

## Interview

**Robert Christensen** worked for the U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons until he retired. He was invited by the Prison Service here to advise us on security issues.

### HOLLY WELSH INTERVIEWS ROBERT CHRISTIENSEN

**HOLLY WELSH:** Can you tell me a little bit about what you have actually been asked to come over and do?

**ROBERT CHRISTIENSEN:** *I was approached by the Assistant Director in the Federal Bureau of Prisons back in December 1994, who asked me if I was interested in coming over and doing some consulting work here. What I have done is look at perimeter security, primarily in Category C facilities, look at the Security Manual and provide some input on revising Security Manual. I just spent the last two weeks going to Wakefield, Full Sutton, Long Lartin and Frankland looking at their tool control and writing up a report. I have worked at the idea of using wire around the perimeters of Category C facilities and the potential use of what we call razor wire here in England.*

**H.W.** Does the wire have an electric current?

**R.C.** *No it is basically stainless steel wire that has very large sharp barbs, is very different from a dan wire that is used by your system, it has better snagging capabilities, and a little physically deterring too, just the physical appearance of it.*

**H.W.** What job did you do in America?

**R.C.** *There are 50 different correctional systems in the States and below that there are counties correctional systems and then below that there are city correctional systems and below all of that is the federal system. I worked for 20 some odd years for the federal system, then I went to work for a high rise what you would call a remand centre in Seattle, Washington, we had about 2,000 remands and I was the Operations*

*Director there and by the way it was very interesting. We use an awful lot of wire on the ground, what I call pyramiding rolls of wire, four rolls against the fence and as you come away from the fence to the inside of the facility it goes three, two, one, so basically you have a right angle of wire stacked up against the fence and it's very effective, but there are some problems here including Health and Safety.*

**H.W.** We have got a perception in this country that the gun is a big part of enforcement in American Prisons.

**R.C.** *No I think there is a misconception. Less than probably three per cent of the current federal facilities have gun towers, what they do have on any institutions fence that does not have gun towers is they have normal patrols in vehicles and these officers are armed, but apart from the institutions that have the big high gun towers you will not see a physical presence of guns in the institution or around the institution. So it is there and the inmates know its there and it can be foolhardy of me to say that it doesn't have an effect, but it is not a very visible presence, except for the major institutions that have what we call gun towers.*

**H.W.** What other things are there that you looked at?

**R.C.** *There are different ways of capping the top of walls for example I suggested some weaknesses in ganders and this has been proven at test sites. I have suggested that we may want to look at two fences in Category C's: a stop fence and a sterile area and then wire against the other fence. Highpoint has two fences, and the perimeter security is very decent because of that. I have suggested that whenever possible to have a perimeter road all the way around. I know that is not possible because of the locations. To me it is extremely difficult*

*if you know the escape that is taking place at 2 o'clock in the morning at one of your facilities at half a mile away on the far end and you have no other way to get to the outside perimeter. That is the case in many establishments because the lack of space you don't have a perimeter road that makes the exterior very accessible, particularly to a vehicle so that is why we are looking at a possibility, but it's precluded at a number of old facilities. Pentonville is like down town you know so there is not much you can do about that.*

**H.W.** You mentioned you were working at a high rise, was that in a town?

**R.C.** *Yes I was in down town Seattle, Washington. You might call it a city county remand centre, was 13 storeys high and all the new, what we call bookings, in the States the new arrests would be booked in there until they are formally charged/released. Then there were probably over 2000 of both men and women, there were probably five per cent of that were post-sentenced individuals waiting for what you would call allocation, which we call designation.*

**H.W.** And how does the security work in a place like that?

**R.C.** *Well the security was the physical building in itself, there were exercise areas on each floor.*

**H.W.** So no open exercise then?

**R.C.** *There was open exercise, it was kind of like a veranda for example you had your floor, then you had a high cement wall that was not connected at the tops, so you had some degree of fresh air coming in, it had a basket court out there and some weight lifting materials and so on and so forth, and then the Court House was a block away and there was an underground tunnel to take the inmates to and from Court, so this alleviated in most cases there was some exceptions to this, but in most cases alleviated the inmates being in vehicles, and transport was mainly used for significant distance to and from Court.*

**H.W.** Is there categorising of

prisoners in the States?

