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Special Edition
Rehabilitative Culture

Staff perceptions of rehabilitative culture

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I interviewed staff at HMP Wymott, a category C prison in the North West of England and HMP Brinsford, a mainly young adult prison in Staffordshire. 16 members of staff participated in total. They were asked multiple questions about rehabilitative culture, what it means to them and how they feel their establishment goes about fostering a more rehabilitative culture.¹

Wymott prison, located in Lancashire, opened in 1979 as a category C prison. After 1993 the prison also began to cater for vulnerable men. Approximately half of the population are convicted of sexual offences and the remainder of the population are mainstream category C offenders. It has an operational capacity of 1173 men. The prison population increased in 2003/04 after the addition of two new wings. In general, the residents have a sentence length of over four years.

The prison has been taking rehabilitative culture in its stride and has been working on a number of projects. It has a Therapeutic Community operating on 'K wing' which is a 70 space community with a full programme of activities to support a drug-free return to the community. A large CARATS team works with all offenders to prevent relapse. The prison has also undertaken a plethora of other rehabilitative initiatives such as the 'Time for Change' approach which 'seek to offer an early intervention in order to empower professional challenge and support relationships between frontline staff and prisoners'. Not only this but it is also reviewing and re-writing its current IEP policy, in order to make it more in line with a rehabilitative approach. The Rehabilitative Culture Team, along with members from the Evidence Based Practice team and regional Psychology Services have also recently undertaken a 'Procedural Justice Blitz' at the prison, which aims to encourage staff to review and reflect on their current policies and practices and identify how they could make them more procedurally just.

HMP Brinsford is located in the Midlands near the city of Wolverhampton. It opened as a young adult institution and remand centre in November 1991. In 2016, the establishment re-rolled to a mixed population of young adults and sentenced category C adults. It has an operational capacity of 577 men and predominantly caters for young adults, between the ages of 18 and

21. Approximately 10 per cent of the population are Category C prisoners of all ages.

After a poor HMIP inspection back in 2013, many resources were placed into HMP Brinsford which included a complete refurbishment programme of residential units 1-4. The prison has continued to drive new projects and initiatives, and it too has introduced a new IEP scheme in the hopes of fostering a more rehabilitative culture. It has also introduced the new 'Development and Progression Unit' which aims to help and support residents with a range of complex behavioural issues.

The prison is also clearly focusing on its current demographic and the issues that can arise with a large young adult population by introducing 'Adverse Childhood Experience's' training for all of its staff. This training is hoped to raise awareness for the trauma that many of the young men within the prison may have experienced.

For the purposes of this article, all interviewees have remained anonymous in order to achieve as honest and open discussion as possible. Responses will be attributed to Wymott (Wy) or Brinsford (Br).

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

Wy: 'A rehabilitative culture is one that makes the men in our care aware of what rehabilitation is. It should aim to change their mind set and way of thinking through trying to give them a different perspective and outlook on life. This isn't just done through education, but through building meaningful and positive relationships and teaching the men good values and life skills.'

'The key features of a rehabilitative culture are the education classes that the men attend as to me, these are going to make the biggest difference in rehabilitating the men as it gives them purposeful activity'

For many of the staff interviewed at HMP Wymott, a rehabilitative culture is important to achieve in order to reduce re-offending rates. This would not only be beneficial for the community but also for the men themselves, in order to help them live a purposeful and crime free life.

Br: 'A rehabilitative culture is one that gives the men that are in our care hope. It should aim to give the

1. Thank you to all of the staff at HMP Wymott and HMP Brinsford for taking part in this interview and providing such interesting responses.

men and women that we look after the ability to plan for the future with a positive mind set. It encompasses everything that we do and means that we should treat every person as an individual. By treating the men as individuals we aim to identify the root causes behind their crimes and give them the help that they need and deserve so that they will stop re-offending.'

For the staff at HMP Brinsford, there was an emphasis on positive relationships between the staff and the young men in their care. This was identified as a fundamental feature for building a rehabilitative culture. 'It all comes back to actually engaging with the men that are in your care and listening to them and treating them with decency and respect when these interactions do take place'.

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

Wy: 'I think that I have played a part in creating a more rehabilitative culture, not through anything drastic but through simply communicating with the men in Wymott in a respectful way and treating them in a way in which I would wish to be treated myself. Although it sounds small I really think that it makes a big difference.'

Three of the staff interviewed at HMP Wymott were part of the safer custody team and were passionate that the safer custody team is playing an important part in creating a more rehabilitative culture. 'We see first-hand some of the awful issues that these men are having to face. We spend quality time with the men and have meaningful conversations to try and build a good rapport and do our best to help them in any way that we can'.

