

- ❑ What to do with those prisoners who express extensive denial regarding their offences.
- ❑ What range of cognitive/psychometric tests should we use to assess the criminogenic needs of our prisoners.

All these are challenges for the future.

The format of the LSPG has been extensively disseminated and was presented at the recent 9th European Groupwork Symposium in London. For those interested issues concerning the LSPG and the general management of young adults serving

life sentences can be found in the British Journal of Community Justice which contains the papers presented at the first ever Prison Service conference on dealing with that group. (G. Boswell, D. Fisher, F. Flaxington, M. Loughlin. 'Working with Young Adults Sentenced to Life' in *British Journal of Community Justice*. Vol. 1. No 2. Summer 2002. Sheffield Hallam University, pp 77-89)

Working in a prison can leave one feeling somewhat isolated and insulated. Recognition by the Butler Trust serves to remind such workers that their work is recognised and appreciated.



Brixton's Best

Information, Advice and Resettlement Service

Joyce Headley, NACRO Information and Service Manager.

Joyce Headley was a Butler Trust Award winner in 2002: her unfailing energy and enthusiasm in the face of very difficult circumstances prompted several prisoners to nominate her. Dealing with about 100 referrals a week, she provides an essential service to prisoners to help them resettle in the community. Advocacy work with landlords, local authority housing departments, benefits agency and potential employers is complemented by events in the prison involving outside agencies.

Working in a prison is like no other working environment. The fact that it is a place of incarceration means that it is important to strike the right balance between working to the regime in place whilst meeting the needs of the prisoner population.

Gaining respect from both the prisoners and the prison staff is essential to being able to carry out an effective, professional service. Adopting a professional working approach, which seeks to build positive working relationships with staff at all levels and so becoming part of the team helps bring this about. As the representative of NACRO in the prison, I act as the information link between the prison and NACRO.

I write to say a BIG thank you for all your efforts in helping me to obtain accommodation. Without your help I would now be facing even more problems. Keep up the good work, I think that a lot of lads here really appreciate NACRO being here. I would dread to think what would happen without you.

The NACRO Brixton Prison Information Advice and Resettlement Service contributes to the prison's policy of providing purposeful out-of-cell activities, enhancing its profile as a community prison moving into the twenty-first century. Brixton Prison funds it.

I have over ten years' experience of working with offenders, both in prison and in the community. From 1990 I worked as a Job Club Manager at Pentonville prison for six years, (the first Job Club pilots scheme set-up by the Employment Service in a prison). I was responsible for getting prisoners into work on their release by developing links with employers. Through this experience I gained a thorough understanding of the diverse needs of both ex-offenders and those at risk of offending in institutional and community environments.

I have been at Brixton managing the NACRO Information Advice and Resettlement Service as its full-time worker since June 1996. My role has been to develop what was previously a voluntary service, and expand both its accessibility and also its range of services. I achieved this by creating more comprehensive referral and information procedures and networking with a wide range of other agencies. I made use of the internal means of communication such as notice boards in Reception and

the wings. I took part in the daily Induction programme to inform new comers of the service. I also relied very heavily on the co-operation of prison officers who are first point of contact for prisoners looking for answers that our service can provide.

Very early on it became apparent that the range of needs that the prisoners presented were quite diverse and complex. With Brixton Prison being a local prison, most of prisoners referring themselves were either recently imprisoned or were nearing the end of their sentence. Immediate needs therefore represent matters left unresolved due to their unexpected imprisonment such as welfare benefits, housing and landlord matters; and issues prisoners face immediately before release:

- ☐ finding accommodation;
- ☐ negotiating the welfare benefits system; and,
- ☐ employment.

Between these categories of prisoners there are also referrals from prisoners in mid sentence or on remand who presented needs that affected their time in prison such as mental health issues, family matters, substance misuse matters and so on.

The number of people we have seen in the first year of my employment in 1996 was 757. From January 2001 to September 2002 we have seen over 3,000 prisoners. The increased number of referrals generated has been accommodated through systems I have put in place, and the fact that the NACRO Information Advice and Resettlement Service is based on G and C Wings thereby allowing prisoners more immediate access to NACRO staff. There are now two more staff for whom I have responsibility. The service has developed and expanded.

The service is further augmented by information sessions provided by representatives from other organisations on particular topics. These include welfare benefit entitlement experts and assistance in the completing claim forms such as Community Care Grant forms, those for Job Seekers Allowance and arranging appointment dates and times for interview, where possible. Organisations involved have included Employment Service Job Centres, Local Authority Housing Departments, Benefits Agency, The Prince's Trust, Local Education Colleges to assist with career guidance — to name but a few. The aim is to help break down some of the barriers that exist.