**R.C.** *In the federal system, the institutions are categorised as to the degree of security, maximum, medium, minimum and open basically your A, B, C and D and then inmates are categorised, but what we do a little bit different in what you do here is we Categorise inmates also under control problems. Primarily you look at the degree of threat, that the person may pose if he or she escapes or a public arrest, that's only one component with a classification system in the States. It is also geared to controlling inmates, so if you have got a proven control problem one who's exhibited control behaviour through other incarcerations. He may even though he is doing an eight month or 10 or 12 month sentence he may end up in very high security prison because of the need to have very firm controls on his behaviour. When we categorise inmates there is a formula, not so much different than your algorithm, but I think it maybe considers more factors than yours does and once an inmate is categorised he is determined or designated for a particular institution based on that categorisation.*

**H.W.** Does the estate match the categorisation. Here we have had Category D Prisons with space and Category C Prisons absolutely full?

**R.C.** *The emphasis of the federal system in the States uses that, let's put this inmate in the lowest degree of security that he is in. The predominant number of establishments in the States, prisons are what you would call Class D or Open and the last count there were 50 out of a total of almost 95, so there is always a movement what I call downwards in security. Of course there is up too, but to much less a degree. The other significant difference, I don't know if this is good or bad I always say it is a difference, your uniform staff are what I call 'generals'. You have your personal officers who look after inmates, both from the security stand point and also from a case manager stand point, with those duties in the federal system are very distinctly divided. There are correctional officers whose primary responsibility is supervision of the unit and security needs*

*then you have case managers who are more the social worker part of this so classification is ongoing.*

**H.W.** Are those case workers formally trained?

**R.C.** *Yes, the minimum requirement is so competitive that you very seldom see anybody in without a masters degree in social work or some related sociology, criminology or something on that line.*

**H.W.** And how many prisoners would they be dealing with?

**R.C.** *On the average the federal systems are very much into what they call the Unit Management System where you have a wing and you have 90 to 100 inmates to that wing and you have a unit manager who is responsible for the day to day activities on that wing and 90 to 100 inmates you would probably have two case managers, so the average ratio is one case manager to about 50 or 60 inmates and that is what they call his case load.*

**H.W.** Do they do Monday to Friday?

**R.C.** *They do seven days a week, they have two days off, but when I was Governor at the last facility I worked in the federal system and what we did was we would stagger and so one was always on duty on a Saturday the other one was always on duty on a Sunday and they overlapped and would pick up pertinent issues of each others cases that could not wait until the other person came back.*

**H.W.** Are the case work people paid a lot more than the security officers?

**R.C.** *Yes, not a great deal more, but I would say significantly more, but to equalise that out I would say that promotion opportunities are much more available because mainly the numbers in security staff on the security side.*

**H.W.** Does that make a division? Does that make the custody officers identified as purely authority?

**R.C.** *Well you have to go back to the philosophy of the federal system and I guess that would be the best way to*

*answer your questions. Taking around about way, you're hired on in the federal system as the correctional worker first. Your first responsibility is always security and I don't care if you come in as case worker or a catering person, a works person, doesn't make any difference. Then you go to the training academy for new employees and you have to qualify with the firearm whether you are going to be a secretary or if you are going to be whatever and it's ground into your head security first, you're case manager second. I put secretaries up the gun towers because we were so short of staff for a long time, as ludicrous as it may sound. There is no real separation everybody has a security responsibility. There is recognition obviously by the inmates there's the hacks, they call them the hacks (Screws) because they have the uniforms. But I think that the inmates also know that the case managers sat in towers, armed gun towers and when we had problems and we have had riots, we have had case managers on the riot team. We have had food caterers that have been trained on the riot team, so there is a separation, but it is a very subtle separation and probably the only way you can distinguish it by uniforms.*

**H.W.** Would you advocate that kind of system here?

**R.C.** *That is a difficult question because the cultural differences are so significant. I mean we share more things than differ, and differ less, but your system I would say is a kinder and gentler system and I think it goes back to the borstal days. I think your system is going to be forced to change primarily because your clientele is changing. We went through something very similar in the States in the late 60's and the late 70's. Society thought they had treatment for treating every ill man in prison and we tried a very extensive rehabilitation approach to incarcerated people and frankly it did not work, for a number of reasons. I think the clientele was changing at the time and continued to change, some people are just not amenable to being treated. We still emphasise the rehabilitation, we still emphasise the education aspect and as we say we want to put a better product back out on the streets than what came in. But we have found out that it just does*

*not work with a number of people.*

**H.W.** How did you find out that?

**R.C.** Well because after a period of time you look at the repeat offender and you can see people like who come into institutions and do all the things that you want them to do, educational classes, take the training, do this, and still you see them come back. I don't say we close the door on anybody, but I say we prioritise our resources for those people that we feel through observations, to studies of pre-sentence reports in the number other variables that we think have the best offer to do something productive with their time while they are in prison.

