

PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

July 2019 No 244



Special Edition
Rehabilitative Culture

Rehabilitative Culture in a High Security prison

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Interview with serving prisoners within HMP Full Sutton, a High Security dispersal prison that houses category A and B prisoners. Full Sutton has an operational capacity of 626, but currently houses approximately 540 prisoners. Of those, almost half are serving life sentences, with a similar number serving more than 10 years, or indeterminate sentences.

This interview focusses on the subject of rehabilitative cultures and explores the lived experience of those in a high security prison.

BD: What for you are the key features of a rehabilitative culture? Why is this important to achieve?

SG: To give people time to stop and think, reflect on their behaviour. To give new skills to enable people to have greater options once released.

AR: Maslow's concept of needs shows us that human beings require a certain level of basic needs to be met before they are able to go to the next level, for example if someone feels unsafe they would struggle to find the capacity to engage in a rehabilitative culture. Trust, a therapeutic arena (or as near as possible) needs to be achieved where the prisoners feel valued and able to talk freely where conversations are encouraged. Prisoners are not herded onto courses that they are not ready for. Rehabilitative movement only occurs when the person is ready to change.

BD: How have you been involved in creating a more rehabilitative culture? How has this been taken forward where you are currently?

SG: Yes, I was chosen to take part in a mediation course as a counsellor. I was professionally trained and took part in accredited courses. Yes, I am now able to help mediate between prisoner and prisoner, or prisoner and staff.

AR: I have attended meetings with Governors who mention something that later they state they never said resulting in a lack of trust. I have witnessed a prisoner

being told not to be so negative when they were expressing a view that differed from the official standpoint. We have numerous Black awareness days, when a White prisoner attended, other prisoners asked why they were attending; and when asked for a White history day I was told that 'We have nothing to be proud of'.

BD: How does the physical environment contribute to this and what efforts have been made to make a positive difference?

SG: In a high security estate, movement is extremely restricted. So for all, staff and prisoner alike, it's important we all make an effort. However, this enforced effort can sometimes lead to resentment. A lot of what is deemed rehabilitative in my opinion is pure rhetoric; provided in posters and meetings to satisfy Ministry of Justice targets and manifestos.

AR: Mains [prisoners that are housed on the main population wings] and VPs [Vulnerable Prisoners who are at risk of bullying, suicide or self-harm] are separated within movements being organised by a control hub who ensure that a VP and a main isn't on the same landing. Education has started to break down barriers through the Leeds Beckett Learning Together programme.²

BD: Are basic services such as food and clothing important?

SG: Yes, for some, food is at the top of the importance list. Clothing not so much, although in respect of civilian clothes, prisoners would like it to be a much easier process to purchase or exchange clothes.

BD: What about relationships between those who live and work in prisons? What role do they have and how are they being improved?

SG: Civilian staff in prison are rarely in my opinion subjected to poor relationships with prisoners; with the exception of medical workers, these are definitely seen as pro-prison rather than neutral civilians they should be. A lot of the time this is due to waiting lists or the

1. Maslow, A. (1943) A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50, 370–396

2. Learning Together, developed by Cambridge University, is an educational programme delivered at HMP Full Sutton by Leeds Beckett University. The programme takes students from Leeds Beckett into Full Sutton to learn along prisoners that register with the University. It is an accredited programme that gives all students that pass, 20 university credits

restriction of medication. Most of us, we have normal relationships with prison staff, but most of us however realise this can change in a heartbeat.

AR: I find wings in the prison differ. Mistrust between officers and Governors, between Governors and imposed regulations. High turnover of staff disturbs the equilibrium. The old guard, the union becomes an obstruction to progression. I find no improvement between relationships. I feel in High Security, Rehabilitation Culture is a word that is brought out for all occasions but I feel after all is said and done, there is a lot more said, than done.

BD: What do the best staff do that makes a difference?

SG: Do what they say they will.

AR: Non-Judgemental, available to make conversation rather than the three quarters that sit in the office. Use humour to lift spirits. Be open to developing sound working relationships and mutual trust.

BD: Do prisoners have the chance to be involved in the running of the prison or shaping the community such as peer support of representative bodies?

SG: Yes in small aspects, this level is closely monitored though; anything that may impact on security overrides everything. The prison give this small gesture as a carrot to keep an ear to the ground as to the feelings of the general populace, and as a tool to send unofficial messages back to the population.

