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Recognising good practice in prisons and probation

Simon Shepherd is Director of The Butler Trust. He is interviewed by **Dr. Jamie Bennett**, Deputy Director in HM Prison and Probation Service.

Simon Shepherd has been Director of The Butler Trust, a charity celebrating and promoting what's best in UK prisons, probation and youth justice, since 2008.

Simon originally trained as a forensic psychologist and worked for the Prison Service for nine years, including at Glen Parva, Swinfen Hall, Featherstone, Holloway, Wandsworth and Prison Service HQ. He spent the next ten years in the drugs and alcohol field, first as Chief Executive of the European Association for Treatment of Addiction and then as head of the Federation of Drug and Alcohol Professionals. He has also served as an independent expert on the Scottish Accreditation Panel for Offender Programmes, and the Correctional Services Accreditation Panel for Offending Behaviour Programmes in England and Wales. And he has been a visiting lecturer at Kings College, London; City, University of London; and Birkbeck, University of London.

The Butler Trust was set up in 1985 to recognise and celebrate outstanding practice by those working with offenders, through an annual award scheme. The Trust is named after Richard Austen Butler (RAB), later Lord Butler of Saffron Walden, who was Home Secretary from 1957 to 1962, and introduced a series of reforms to improve the management, care and rehabilitation of offenders. During his parliamentary career, as well as being Home Secretary, Butler served as President of the Board of Education, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Foreign Secretary and Deputy Prime Minister.

Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal is the Trust's Patron. Each year she presides over the Award Ceremony, presenting Award Winners and Commendees with their certificates.

Since its launch the Trust has widened its scope to bring first probation and then youth justice within its purview, and increasingly focuses not only on recognising excellence on the part of staff and volunteers working in correctional settings, but also on helping to further develop the work of Award Winners and Commendees, and to share good practice more widely.

The interview took place in December 2021

JB: The Ruth Mann and Kathy Biggar Trophies were inaugurated by the Butler Trust in 2021. What was the thinking behind them?

SS: We know that there are lots of good things going on across the prison and probation estates, but they often remain as local initiatives and are not shared

more widely. There are probably many reasons, not least that Governors, and their Probation equivalents, are so busy doing their jobs that they don't feel they have the time to share what they do with their colleagues. I suspect too that there's a natural modesty on many people's parts, and a reluctance to 'blow their own trumpets'. So we came up with the idea of a competition — people love a competition — and it worked! We had almost 50 initial submissions for the Ruth Mann Trophy for custodial settings, and another 30 for the Kathy Biggar Trophy, from probation and youth justice settings.

JB: Could you describe Ruth Mann and Kathy Biggar, what work distinguished them and why the Trust launched a prize named in their honour?

SS: As I am sure many people are aware, Ruth and Kathy were both outstanding champions of good practice throughout their careers. Ruth, who was a Prison Psychologist, was passionate about uncovering and sharing practice that contributed to a rehabilitative culture in prisons, while Kathy, a Probation Officer, was (among many other things) behind the Listeners programme and its roll-out across the custodial estate. They were also both very special human beings. So it just felt appropriate to name the Trophies in their honour, and we were delighted their families agreed to let us do so.

JB: What are the criteria for the trophies and what is the process for submissions and judging?

SS: While our Annual Awards are for people, the Trophies are for are examples of local practice which have a positive impact on prisoners and/or staff, and which could potentially be rolled out more widely. That might be something unique to a particular workplace, or a notable example of a wider initiative. We write to Governors, and Probation Directors, asking them if they have any initiatives which they think might be of interest to their colleagues elsewhere. We follow that up with a brief telephone interview to find out a bit more, and then write-up a submission for them, from that. We have two panels of sector experts — one for each Trophy — who review all the submissions, and then interview those shortlisted, before deciding on the finalists. A larger panel then review both sets of finalists together, to decide on the winner in each case.

JB: The first Ruth Mann Trophy was awarded to HMP Maghaberry in Northern Ireland, for introducing autism friendly visits. Could you describe this work?

SS: Neurodiversity, including autism, is common not only among both prisoners but also their children. Maghaberry have introduced special visits just for families with children with autism, together with 'pre-visit guides' for the children on what to expect, additional equipment in the crèche, and a 'relaxation room' — with bubble lamps, toys and gadgets — to help provide a calming environment. And all the staff on duty during 'autism friendly' visits have received autism awareness training. It's a brilliant way to help children with autism cope in a situation which is difficult enough at the best of times, and which often leads to them not being able otherwise to visit at all.

JB: The two other finalists were HMP Full Sutton for a project to refurbish and de-fog Perspex windows, and HMP Wealstun's initiative to introduce problem solving mentors. Could you describe these initiatives?

SS: Full Sutton's 'see the light' initiative is a simple idea, to repolish fogged Perspex windows, so prisoners and staff can see out of them again. It's cost-effective, brightens the living and working environment, and brings the outside in. While Wealstun's 'Problem Support Mentors' makes use of the skills and resources of prisoners to help their peers — training them as wing-based peer mentors to act as social problem solving coaches, using the 6 step problem solving principles of the Thinking Skills Programme (TSP) to help other prisoners find solutions to their problems.

JB: The first Kathy Biggar Trophy was awarded to the London National Probation Service, for their young adult transitions programme. Could you describe this work?

SS: London Probation's young adults transition programme is a 10 session, trauma-informed, modular 1-2-1 programme for young adults moving on from youth justice services to adult probation. It's a particularly vulnerable time for young people, and data suggests that the programme reduces their anxiety about the transition, reduces breaches and 'failures' on transition, and improves their engagement with adult services.

JB: The two other finalists were East of England National Probation Service for their

student counselling service, and Hillingdon Youth Offending Team for their parent champions, who support families of those at risk of exploitation. Could you describe these initiatives?

SS: Many people on probation could benefit from counselling for a wide range of issues, but it is hard for service users to access and not something that the services themselves are funded to provide. East of England NPS have neatly resolved the problem by offering placement opportunities to local counsellors in training, so they can provide counselling to their service users free of charge. And Hillingdon YOT's parent champions programme, run by the charity Brilliant Parents, provides peer support to the families of children at risk of exploitation, by other parents who have experienced similar situations themselves.

JB: How were the winners recognised for their achievements?

SS: We presented the winners with their Trophies at local events in their places of work, with Michael Wheatley, Ruth's husband, making the presentation at HMP Maghaberry, and Pam Wilson, a close friend and colleague of Kathy's, presenting the trophy to London NPS.

JB: How have you disseminated the good practices that you have identified through the Trophies?

SS: To help disseminate the notable practice we've identified through the Trophies, we have uploaded write-ups of all the submissions we received (not just the winners and finalists) to our knowledge exchange platform — www.theKnowledgeExchange.uk. We also sent write-up on each of the finalists to Governors and Probation Directors across the country.

JB: There must be many prisons and community-based services that have innovative and successful practices. What would you say to practitioners about the value of the Ruth Mann and Kathy Biggar Trophies?

SS: After the success of this year's pilot, we're going to make the Trophies an annual thing, and we'd encourage as many Governors and Probation Directors as possible to take part each year. There is so much good stuff going on that really needs to be shared as widely as possible. And it's not difficult to do — all we need is a couple of sentences outlining each initiative and we'll take it from there.