One thing we try to do and I think it is effective is we have a more graduated disciplinary system, within our system than you do. In other words you continued to have management problems with a particular inmate who is maybe disruptive, you call it bullying over here, we call it gang activities in the States, but basically they do the same thing so we move him up to the next layer, which is a little more restricted environment. He continues well he obviously is not interested in any of the vocational training, or education you move him up to the next layer and so on and so forth until finally if he continues his ways and he is continuously disruptive and he is just a regular pain in the ass, he will end up in one of the penitentiaries where he has minimal opportunity for education or anything else. I mean it's there, but it's not there as frequent or as well as the lower security institution. Where as your system, I am not saying it is wrong I am just saying it's different, you tend not to try and control the problem you tend to move the problem, you go from dispersal to dispersal to dispersal and they end up perhaps in a CRC which to me is a holiday, because they end up ordering their own food and there are no queues for anything, very individualised treatment and this is a reward for negative behaviour.

**H.W.** How quickly would somebody move through the system?

**R.C.** Well let's take the extreme, for example Marion just recently had their

function changed to the new super max, You'd spent about three years there, but the door is never closed. It's a progressive regime there and obviously have the most restricted housing. There are a number of housing units. There you have your most restricted housing where you start out. You earn your way back out to what you call the transition housing unit. After the transition housing it's back into an open penitentiary where you can scale to a certain degree and scale back down depending on your behaviour. You still have the opportunity to get back into a less regimented regime.

**H.W.** We are under a lot of pressure here from a number of groups to keep prisoners close to home. With the system that you outlined that would be very difficult if not impossible?

**R.C.** That's a goal but is not a primary goal. East to the West Coast of the United States is three thousand odd miles. Part of the disciplinary process can and has been and will continue to be, hey, you don't mind your P and Q we will ship you to Timbuctoo and where is the burden going to lie? It's going to lie on your family, you know start thinking about what you are doing. But the goal is all things being equal, he's not a problem, he's got to do x number of years and he's suitable for x type institutions and will try to put him in an area close to his home so as he can have visits. He may have visits when he is reasonably comfortable because of having visits obviously he is a better prisoner and causes less problems, so we strive for that, but that is not an overriding plan.

**H.W.** One of the things in our system is that our agenda is set by the special interest groups or whatever the media are setting as their agenda. Is it the same in the States?

**R.C.** I was astounded when I came over here to see the kind of media coverage that you receive here in comparison to what happens in the States, and I think it is grossly unfair because they dwell on the negative. The positives do not make good media. You know you do 99 things right and it never hits the media, you do one thing wrong and you are made out to be a fool or whatever else, and to me

*if I read the press cuttings it is just amazing all that I would call trivia, that the press picks up on and publishes.*

**H.W.** What about special interest groups?

**R.C.** *The American Civil Liberties Union will champion various rights for prisoners when they feel that some procedure or some new regulations is an infringement upon their rights. There are the Indian Groups that are quite active. There was a long battle that they carried on to get sweat lodges inside the facilities and they end up winning and we have to furnish inmates sweat lodges, where they actually put the coals on the fire and have the tent out in the institution security. They convinced the Court that that was part of their religious exercise. From the Indian Activist, to Prisoners Reform Booths they fight for such things as conjugal visiting, which the federal system does not allow, but small numbers of States do and you name it there is probably some group out there, but some are more active than others, I would say the most active one is probably, not much of a nuisance.*

**H.W.** Is there a system similar to our special hospitals for the mentally ill patients?

**R.C.** *Yes, there is at least 3 prison hospitals. I am talking about the federal system now. There is at least three prison hospitals that I am aware of that house mentally ill and physically incapable people.*

*If the person is sentenced by the Federal Court but he is deemed mentally incompetent at the time of the crime, for example Hinckley tried to successfully break it, he still has that Federal Sentence over him, but until he is deemed mentally capable he will stay in a mental hospital.*