Br: 'I have been involved in creating a new IEP system for HMP Brinsford. It is one that aims to celebrate success and inspire others. I hope that it will celebrate the positive things that the men at HMP Brinsford do, rather than the negatives which I feel the current IEP system does. When creating this new policy I actually held a focus group with the men at Brinsford to see if they had any suggestions. I think that this really helped the men feel valued and like their opinions mattered, and helped them to feel a part of the Brinsford community'.

Other members of staff at Brinsford felt that they contributed to creating a more rehabilitative culture though building good rapports with the men in their

care and having meaningful interactions with the men on a daily basis. Interviewees mentioned that they pay a lot of attention to complex cases and often, if they feel that it is necessary, invite family members in to be a part of any review or intervention discussions. Family inclusion and strengthening family ties is viewed as an important aspect of rehabilitation. 'We need to ensure that we go about things with an individualised, calm and compassionate approach'.

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

Wy: 'I think that having a decent physical environment is extremely important as at the end of the day, for the time that the men are here it is their home.

If we take pride in it and make it look nice then hopefully they will do the same. I think that trying to normalise the environment as much as possible is important as prison can be a very false and somewhat strange setting so by attempting it to give it to normalising effects should hopefully make the men feel calmer and less intimidated.'

All of the staff also mentioned HMP Wymott's gardens, and were particularly proud of how well kept the gardens are. Many of them mentioned the motivational quotes that run through the establishment on the walls, with the aim of giving the men hope

and motivation. All of the staff mentioned the importance of having a decent and clean establishment as not only is it morally right to try and ensure the men live in a clean space, it also sets the tone for what HMP Wymott's attitude is towards the men in their care.

Br: 'I think that the physical environment is a very important part of prison, as it can have a significant effect on the mood of the men. At Brinsford we have just received some funding to put some murals on the walls, which I think will really give a nicer feel to the environment. We are also in the middle of refurbishing some of the wings to ensure that they are as clean and decent as possible.'

'The physical environment has a massive impact, it shows that we do care and that we have a good outlook in regards to decency. We are introducing a lot of nature paintings on our res 2 wing, with the idea of 'bringing the outside in'. We also have rehabilitative culture 'success stories' on our walkway that the men use to get to work and education. This gives out the message of hope to the men.'

By treating the men as individuals we aim to identify the root causes behind their crimes and give them the help that they need and deserve so that they will stop re-offending.

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

Wy: 'Yes they are very important. They provide the foundation of basic decency. Food is also one of the main things that the men have to look forward to in the day so we need to make sure that it is of a decent standard. It also shows that in prison it doesn't matter what your background is, where you have come from, everyone is treated fairly and equally'.

Br: 'Yes they are massively important, if we don't give basic services it gives the impression that we don't care. We are getting away from prison issue clothing to try and normalise the environment at Brinsford even further. We have introduced ironing boards on our res 4 wing to try and encourage the men to take care of their clothes and teach them another valuable life skill that will serve them well in the community'.

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

Wy: 'These relationships are so important, I think that there is a big movement now to treat people how you wish to be treated. They are integral for the whole establishment to function properly. I think that the introduction of the key worker has been excellent as it provides a good opportunity to build up these relationships and invest some time into the men in our care. Positive relationships are the foundation of rehabilitative culture.'

Many of the staff interviewed at HMP Wymott felt that the Key worker scheme has been instrumental in aiding good relationships throughout the establishment as it allows staff to really 'get to know' the men in their care. They felt that these good relationships then improved communication between the men and staff and allowed the staff to have a greater ability to mould expectation and shape values.

Br: 'These relationships are so important. Not only are they important for the men but they are important for the staff. I think that rehabilitative culture is just as much about the staff as it is about the men and positive relationships makes the job not only more interesting, but also helps staff to feel more fulfilled. Feeling like you are actually getting through to someone and making a difference has such a positive effect and reinstates the meaning behind the job.'

'Good relationships are very important. I believe that they key workers has made a huge difference in helping to build relationships even further. At Brinsford we are also keen on ACE training (Adverse Childhood

Experiences) and are keen to provide the young men in our care with at least one stable relationship, which they most probably have never had any experience of in their life due to what they have been through. By doing this and providing them with someone they can trust we hope that we will be able to encourage them to make positive changes'.

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

Wy: 'The best staff are the ones that care. They take the time to listen and take genuine interest in the people that they are helping.'

'They are polite, straight talking and live up to any promises that they make. They communicate respectfully to not just the men but their colleagues too. They provide support for both the men and their fellow staff members and act as role models.'

Br: 'The best staff demonstrate active listening.