AR: The division of power is always apparent. I feel the prison has a set agenda and uses the representatives meetings to legitimise this agenda.

BD: Do families have a role in building a more rehabilitative culture? How are they involved in your establishment?

SG: Ha, Ha. I am more embarrassed you would think the Prison Service really care. Some arrange family days, which go above and beyond what is required. In my opinion, other than family days, what I am about to say may come across as contradictory, but it is true in my opinion that they do everything to impede family contact, by keeping prisoners hundreds of miles away from home, stopping mail due to unworkable drug policies, and intrusive searches before and after visits.

AR: No, and not at all.

BD: What opportunities are there to address problems such as health and substance misuse?

SG: I don't know, I have no issues. There does seem to be a lot of people going to the med hatch each day; I assume it is for substance issues.

AR: I am registered disabled since 1989 following a road traffic accident. I have been told that I am not disabled as I attend the gym. I have complained to the health provision but still do not have the chair I need. So I have to lie on the bed as I am unable to sit for any length of time. With substance misuse there is a peer programme that operates in the prison.

BD: Do punishments, adjudications, incentives and privileges have a useful role in shaping the behaviour of people in prison?

SG: Yes, as a control tool, without these it would be chaos in here. The use of incentives on here, that is the IEP system is abused by staff in this prison and they use it incorrectly in my opinion.

AR: Change comes from within, not from the promise of an IEP upgrade. If used correctly they are very useful in creating a safe environment which in turn promotes the feeling of wellbeing. At such a point the prisoner had the space to connect to their feelings and emotions.

BD: Do prisoners have the chance to develop their talents and interests, for example through education, training or employment?

SG: Yes, but very limited. Here I believe due to what is known as distance to the gate

that is most have decades before release, a lot of opportunities that could give new skills or create new interests are not given. The education is basic and as far as I am aware there is limited training. Other courses or opportunities such as creative writing etc. stop before they start due to staff leaving etc.

AR: Education has been very limited, for example to level 1 and 2 English, maths, Art, Computers and cookery. Leeds Beckett University's involvement in the education department had brought a breath of fresh air, where prisoners are treated like students and for a brief moment our minds have the opportunity to grow.

BD: What is the best way to prepare prisoners for a successful life after release?

SG: Move them to D cats (Category D prisons are for prisoners who can be reasonably trusted in open conditions) or local prisons, source employment for them and give them the opportunity to save for release. Too many prisoners are released with just the discharge

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grant of approximately £47 into civilian life, with no job, no home and little money; and they wonder why they come straight back. I could speak forever on this, it is a passion of mine.

AR: Stop herding. We are not numbers. Talk to use identity, our concept of self and assist in identifying the role the prisoner would like to pursue after release. Be honest, encourage the development of ties in the community for example with family. Empower the prisoner as much as possible, but be realistic. Ensure the prisoner is familiar with the support organisations on the area of re-location. Re-integration into society I have heard can be rocky as when we were excluded from it.

BD: Is there anything that is done at your establishment that you feel is a particularly powerful way to foster a more rehabilitative culture?

AR: Leeds Beckett University ran a course in Psychology which was attended by Mains prisoners, VP prisoners, Prison Officers and Leeds Beckett students. The barriers melted away as we all became students. At the end of the course the way I saw the officers changed as the person behind the uniform became more visible. The relationship between prisoners and officers was strengthened by the process and I felt more respect for the human that occupies the uniform.

BD: What are the barriers to achieving success? What gets in the way? How can these challenges be overcome?

SG: Negativity, trust, take away the bullshit, stop trying pseudo-psychology courses. Try to identify the skills and interests in individuals and tailor a plan for them.

AR: Institutional noise from the top down. If it were more transparent where trust was developed between the prison hierarchy then I believe this would go some way in changing prisoners in prison to humans in a community. This will need time to change. Initial training to involve a more systematic approach. Training at every level focussing on team building rewarding education achievement within the prison ranks fosters best working practices.

BD: How would you know that a more rehabilitative culture was being successfully developed? How would you measure this?

SG: There would be empty prisons. Some of us are just born bad though.

AR: Firstly I would drop the new buzz words 'Rehabilitative Culture'. I would know a more community based approach was being developed by the prisoner's active participation in developing courses to promote growth. A more person centred approach by all officers. First names used. Prisoners would display signs of unity (a shared identity). Minority groups would be given questionnaires to ask how they feel they are seen by other prisoners. The use of communal areas.