**H.W.** Would that be a secure mental hospital?

**R.C.** Yes, absolutely.

**H.W.** Which system is that?

**R.C.** *It can be both. There are secure wings in the Federal System's Hospitals*

*for mental people or at times if it is in a particular area and they want to keep this individual in a geographical area for various reasons then they will contract out to a State Mental Hospital that has a secure wing. That is used quite frequently in the States, but the Federals do not have a particular facility in a geographical location that would mean a need and they would try to contract with the appropriate state to handle that need.*

**H.W.** What are you going to take away with you when you go home?

**R.C.** *I was impressed by everybody I met in the system. They are all hard working dedicated people. I think if I was to say and be fair with you and say objectively what I think your system needs more than anything else is a strong security voice, in every establishment that has the ear of Governor or a Security Governor Grade. From what I have been told by a number of staff in a number of facilities, this was lost when they did away with the Chief Officers, as they used to be a head figure for security.*

*When a Governor is selected to be in charge of security he does not have to have a security background, he is just filling a vacancy. A number of people said and some Governor's, we do not have the security expertise in the establishments that we need to have for the demands that are being made on us now. I have suggested development in the promotional ladder where somebody who stays in security, goes up through the ranks in security, senior officer, principal officer and Governor whatever the lowest grade Governor is, in a smaller institution, go in there as a Governor in charge of security so you have the ear of the main Governor to deal with security issues, I think in many cases that's been lost.*

*What I would take away is a lot of people trying to do a good job, but there is I would say some voices crying out in the wilderness who need some help and security advice and expertise. I am not saying that people there are not trying to do a good job, but saying in some cases, I do not think they have that background to fall on. You will be surprised at the kind of calls that come in here that from the field from principal officers asking for guidance for some very basic, security*

issues. There is something missing out there in a number of places.

**H.W.** Have you looked at the training at all?

**R.C.** The first thing that goes on at institution level which I think is terrible, if they get short on monies. They get short on staff, well we cancel training. I think what has happened over a number of years that there has been a, if not intended, gulf created. Staff have not been made to feel part of the organisation through annual training on a regular basis. I asked how much training do staff get on security issues 4.7 days that is all there is. When we were going around talking to staff they said we don't get nearly maybe one day or 1/2 a day or if we are lucky on security issues. There needs to be more emphasis on line staff being trained on security issues and I suggested it as a KPI. It is very very important that you show some investment in staff. There has got to be something that brings people together, and training can be a good for that.

**H.W.** The Whitemoor or Parkhurst escapes, how would they be handled, in the US? You said the media would be different?

**R.C.** The media would be different. I think it would probably be reported in the local area and it would be a matter of concern, for a couple of days and then it would die out. I think what is different in the States is that the officers would have been held responsible for their degree of negligence. Let's say you had a similar escape something on the same circumstances, we will say from Full Sutton, and they tried to penalise these officers one way or the other and discipline those officers, I would think it would be very difficult particularly if you have got a very sharp lawyer, who said how could you want to discipline these officers when you know the officers at wherever. It's a simplistic approach, but you asked me how it would be handled differently in the States, the officers who are negligent of their duties will have been chastised and penalised just as much if not more so than the Governor. I mean he has got to share some of that responsibility, there is no doubt about

that, but that does not in my opinion remove the responsibility off line staff level for doing their job correctly. You don't do your job correctly when you are sitting playing scrabble. That would be the difference, they would have been disciplined. The media would have reported there is no doubt about that, would have been sensational at the time, but it would go away, get it over and done with.

**H.W.** What do you think of things like our security manual, do you think that is a good way of setting standards?

**R.C.** Yes, because I am most familiar with the concept of a security manual, it is what the Federal System has. The problem that the current manual has is it is not mandatory and very very few things says you will do this or you must do that, but you should do this or you can do that. Well should and can I don't think there is that much cultural differences in our language which leads us up to the individual discretion. I know the new manual, that will come out will be much much more mandatory, in the things that should be required throughout the system.

**H.W.** Do you think we need to put more resources into security?

**R.C.** I think it is more a case of doing it right. I do not think the resources were the situation in the notorious escape from Whitemoor. I think the resources were the question at Parkhurst, I do not think the resources were a question at Wormwood Scrubs, where two lifers got over a wall. So I am not saying that there are not physical improvements that need to be made, but I think the emphasis at least has to be strong on procedural requirements and to establish procedures and standards. I do not care what it is, if you do not have staff that adhere to the procedure and standards and take care of business, then prisoners will take advantage of it.

