

Special Needs - Vulnerable Prisoner Care at Camphill

Roy Drummer manages St Patrick's Hall or wing at HMP Camphill. The regime has been designed to help the vulnerable prisoner cope with the demands of prison life and offers an example of best practice in this field of work.

St Patrick's Hall is a wing for 45 prisoners at Camphill on the Isle of Wight.

The aim of the Wing is to provide a high standard of custodial and personal development care for the prisoners, who are people not able to cope in the normal environment of the prison.

The Development of VP Care

In 1990 the concept, which has evolved to today's VP at Camphill, was more closely related to 'inadequate behaviour' or 'silly behaviour'. It was usually the behaviour of prisoners with learning difficulties, who were slow to react and respond to care. They were often Rule 43 applicants and tended to be relatively easy to work with.

Care in the Community and the closure of hospitals for the mentally ill, led to much more serious cases of socially and mentally disadvantaged prisoners finding their way to St Patrick's Hall.

Behaviour was typically uncontrollable and the large numbers of such prisoners arriving in the wing meant the Team had to sit down and rethink how they would deal with these cases – because they had no experience to draw upon.

The Medical Officer found himself rejecting transfers from the London prisons because the prisoners were assessed as unlikely to cope in a normal (prison) environment.

St Patrick's offered to give these prisoners an opportunity and they were given an initial two week's assessment period.

Most settled, thanks to the quality of care offered by the multi-disciplinary team, and St Patrick's evolved, almost by accident, into a VP Care Wing – with the potential for becoming a Special Needs Unit for prisons in the South.

Service Development

The service developed, initially, almost by default.

Officers developed the skills of dealing with VP's through personal effort; by trial and error; from a team approach and from feedback or feed-in from the MO and/or a Psychiatrist.

Today the service depends heavily on the multi-disciplinary team of:

- Officers, who have special personal qualities to deal with this type of prisoner (as well as standard custodial competence)
- Professionals, especially the Medical Officer and the Psychologist, Probation staff, Psychiatrist and others relevant to meet particular needs.

The team meets regularly for case conferences and to further develop the service.

When a prisoner is proving to be especially difficult those officers on duty will discuss:

- i) the behaviours being displayed
- ii) their suggestions for the Personal Officer to deal with the prisoner.

An agreed approach will be tried by the Personal Officer and this will be fed back to the group:

- i) for their information
- ii) for further development, if necessary.

If the prisoner makes no progress, he will be referred to the MO for further attention/treatment.

Slowly, the team has developed the service in this way, drawing on one another for the necessary support.

Planning the Service

Initial key initiatives included:

- an officer who became a counsellor in suicide treatment and he, in turn, helps other officers to recognise the signs and, either take action, or seek his help
- a suicide suite designed to replace more standard treatment of segregation for such prisoners.

The concept was developed elsewhere but officers at Camphill have taken it up and driven it through.

The suite has special

- furniture – to prevent self harm
- windows – to prevent self harm
- cameras and monitors
- decor to lift a suicidal prisoner's mood.

It is an area of respite when needed. It is not intended that anyone stays there permanently.

One technique to try to ensure a suicidal prisoner will communicate was not to include a lavatory in the suite. It is hoped that this will give experienced officers a way into general, gentle conversation at some stage, to establish a relationship and begin treatment/therapy.

Domestic Facility

A further planned development acknowledges that VP's tend not to be able to cope with the basic daily living skills.

The planned domestic facility will allow them to learn and develop their skills and an acceptance of the desirability of washing and ironing clothes and simple nutrition cooking and safety.

Management Information

In addition to standard management information required by the manager and staff on a wing, the VP Wing will often need different information as well as, sometimes, more detailed standard information to provide prisoners with the highest quality of service.

1. **Personal Dossiers** are compiled and kept up to date at all times and contain:
 - Page 1 (the CV) of the prisoner's record
 - medical card - the MO's record of assessment treatment (especially

treatment changes)

- Liaison between the MO and officers is vital, if officers are to provide the best service. Changes in treatment can lead to changes in behaviour
- History sheet or Daily Record
 - visits
 - restrictions
 - behaviours (eg associated with drugs/alcohol abuse)
- Applications
- Visiting Passes or Orders.

2. The Occurrence Book records in brief, but sufficient, detail information about anyone who has had any difficulty with anyone else.
3. The sentence plan often involves a lot of behavioural development, sometimes basic (for example, speaking in a normal voice), sometimes more subtle (for example, thinking ahead, or, reflectively).
4. The Personal Officer scheme is of paramount importance and unusually long periods are often spent by officers talking to and listening to inmates, often patiently repeating information which is important to the inmate but which they are not retaining.

Activities

VP's mostly do not leave the wing. Arrangements have been developed, often thanks to the goodwill of those involved, to bring activities and experts to the Wing.

Exercise - anyone wishing to exercise can do so between 08.30 and 09.00.

Work - about 10 per cent of the wing go to work.

Education - Day centre - Occupation Therapy - about 50 per cent are involved in crafts, learning the basics of computing etc.

Orderlies - 15 per cent are orderlies and this is a figure which can sometimes be difficult to achieve.

Staff Performance and Development

At Camphill, the staffing of the VP Wing has depended on:

- i) finding permanent staff who have the

necessary qualities and motivation to work with VP's

- ii) ensuring cross-deployed officers received a thorough but quick induction so that they do not, inadvertently, undo in two minutes the constructive work of a colleague over two months.

Many of the qualities needed for working effectively with VP's are similar to those needed elsewhere in the prison, but often they are needed in much larger measures.

All officers are capable of development, but a major pre-requisite is that they wish to develop.

No formal development of any of the skills required has been able to be separately resourced, except suicide counselling. If the VP situation continues to become more prevalent, as is likely, then serious consideration will need to be given to planned staff development and to succession planning.

Qualities required of effective Officers

- infinite patience
- sense of humour, understanding
- sense of fun – these prisoners struggle to make their own
- consistently seeing the positive side of a situation
- persistence with people
- fine judgement of INDIVIDUAL situations
- able to deal with attention seeking behaviour for what it is
- able to find their own level of acceptance to prisoners in the current context of prisoner care

- able to communicate in the way/means which suits the situation, for example, with non-communicators, with try-on's, with loud, angry, verbally violent prisoners
- able to predict and anticipate behaviour and take action to prevent it (for example self-harm)
- able to understand learning in adults and design learning to suit the individual
- able to assess readiness for learning
- able and willing to get to know the person
 - listening
 - asking good questions (open, information seeking)
 - being very observant and interpreting soundly what they see
- registering and recording accurately information about prisoners for others to use
- having a good, accurate memory of specific matters.

All of these may need developing in officers working with VP's

Conclusions

Camphill is proud of its work with VP's and the efforts made to provide a high quality service with a multi-disciplinary team committed to helping these prisoners to progress. As requests for transfers have shown, its reputation spreads amongst the Southern prisons.

As ever resources are needed to take our work further forward. Staff development and service planning being key to our progress ■

STATISTICS

Prison officer appointments						
Year	1989/90	1990/91	1991/92	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95
Ethnic minorities	38	42	59	46	25	28
As % of prison officers recruited	2.4	2.3	2.2	2.4	3.5	2.7
Prison officer appointments						
Year	1989/90	1990/91	1991/92	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95
Women	210	282	392	259	135	230
As % of prison officers recruited	13.4	15.4	15.7	13.4	19.9	21.9

[Equal Opportunities in the prison Service Progress Report 1 October 1993 - 31 March 1995]