

What works for freedom?

If prison doesn't work, what does? Anna Gilmour outlines the development of a new Centre for Crime and Justice Studies project.

In 2007, the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies published a 'Scoping Study on a Community Based Centre for Male Adult Offenders with Multiple Needs' which looked at the requirements of a proposed project aimed at supporting male convicted offenders with multiple needs. The study provides a detailed review of needs-led models for engagement with men in criminal justice.

Whilst the original remit was men caught up in the criminal justice system, the study found very few examples of properly evaluated practice readily available to draw on. Interestingly, some of the best examples uncovered were projects working with women and young people. For example, the study reviewed the 218 Centre, which it described as an innovative project providing residential and non-residential support services for convicted women in Glasgow. 218 serves as a diversion from prosecution and an alternative to custody. More generally the project offers support such as residential or daily for detoxification, outreach to health, and social work and housing services. Women who use 218 have a key-worker and services are generally designed to be 'person-centred and designed with the woman, her needs and capabilities in mind'.

There are other practice examples profiled in the scoping study that chime in with the ethos and values of meeting needs and keeping people out of criminal justice, but we were left with the feeling that there were more examples of innovative practice taking place across the country that were not being profiled anywhere. This led us to question how these locally based examples of practice, and the lessons they offer, can be shared, discussed and assessed in terms of whether they can be applied more widely.

So, building on the scoping study, we are now developing a project, with the working title of 'Works for freedom', aimed at addressing these issues. In a nutshell, the new project aims to seek out, explore and network effective practice that aims to support anyone targeted by the criminal justice system that focuses on a broader range of needs-based interventions rather than punitive interventions.

Why call it 'Works for freedom'?

In part, because when Michael Howard said 'prison works', we weren't sure we believed him. The working title conveys the project's emphasis that people with multiple needs should largely be free of the criminal justice system. 'Works' also refers to the practice that is delivered to support people caught up in the criminal justice system, and also conveys an interest in exploring

what might work, i.e. what might be effective in keeping people outside of the criminal justice.

Those **cjm** readers who know the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies will know that we have form in this area. The scoping study drew on existing knowledge within the Centre that has been accumulated over many years by examining models of working with convicted offenders, and drawing out the principles and features that underpin effective practice. Through 'Works for freedom' the Centre is also building on a history of working with practitioners and of encouraging the sharing of knowledge about what really makes a difference rather than what ticks boxes.

Who is 'Works for freedom' for?

Anyone working across social justice interventions with an interest in keeping people outside of the criminal justice system. Whilst the project will primarily be aimed at those delivering services, the range of information provision will also draw on the involvement of researchers and academics seeking to engage with practitioners about what might work.

While resources for those involved in frontline delivery within criminal justice exist, in the form of crimereduction.gov.uk, with examples of practice delivered by the voluntary sector well-represented on smartjustice.org.uk, the focus of the 'Works for freedom' project will be on practice that addresses the needs of the person and which shows promise in achieving this aim.

Central to the work of the first year of the project will be the development of a web-based information provision hub that will grow into a treasure trove for practitioners looking for ideas about effective person-centred practice. It will also offer a space for information sharing, and crucially, for ongoing dialogue and discussion.

The information provision service will include: a searchable database of projects and practice examples, so that practitioners looking for ideas can find tried and tested examples and other practitioners to compare experiences with; latest research findings and policy publications will be available to help front line workers to have easy access to what's behind practice developments, and there will also be a monthly e-digest service that will keep practitioners abreast of recent developments in research and policy.

The information sharing aspect will be dynamic content, driven by the issues practitioners face and want to discuss. We are currently considering what interactive features should be made available and are keen to get practitioners' feedback. For example, there might be a

facility for practitioners to discuss and explore interventions across a range of services through blogs and comment features. Groups with a shared interest in an ongoing policy theme or practice could be given the facility for an honest exchange of views through setting up non-public access communities of interest and practice through the website. Practitioners should also be able to share information by nominating a project or particular type of practice for inclusion on 'Works for freedom'.

It is hoped that projects nominated to be case studies for the site will become a focus of discussion. For example, the Just for Kids Law (JfK) works to support children and young people who have been involved in the criminal justice system, working with those who are amongst the most vulnerable and impoverished in our society. JfK legal representation is supplemented with support to address young peoples' needs around housing, education, immigration, employment and housing. The project is needs-based and operates an open door policy for its clients. JfK raises important considerations around the ethos of a project, and the range of services provided to meet multiple needs. As a small, local community-

based project, there could be discussion around this model and how it might be replicated in different parts of the country.

JfK was a 2008 winner of the Una Padel Award, an annual prize awarded by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, which celebrates the work of determined and visionary individuals and organisations working in the social and criminal justice sectors. The new 'Works for freedom' site will provide a permanent home for the annual Una Padel Award and a place where other practitioners can engage in discussion with those who are nominated for an award.

This is an ambitious project that will only work if it is of use to practitioners. The combination of information provision, information sharing and social networking offers the possibility of breaking through some of the 'what works' and 'best practice' mantras and creating a space where some genuine dialogue can take place that will be stimulating for practitioners on the frontline of helping people with multiple needs. ■

Anna Gilmour is Policy Associate at the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies.

Interested in working for freedom? How you can help

If you are a practitioner, or represent social or criminal justice practitioners, and would like to play a role in the development of this resource, please do call 020 7848 1677 or email anna.gilmour@kcl.ac.uk



37th Annual Conference of the European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control

26th –29th August 2009 University of Central Lancashire, Preston, United Kingdom

'Crime', Justice, and Control: The challenge of recession

Times of recession tend to be periods of exclusion and repression which have profound implications for the lived realities of the powerless. The aim of this conference is to place the latest capitalist economic recession into context, specifically to consider its impact on processes of criminalisation, justice and control across Europe.

The conference also includes a special opening session to commemorate the life and work of world renowned Dutch criminologist Louk Hulsman, who died in January 2009.

Confirmed Speakers include:

Stan Cohen	Eric Allison	Steve Tombs	Andrea Beckmann
Scott Poynting	Phil Scraton	Barbara Hudson	Jehanne Hulsman
Basia Spalek	Rob White	Eammon Carrabine	George Rigakos

For further information and booking forms please see:

www.uclan.ac.uk/ahss/research/criminology_criminal_justice/conference2009.php

Email: centreccj@uclan.ac.uk

Booking forms and abstracts to be received by 15/07/2009.

www.europeangroup.org

www.loukhulsman.org