**H.W.** Have you looked at hostage training at all?

**R.C.** Yes, we approach hostage training very much the same as you do, the

philosophy is a little bit different. It is well known in the Federal System by both staff and inmates, that whoever is taken hostage loses all authority, and there is no equivocation. The difference is there is no definitive statement in your manual that hostages lose their authority, you try to contain them and do what you can. In the States it's very clear a warden is taken hostage he is no longer a warden and the staff do not recognise him as a figure of authority inside the institution. The understanding is the hostage is unfortunate but you do not have any authority so if you order anything you are just not going to be recognised or accepted by staff.

**H.W.** Have you ever had the hostage on the move?

**R.C.** No, because we would not allow, I mean it sounds callous, but what they would first call in the Swat Team and they just ring the place with rifles. It would be very unfortunate if a staff member got killed or hurt, but the degree of risk and the precedence for letting that person out who was taken hostage, the ramifications which in our opinion would be worse.

**H.W.** If you had another six months, what would you want to look at?

**R.C.** Well I think I would like to concentrate on dispersal prisons because I think the basis is there and I think there was some refinements in certain things that they could be made much more

secure. I have been at Wakefield, Full Sutton, Long Lartin and Frankland. There is inconsistency on how they handle and manage tools in their workshops. It is the difference between night and day. Perimeter security was a concern, but I think procedurally there are so many things that could be strengthened that would reinforce overall security. I would like to be able to concentrate on the security manual, perimeter security for Class C, which I think can be improved immensely without a great deal of money and effort and dispersals on some other things.

I do not want to leave, with the idea that all I say was negative. There was more positives than negatives and I was not here to, support the positives. I was here to identify what I call some negatives and propose solutions through different approaches. I do not have any better answers, just different answers. I saw many positives like your caring, that was very much a positive, just the humanity of your system is very large. You are a kinder and generous society and I hope that does not change. I fear when I read your papers and see the culture, in great ways it is changing, unfortunately, and what happens on the outside is reflected in the prisons four, five, six, years hence. You will see a more ruthless people in the organised crime, the people with large minority resources that are going to cause you headaches in the years to come.

I wish you well ■

## VERBALS

"The masculine defects of self-aggrandisement, insensitivity, status-seeking, aggression, arrogance greed, writ large, have brought about the downfall of many corporations. Whether a number of women in top management would radically alter performance must remain a speculation. Given the persistence of discrimination against them, there is little immediate chance of this being put to the test."

[Sir Geoffrey Chandler former Director-General of NEDO and one time Director of Shell writing in *Management Today* July 1995]

# Community Based Sex Offender Treatment Provision:

AN EVALUATION BY THE STEP TEAM

## Introduction

In 1993 Barker and Morgan reviewed the literature on the nature, evaluation and efficacy of sex offender treatment programmes; and surveyed the provision of such programmes by the Probation Service. They found that all but 13 of the Probation Services in England and Wales were running some form of sex offender treatment programme. Of the 63 probation-led sex offender treatment programmes in existence, only three had been running for more than five years. This finding illustrates the rapid growth in the area. There appeared to be three main models of treatment programme: full-time attendance for one or two weeks; two hours weekly for eight weeks to six months; or two hours weekly for a year to indefinitely.

The main treatment approach reported being used by Probation Services was 'cognitive-behavioural' therapy. Barker and Morgan suggest that the reason for this lack of variation in treatment approach in probation services has been due to the influence of one or two training organisations and reports of the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioural therapy, particularly with child molesters and exhibitionists (Marshall *et al.*, 1991). The 'cognitive' aspect of this type of therapy should cover recognising the patterns of distorted thinking which allow the contemplation of illegal sexual acts; understanding the impact of sexually abusive behaviour on victims; and increasing the awareness of the harmful short and long-term consequences of offence behaviours. The 'behavioural' component of treatment should involve reducing sexual arousal to inappropriate fantasies of forced sexual activities with children or adults.

Such programmes are primarily undertaken in groups. Groupwork can be seen as an effective means of delivering treatment for a number of reasons. By joining a group a sex offender publicly acknowledges his need to change, allowing other clients to challenge the offender's distorted

patterns of thinking and behaviour and providing a supportive environment in which new attitudes and behaviours can be rehearsed.

