on past pain.

* *adopting the non-violent consciousness by looking for underlying feelings and needs.*
  If we are aware of when we are in danger of 'violent' responses — that is ... those characterised by blame, judgement, criticism or a desire for revenge — we can transform this thinking into the 'non-violent' alternative.

Predictions

We began this article with a statement of our wish to see the pursuit of values as intrinsic to the way prisons work. We would like to see these values realised day by day in the relationships between staff and prisoners, as exemplified in the Tutor's alternative internal dialogue described above. When NVC informs practice, we predict that the prison community would suffer from fewer incidents and that individuals would enjoy enhanced relationships. As each person becomes more aware of feelings and needs, and increasingly acts from this awareness, so he or she will experience less stress and feel more alive. We know ourselves that NVC takes time and commitment: we also celebrate the clarity, honesty, trust and connection that we experience when we use it.

Throughout this article, the use of the male pronoun includes the female

A list of references is available from the Editor.

Widening the Net

Steve Taylor, *a freelance writer on criminal justice and prison issues. He runs websites for a number of prison and criminal justice related charities and voluntary organisations.*

I spent last December sitting on a BBC Ethics Committee overseeing production of 'The Experiment' [broadcast on BBC2 in May], in which 15 volunteers were incarcerated for ten days to allow psychologists the opportunity to see what happened in such situations. Sitting with a group of participants afterwards, I asked them what their pains of imprisonment had been ... what had they really missed? Three participants gave the same answer in chorus: the Internet.

A government report published in 1999 estimated that, by 2004, as many as 68 per cent of the national workforce will use the internet and e-mail as a tool of their trade. A closer examination of the statistics shows obvious variations: at the one end of the spectrum 98 per cent of people employed in secretarial roles will use such technology, whilst the figure was less than one percent for those employed in the construction industry.

Such reports provide unlimited quandary for the Prison Service. On the one hand, the Service must spend its time ensuring that security targets are met and that all prisoners' communications with the outside world are open to scrutiny. On the other hand, the Service is charged with giving prisoners the skills they require to 'lead a law abiding and useful life in custody and after release'. We know that employment is the most successful route away from offending behaviour ... but how can the Prison Service marry these two conflicting concerns?

For a prisoner, ignorant of the disappointment with which most of us now view the internet, watching television programmes and reading newspapers with endless website and e-mail addresses, must be frustrating. A lucky few do get to use the internet, but these are usually the ones in open prisons who go out to work or to a local college or university. Some prisons have given prisoners the opportunity to build a website for the prison, as a link to the wider world, and in the case of Winchester prison, the results are impressive.

Building a website is one thing. Accessing the internet, and websites designed by other people and companies, is another. Sordid news stories remind us of some of the more insalubrious offerings on the world-wide-web, and the immediacy of it all makes it difficult to monitor the websites being viewed. Instantaneous communications such as e-mail and 'chat' are a prison censor's nightmare. Some argue that it is obvious that prisoners' access to the internet and e-mail is not feasible.

Parents, many of whom use the internet as a means of entertainment for their children, use widely available software for disallowing access to certain websites with content they deem unsuitable. This software works by 'watching' what the user is doing, picking up words and phrases that give a clue to unsuitability. The technology is now available to monitor images and graphics being downloaded and stopping these downloads where required.

The imaginative use of such software by the Prison Service, through the computers already available in education departments, could be used to allow prisoners limited internet access. There are two possible approaches. The first would allow prisoners access to a selected list of predetermined websites, such as the Employment Service or housing associations as examples. The second would be a more liberal use of the software, where certain words trigger a block on

access. Either way, allowing prisoners at least some access to the internet would give them the tools they need to compete in an increasingly technology driven employment market.

Companies quick to utilise e-mail as a means of efficient communication with clients are rapidly purchasing 'firewall' software which monitors the content of e-mails. I recently sent an e-mail – which contained the word 'bitch' – to a friend who works for an insurance company. That company's firewall rejected the e-mail and sent it back to me with a terse warning about 'offensive language'. As an aside, that company, which sells pet insurance, is rethinking its approach to 'bitch'.

E-mail should be an even more appealing prospect for the Prison Service. Increasing postage costs, together with the costs of printing and providing writing paper and envelopes, make prisoners' letters a significant financial burden. Giving prisoners access to e-mail would not only reduce these costs significantly, but also give them experience in the use of such virtual communications. And once again, there are two approaches open to the Service in granting use of e-mail.

The first option would mean that prisoners could type their e-mails on computers not connected to a network. The e-mails could then be saved, transferred to the censor's computer, and go through the normal censoring procedure before being sent *en masse*. Under the second, somewhat more open approach, prisoners could type and send their e-mails, in the knowledge that firewall software is looking out for explicit or otherwise inappropriate content.

Under whichever option, prisoners would be given their own e-mail address so that their communications remain personal. One example of the address format might be oscar.wilde@readingprison.gov.uk.

There are, of course, costs involved in such a project, and so there is a clear need for such access to be tied in with the education provision in individual prisons. Education departments have computers with sufficient technology to handle such changes, and IT and other tutors would be able to use this technology to their teaching advantage. Most colleges now run 'Open Access' courses where members of the public can attend free-of-charge computer tuition, and this is part of wider government attempts to create a nation of computer-literate citizens. 'Open Access' could be easily rolled out to the prison estate at a comparatively low cost.

If the report I quoted earlier is to prove accurate, two years from now more than two out of three British employees will use the internet. To compete in such a labour market, ex-prisoners need to be equipped with the necessary skills to prove their worth. Any prisoner having spent three or more years in prison is unlikely to be cognisant of the intricacies of the internet and e-mail; and other prisoners, such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are also likely to be similarly lacking.

Last September, the Home Office research unit published *Building Bridges to Employment for Prisoners*, in which the researchers examined the programmes available in prison to assist prisoners getting work after release. Although 'most prisons and YOIs are doing something to assist with employability and employment', there is a noticeable lack throughout the report of reference to the importance of training in the use of the internet and e-mail either for job searches or for applying for vacancies. This is not due to the researchers not recognising the value of such training … it is because such training does not exist at present, despite the noble attempts at some prisons (such as Winchester and Rye Hill).

Internet and e-mail access for prisoners is not just about employment, however. As I have said, it would allow prisoners the opportunity to seek accommodation for their release; to seek legal advice and assistance; to explore the benefits system; to maintain contact with families and friends; and, last but not least, simply to remain abreast of current technology.

The risk in not embracing this technology at the earliest opportunity is that we will have a prison estate populated by 70,000 people unable to use and unaware of the possibilities of the internet. The government has ploughed millions of pounds into encouraging people to 'join the internet revolution'. We must hope that this will not be another area in which prisoners are the forgotten citizens.