

typical remark was 'I've been an officer 14 years and no one has ever asked me what I feel about the job...after riots, the only person I could talk to is my wife.' The introduction of post incident care teams for officers seems to be a good innovation. Unfortunately, some officers said that they were unwilling to take up the service as they felt that it was seen to count against them and they found the members of the team to be too distant from them.

It is an almost meaningless cliché to call for more research at the end of a paper. In this case, the research needs to be carried out not just by the professional inquirers but also by the managers of the prisons. Nearly all the officers and many prisoners felt that governors were out of touch with what went

on on the wings. The results here suggest that not enough of the officers are aware of the problems faced by the prisoners. The prisoners and officers interviewed felt that their experiences were being neither listened to nor heard. If the prison service is serious about improving conditions in prisons and dealing with intimidation, then it has to commit itself to carrying out the kind of research that it suggested is needed in its bullying information pack. It also needs to take heed of the kinds and levels of fears that prisoners and officers have. Without improved communication between management and staff and prisoners, the situation on the wings will be hard to assess and even harder to change, where change is needed ■

DIRECT AND INDIRECT MEDIATION AT STOCKEN:

PRISONERS MEET WITH VICTIMS

In the past 12 months, Stocken Prison has had three separate encounters involving a total of 9 victims and 10 prisoners. Prison officer Terry Green and Senior Probation Officer Alan Gray have been the key figures in this pioneering scheme working closely with Leicester Victims of Crime Scheme.

The idea came initially from a prisoner serving four years for grievous bodily harm. When sentenced in court, he heard how the victim, who was seriously affected by the attack, was receiving counselling from her local victims of crime scheme. Many months after the event she was still very distressed, blamed herself, had suicidal thoughts and felt life was not worth living. Both expressed a wish for a meeting and this took place with Alan Gray the Deputy Director of the Victims of Crime Scheme present as facilitator.

Not surprisingly, it was a tense and anxious meeting. The prisoner's apology and

reassurances were not acknowledged as he had hoped. However, the victim was eventually able to ventilate her anger and share the long-term consequences on her life.

What was achieved? The feedback many months later was that the victim was now finished with counselling, no longer blamed herself or feared for a repeat attack and was due to go to University. By chance, I met the prisoner in the middle of Leicester. He had completed his parole successfully, was working and living with his family. Whilst he was very disappointed not to have received any credit from the victim whatsoever, he recognised that helping her to move on positively in her life was reward in itself.

The second meeting focused principally on house burglary with five victims and four offenders present. They were not the actual victims.

*Terry Green, Prison Officer
and Alan Gray, Senior
Probation Officer, HMP
Stocken*



The victims were very tense initially, most of them not having slept the night before. They cried, they got angry but gradually as trust developed they questioned and listened in a constructive manner. The offenders seemed taken-aback at the long-term consequences on the victims. The oldest victim was 75, the youngest 19. They shared their every-day concerns that they would be burgled again. Three of the offenders displayed what was interpreted all round as genuine concern and empathy and impressed the victims.

After the meeting, the victims were taken on a brief tour of the prison and saw inside a cell. Thereafter they were taken to lunch in the Mess courtesy of the Governor's hospitality fund. They all expressed their satisfaction in the day; to quote one: 'It was nice being made to feel special'.

The next meeting focused specifically on unrelated victims of assault and offenders with current convictions involving violence. Unfortunately the balance was wrong in that three victims and five offenders were present as two victims dropped out at short notice. However this did not appear to detract from the value of the exercise.

The meeting was dominated by the three victims telling their stories in detail. Two of them had very visible scars; one had a scar from his neck to his navel. It was clear that the inmates were all taken aback both at what they saw and heard. In their own way, they expressed sympathy and concern and even the two who said next to nothing showed their concern by their body language.

Subsequently, two of them have written letters via the Victims of Crime Scheme expressing their sympathy to one victim. Another prisoner has written to his victim as a result of this encounter. Both groups expressed a desire to meet again and this took place three months later. There was an amazing contrast in how everyone presented themselves from the previous occasion. The victims were relaxed, open and even enthusiastic about meeting again. They had clearly formed an informal support network of their own. A good, balanced discussion ensued which clearly had a reinforcing impact on all concerned. Much empathy and support was evident and the remorse expressed by the offenders seemed to be accepted as genuine.

There have been many 'spin-offs' from these encounters, not least the working

relationships formed between Probation, prison and the Victims of Crime Scheme. Clearly many victims and offenders will not be interested in such meetings. At Stocken, we now have a waiting list of prisoners; most of those interested have been 'sold' the idea by their peers.

It is also encouraging that some prisoners have simultaneously chosen to write to their victims to apologise, usually via Victims of Crime Schemes. One victim has become a Probation volunteer as a result of his experience; others have ventured out and begun to socialise again for the first time since their original trauma.

We encouraged some offenders to write up their view of these encounters. The quotations below are significant:

'Seeing and listening to each victim's own story of their ordeal was distressing for me; it made me realise that my victims were more than likely still suffering mentally in the same way'.

'In my opinion the whole meeting was a great success because of the fact that it made me aware that when I was sentenced for four years, it was not the end of my victim's ordeal. Like the three victims of the meeting, their ordeal was still going on and would for years to come'.

'I will never forget the group meeting and the three victims. I think there should be more meetings of this nature'.

'You could see the tears and sadness building up in their eyes and sense their anger and pain. It was a very, very humbling experience and it certainly makes you stop and think about what you did'.

Our hope is to run these meetings quarterly, with the next one centering on Lifers meeting the relatives of murder victims. They are time consuming in terms of preparation, the meeting itself, de-briefing and seeking feed-back, etc. We share a personal, wider hope from these small beginnings, that a victim perspective is built into all casework with prisoners. Anyone interested in talking further is welcome to contact either of the authors at HMP Stocken on 0780 410771 ■