## Background to the Research

Seven centres were selected for detailed evaluation because they were well-established and represented the range of sex offender treatment programmes offered by, or for, the Probation Service. The programmes fell into the following categories:

- **Long-term residential.** Clients seen here were resident at the only private specialist centre for the treatment of child abusers in the UK. They had approximately 15 hours of group therapy per week (plus the equivalent time spent in individual, family work or time spent working on their own) for about, on average, a 31 week stay;
- **Short term intensive.** Three programmes were looked at, offering, on average, 50 hours of group therapy over a two week period;
- **Rolling long-term.** Two open ended programmes were evaluated: delivering two hours of therapy weekly or fortnightly;
- **Short-term intensive group plus co-working.** One programme was seen: consisting of a full week of therapy followed by long-term co-working with the client's probation officer and a programme leader.

Detailed demographic data was collected on approximately seven clients from each of the probation programmes and 20 clients from the residential programme. Each client was given a battery of psychological tests before they started therapy and again after a period of treatment. These were designed to measure changes in those

**Dr. Anthony Beech** is the full-time researcher on the STEP (Sex Offender Treatment and Evaluation Project) Team and an Associate Research Fellow, University of Birmingham. The other members of the STEP team are: **Richard Beckett**, Consultant Forensic Psychologist; **Dawn Fisher**, Consultant Forensic Psychologist and **Ann Scott Fordham**, Consultant Forensic Psychologist. – The STEP Team are currently involved in an evaluation of the Core Sex Treatment Programme in category C establishments.



areas believed to contribute towards re-offending, such as: 'an offender's willingness to admit to offences and sexual problems; level of distorted thinking about children and sexuality; level of fixation or emotional over-identification with children; the extent to which he is unable to understand the distress that he has caused to his victims; his knowledge of thoughts and situations that may put him at risk in the future; and levels of personal functioning such as – assertiveness and intimacy skills. Data was also collected on these tests from 81 non-offending adult males. By doing this comparisons could be made with the offending sample.

In total, 59 offenders completed testing before and after treatment, of these 52 were child abusers. The rest of the sample consisted of rapists, indecent expositors, and one man whose index offence was of making obscene phone calls. Because of the small numbers in these latter groups all analyses were confined to the child molest sample.

Clients were seen after a full period of treatment in the short-term intensive programmes. Because of time constraints, clients in the other probation programmes were seen after a similar period in treatment. This enabled a comparison to be made between a relatively short amount of therapy in these programmes (average 63 hours), and longer-term treatment in the residential programme (average 462 hours).

### **Offender Profiles Prior to Treatment**

The child abusers in the sample were found to be significantly different from the comparison group of non-offenders in a number of ways. They were typically: emotionally isolated individuals; lacking in self confidence; underassertive in many social situations; poor at appreciating the perspective of others; and ill-equipped to deal with emotional distress. They characteristically denied or minimised the full extent of their sexual offending and problems. A significant proportion were found to have: little ability to comprehend the distress that they had caused to their victims; evidenced strong emotional attachments to children; and a range of distorted attitudes and beliefs, where they portrayed children as able to consent to, and not be harmed by, sexual contact with adults.

Men with most problems in these areas tended to be the more serious offenders, they were more likely to have: committed offences against a number of victims; been convicted of a previous sexual offence; committed offences outside of the family or **both inside and outside** the family. In comparison the rest of the sample were

characterised as having less distorted thoughts and attitudes about children. Of these, most were incest offenders, with usually one female victim (daughter or step-daughter). As a group, these men had an inability to relate to, and understand the emotional needs of children. Suggesting that this may be an important component in the etiology of incest offending.

### **Was Treatment Effective?**

Analysis of the data identified that 54 per cent of the group had profiles that were within a non-offending range on most of the psychological measures after a period in treatment. There was also significant change pre-treatment/post-treatment on these measures. These findings suggest that these men could be considered to have benefited from treatment. In comparison, the rest of the sample had scores that were still outside of the normal range of scores and did not show any change on any significant pre-post change, except for an improvement in level of denial of offence behaviours (specifically admitting to planning of their offences and that emotional damage was caused to their victims).

