 per cent)—self-referrals come between these two points. In fact, the least satisfactory on most measures (although not spectacularly poorer) were the third party referrals *after* release and one suspects that many of these men are not referred by social workers as part of some well thought out plan but rather as an action of near last resort, for it is sometimes reassuring for a social worker to feel that he is doing something even though the action may not be particularly appropriate.

In considering the length of time that the men and women actually placed by APEX stayed at the jobs arranged, the most noteworthy point is that white-collar workers placed by APEX settle into the jobs arranged in quite a remarkable fashion. Of the 173 persons placed in the present sample, just under three quarters (71 per cent) were in the jobs after three months, and just under one half (46 per cent) were still there at the one year point after starting. More specifically, self-referrals seem to respond particularly well for approaching 60 per cent of self-referrals placed by APEX stayed at the jobs for one year or more (see Table 2, column F). With this sort of response from self-referrals, it would seem unwise for APEX to deal exclusively with those offenders referred by third parties, such as probation officers and other aftercare organisations.

Up to now we have made some rather bold but dangerous assumptions, for the differences in success between the various groups could be explained more simply by the types of clients which come by the various routes to APEX. For example, it could be the case that the poorer results of

after release were placed. (A further 70 clients had received non-custodial sentences of whom 34 per cent were placed by APEX). Table 2 combines the source of the referral (i.e. self-referrals or third party referrals) with the time of the first APEX interview (i.e. before or after release).

What emerges from Table 2 (Column D) is that APEX manages to place into employment the highest proportion when there is a third-party referral

the third party referrals *after* release reflect a poorer calibre of client coming by this route. This is important to investigate for certainly APEX finds it easier to place men and women back into employment who have shorter criminal records. However, column G of Table 2 indicates that, while they may or may not be poorer candidates on other grounds, third party referrals *after* release do not tend to have much longer criminal records. So this is not the obvious explanation for the poorer rates of this group. In fact, self-referrals interviewed *before* release generally have the least satisfactory criminal records for over one half of this group have three or more previous convictions—and this is the group which did particularly well in terms of staying at the jobs arranged by APEX.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

What this analysis seems to indicate is how the APEX service of finding employment is perceived and used by various groups of offenders and social workers.

Self-referrals. The longer records of some of the white-collar workers who refer themselves and are interviewed *before* release suggests that these are men who realise that they will have difficulty in finding employment after release. They take the initiative and contact APEX. While APEX manages to find work for a slightly lower proportion of these men, these do generally respond very favourably when they are actually placed, for well over half stay at the jobs for one year or more.

In contrast, men who refer themselves to APEX *after* release tend to be white-collar workers with less lengthy criminal records and probably these were offenders who did not think they would have difficulty in finding work after their current conviction. However, the reality of trying to find suitable employment may have taught them otherwise, so then they take the initiative of contacting APEX for help. If APEX can find suitable employment these offenders also seem to respond particularly favourably in terms of staying at the jobs.

Third party referrals. APEX has the most success in actually placing men who are referred by a third party and interviewed *before* release. In fact, these are the cases which are perhaps most akin to the concept of "through-care" for usually the prison welfare officer is the key person involved. Often there is a dossier being prepared for parole consideration and APEX

will be involved from an early stage. Interestingly, however, a lower proportion of third party referrals who are placed actually stay at the jobs for a year or more.

APEX has least success in placing third party referrals who are interviewed *after* release and there is sometimes the feeling that totally inappropriate cases are referred on some occasions (perhaps reflecting feelings of "where else can we send him?" on the part of some social workers). However, when they are placed, a similar proportion stay at the jobs as those who are referred *before* release.

CONCLUSION

What can a voluntary organisation like APEX learn from this study? In the first place, it is evident that we should continue to treat with considerable respect the requests for help from men and women who refer themselves to the organisation. Although a prison welfare officer may, unbeknown to APEX, have made the suggestion to the prisoner to contact APEX, these men are making the key move of writing or phoning APEX. With self-referrals there is the probable advantage of an element of self-realisation about their employment prospects and their present predicament. For this reason there is definitely a danger in limiting clients only to those who are referred directly by accredited social workers and for certain clients at least there is an attraction if the voluntary organisation is not too formally linked with any statutory service.

In a small study of this kind it is impossible to make any definitive conclusions. However, there is little evi-

dence to suggest that those offenders interviewed *before* release and where something akin to "through-care" is operating are all that more successful than the others. There is certainly some benefit to APEX in dealing with these men, for with the additional time available *before* release a marginally higher proportion are actually placed.

Perhaps the message which does begin to emerge is that there could be a danger if "planned aftercare" is regarded solely as the occasions when the social worker is holding the plan and it is regarded as "unplanned" if the initiative comes from the offender himself. Certainly there is evidence that some offenders in the present sample had worked out a plan themselves and were putting it into operation with rather favourable results. It would be wise perhaps to begin to consider "through-care" as much a movement in allowing the prisoner the opportunity to involve himself more actively in his own rehabilitation as well as "an important movement in involving the probation officer even more actively in prison."

1. DAVIES, MARTIN (1974). *Prisoners of Society: Attitudes and Aftercare*. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
2. PENDLETON, J. A. (1975), Book review, *Prison Service Journal*, (July).
3. *Ibid.*
4. SOOTHILL, K. L. (1974). *The Prisoner's Release*. Allen and Unwin.
5. BERNTSEN, K. and CHRISTIANSEN, K. (1965), "A Resocialisation Experiment with Short-Term Offenders" in Christiansen, K. O. (ed.), *Scandinavian Studies in Criminology*, Vol. 1. Tavistock.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
7. SHAW, MARGARET, (1974). *Social Work in Prison*, Home Office Research Studies, No. 22, London, H.M.S.O.
8. SOOTHILL, K. L. "The Effort Involved in Finding Employment for White-collar Offenders". *British Journal of Social Work*. (In press).

"IN all the years I've stood outside on the landing this is the first time anyone's asked me in for a chat!!!"