Other initiatives I have taken include the organisation in the prison chapel of 'Open Day'

events. After the first event, which took place in 1999, I was nominated 'Employee of the Month' by prison officers, who vote for a member of staff who they felt the award should go to, which the Governor presented. I was very surprised and honoured to have received the award, as the only civilian worker to receive the award at the time. This was based on the success of the service NACRO provided in the prison. It was good to be recognised by our colleagues.

We have just arranged our fourth 'open day'. Previously the prisoners have heard from Sir David Ramsbotham, then Chief Inspector of Prisons; the Mayor of Lambeth, and, in October 2002, Mr. Terry Waite CBE, former Beirut hostage, whom Ann Fragniere, Director of the Butler Trust, very kindly arranged to attend. Mr. Waite talked about his own experience while held hostage in Beirut. He urged prisoners to make best use of the occasion and the opportunities provided to enable them resettle back into the community.

Lloyd Honeyghan, the former two-time undisputed world welterweight boxing champion was invited as a surprise guest. His visit went down well with both the exhibitors and prisoners alike. Some said they got a 'huge buzz' out of meeting him, others that they were inspired by both Terry Waite and Lloyd Honeyghan, who both took time to talk to prisoners individually about various issues and concerns.

A greater emphasis is being placed upon resettlement of prisoners: the Government has plans to extend this area of work in order to reduce some of the causes of crime — prisoners leaving prison unprepared — a lost opportunity to put right some of the factors behind their offending in the first place. Helping prisoners to prepare for their release from prison plays a vital role in stopping them from committing further crimes in the future. Home Office research shows that:

- ☐ unemployed ex-offenders are twice as likely to re-offend as those who go straight to a job on release from prison; and,

Just a note of thanks to say how appreciative we are of NACRO's involvement in the pre-release course — mainly by bringing in outside visitors to offer advice and direction, clarification on housing, employment, and training among other issues. To many of us this is vital if we need to break out from the vicious cycle of jail — out — jail.

Thank you for your assistance in sorting out my problem with the Borough Council, although I have not had a reply after my housing benefit form was filled in and sent by your good self, I find that it has been a problem taken off my back. It's nice to know that people like yourself and your staff are there to help.

- ☐ prisoners who are homeless on release are more than twice as likely to commit further crimes than those who have a home.

Providing prisoners with housing and employment advice therefore plays a vital role in preventing them from re-offending on release. The special events and our service have been highly successful in encouraging the community to work with prisons to help reduce crime. I believe that even if one person benefits from my effort it would be a big achievement. That is one less person who will go back to crime, one less victim. I remain determined and optimistic.



As good as you want it to be

John Spedding, Principal Officer, Oswald Unit, HMYOI Castington. Butler Trust Award Winners for Working with Young Offenders.

The Oswald Unit houses 40, 15-17 year olds serving long sentences, many with a history of serious behavioural problems. The success of the Unit lies in meticulous planning and an inspiring vision, which has engendered a vibrant, purposeful atmosphere and remarkable sense of community between staff and trainees who eat and participate in classes together. Staff use leisure time constructively and enhance already above average GCSE results by bringing their own hobbies into the Unit. There have been no positive drug tests since the Unit opened and a comparatively tiny number of assaults. Families say they cannot compare the boys with the day they arrived at the Unit.

In August 2000, Oswald Unit opened at Castington. It is a purpose-built unit to hold 15-18 year olds serving section 53/91 sentences. These trainees are serving sentences up to and including life. Staff were volunteers for the unit. They came fully committed and excited at the prospect of being part of a new vision of what can be achieved with young people, given good staffing levels, and located on a unit ideally designed for holding a maximum of 40 trainees.

The unit ethos is all about building up a good relationship between trainees and staff through

the staff's interaction with them, breaking down barriers. The staff were taking up the role of a responsible adult and earned respect through their caring, honest attitudes.

Over the months a community has been built on the unit and mutual respect has been gained. Staff who had outside interests, brought them onto the unit and quickly got the lads involved. Hobby classes became more and more popular. The landscape of the unit, which had started bare, soon became colourful with plants and flowers. As the weather warmed up, the staff were on the sports field playing football and softball with the lads.

Academically, good results were starting to happen. One trainee who had arrived on Oswald Unit, barely able to read or write, won a prestigious 'Koestler' award for his book '*Alec the caterpillar*'.

When I came to Oswald I was only 15 years old and I am now 17 years old. Now what did Oswald do for me? It gave me the belief to do things like read and write. I wrote a book about a caterpillar, which won a Koestler Puffin Award and I was given £60. It gave me the chance to control my temper and I