In judging the extent to which treatment was effective, the level where the offenders started from needs to be addressed. Fixated paedophiles needed to make a substantial change in order to reach a 'successfully treated' profile, whereas men with less distorted thoughts and attitudes towards children needed to change relatively less. Short-term therapy, delivered by the probation programmes, was generally successful in treating the less fixated men. Such therapy had an impact on an offender's willingness to admit to offences and sexual problems, reduced the extent to which he justified his offending and his level of distorted thinking about children and sexuality. However, short-term probation programmes had little success with fixated paedophiles.

Longer-term treatment was generally successful with fixated paedophiles. Such therapy, as well as having an impact on offender justifications and distorted thinking, was found to be related to improvements in self esteem, assertiveness and intimacy skills in these offenders.

Overall 25 percent of clients actually got worse in terms of their ability to comprehend the distress that they had caused to their victims. This may have been due to the fact that they had low levels of self esteem and an inability to cope with the feelings of others. Failure to have the necessary coping skills, as well as feelings of little self-worth, may have left some men feeling bombarded with the consequences of their abusive behaviour without the resources to cope with their feelings, leading to some men becoming hardened in their

attitudes towards their victims as a defence strategy.

### **Treatment Delivery**

Most programmes were successful at delivering the more cognitive aspects of therapy but most contained little, or no, behavioural component. The reason why these techniques were not in evidence in many of the probation programmes may be due to the fact that these require specialised psychological knowledge and training. There was also little evidence of offenders having acquired any formal 'relapse prevention' skills. This involves getting the client to recognise warning signs and risky situations that could lead to re-offending, and teaching the necessary coping, avoidance and escape strategies to deal with such situations appropriately. Any comprehensive programme should include this aspect of treatment.

All group members and leaders and clients were given a questionnaire designed to evaluate the therapeutic environment of the programme. This assessment measured aspects of the groups' functioning such as: cohesiveness of the group; support of clients by group leaders; how much control leaders exerted; and the extent to which the group focused on the tasks in hand.

Considerable variation was found between different treatment programmes with regard to the therapeutic environments that they created. Successful programmes appeared to be highly cohesive, well organised, well led, encouraged the open expression of feelings, produced a sense of group responsibility, and instilled a sense of hope in members. Helpful and supportive leadership style was found to be important in creating an atmosphere where effective therapy could take place; whereas, over-controlling and confrontative leaders and the strict enforcement of rules had a counter-therapeutic effect.

### **Conclusions**

Just over half of the sample appeared to have benefited from treatment. However, this result must be viewed with caution, as it is not known

whether these treatment changes will hold up over time and to what extent treatment change translates into a reduction in recidivism.

Short-term probation programmes were generally successful in reducing levels of denial, justifications for offending and levels of distorted thinking about children and sexuality in less fixated men, but had little impact with highly fixated paedophiles. Long-term treatment produced most change in fixated paedophiles. Such treatment, as well as having an impact on justifications and distorted thinking, was found to have an impact in areas of personal functioning that have been implicated in sexual offending, for example, poor self esteem, underassertiveness and lack of adult intimacy skills. However, it should be noted that such improvements required a large amount of therapeutic input.

The observation that a significant minority of clients (25 per cent) actually got worse in terms of their ability to comprehend the distress that they had caused to their victims after treatment suggests that care should be taken in the timing of such work. If introduced too early the effect may be counter-therapeutic, as offenders may not have come to terms with the consequences of what they have done and may become more defensive and victim blaming as a coping strategy.

### **References**

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This article is based on a report by the STEP team which was commissioned and funded by the Home Office, entitled 'Community-based Treatment for Sex Offenders: An Evaluation of Seven Treatment Programmes' published in 1994. It can be obtained from the Home Office Publications Unit, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London, W1H 9AT.

## **VERBALS**

The first six months of operation have produced some early indications about possible shortcomings in Prison Service practice. From the relatively small number of complaint investigations completed, it is already becoming clear that categorisation decisions are all too frequently being based on criteria, which however important, are not currently listed in the relevant regulations.

Practice at adjudications seems poor at times. Laid down property procedures are often not followed, and recording of property both in possession and in storage is frequently inaccurate. Above all, practice relating to home leave and temporary release seems confused and inconsistent. It remains to be seen how far the ... release on temporary licence regulations issued in April 1995 will improve matters!

**[A Review of the Work of the Prison Ombudsman 24 October 1994 - 23 April 1995]**