They listen and talk and communicate well. They make the men feel that they can do better and convince them they are not always going to be stuck in a life of crime. The best staff will know that building a good rapport is key'.

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

Wy: 'Yes. At Wymott we have got the prisoner council, PID [Prisoners' Information Desk] workers, the Listener's scheme and violence reduction reps. They seem to be making a real difference within the prison. The suggestions from the prisoner council always get taken on board, even if we can't always see these suggestions through. Having these kinds of bodies and reps gives the men a voice which is very important within the establishment.'

Br: 'Yes — we feel that at Brinsford the men have a number of opportunities to get involved in shaping the community, and furthermore we want them to as we value their input massively. We have mentors that work on the wings, along with a prisoner council and our reception orderlies' are now trained Listeners. We often hold prisoner focus groups to run new ideas and initiatives past them, for example as we did with the new IEP scheme. The feedback that the men provided really helped us to shape the new scheme. We also have violence reduction reps. We feel all of these things are really important as it gives the young men a voice and allows them to feel valued as part of the Brinsford community.'

These relationships are so important, I think that there is a big movement now to treat people how you wish to be treated

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

Wy: 'Families definitely have a very important role in building a more rehabilitative culture. They can provide grounded motivation for the men and can help them want to better themselves. They are a key support system for the men. At Wymott we host family days along with facilitating a homework club which gives the men the opportunity to help their children with their homework.'

The staff at Wymott emphasised that having events such as family days really helps to normalise the prison environment along with strengthening family ties. They also talked about the 'Storybook Dads' initiative in which the men can record themselves reading a children's book which can then be played to their children.

Br: 'Families are extremely important to us at Brinsford. We host family days and also run 'Storybook Dads'. We also have a family wellbeing day in which the men's families can come into the establishment and talk to all of the different agencies that the men have access to. We also invite the families in to an awards ceremony that we host, so that they can watch if their loved one received an award. We also recently hosted a carol service which families were invited to attend.'

The staff at Brinsford were keen to mention the work that the safer custody team has been doing to try and incorporate family engagement into their work. With complex cases they will often invite the families in to be part of the discussions that are taking place between the staff and men. They involve families in the care plans and feel like this not only helps the men but also helps the family to feel that they are being involved and communicated to with transparency. Brinsford has had a number of success stories through these measures.

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

Wy: 'At Wymott we are very proud of our Therapeutic Community which aims to help men with health and substance misuse problems. We also have a PIPE [Psychologically Informed Planned Environment] unit on F wing which really helps the men on the unit. Safer custody invest a lot of time into men that appear

to have serious substance misuse problems. We also run a 'building futures' programme.

Br: 'At Brinsford we have the inclusion team which addresses mental health problems that the men might be facing. We also have drug and alcohol teams that work within the establishment that try and help any substance misuse issues. We are currently in the process of introducing a voluntary drugs test that the men can use upon arriving in reception. If the results come back positive then we will ask them if they would like us to refer them to one of our substance misuse teams. The idea behind this is that we would be trying to help the men and their issues rather than taking a punitive approach'.

LN: Do punishments such as adjudications and incentives and earned privileges have a useful role in shaping the behaviour of people in prison?

Wy: 'I think that they do have a part to play in prison establishments as otherwise there is not incentive to behave. It can sometimes depend on each individual case as the best way to deal with someone. I believe that IEP can work so long as it is not abused. I think part of rehab culture is making sure that even when we are punishing someone we are doing it in a fair, neutral and respectful way.'

'Yes I think there is a need for punishments within prisons because at the end of the day if

someone breaks the rules then they need to pay the consequences. We wouldn't get very far as a service if we didn't punish poor behaviour'.

Br: 'Yes there is a place for punishments so long as they are appropriate, but an overly punitive approach very much goes against what we are trying to achieve at Brinsford. We want to praise the positives rather than re enforcing negative behaviour through punishment. Our aim is to make things like enhanced status look more attractive rather than having basic as a deterrent. The idea is that it would be something for them to lose rather than something for them to gain. Punishment itself is quite archaic but certainly has a place in making the prison safe, decent and secure. There still has to be boundaries just like there is in the community but finding the right balance is crucial. Being overly punitive doesn't work.'

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

Families definitely have a very important role in building a more rehabilitative culture. They can provide grounded motivation for the men and can help them want to better themselves.

Wy: 'Yes, at Wymott we offer a vast range of education and employment opportunities. For example we do BICS training and offer opportunities to gain qualifications in things such as engineering and woodwork. We also offer holistic classes such as art and gardening.'

Br: 'Yes, at Brinsford we have a large variety of courses and training on offer for the men. We have a catering academy and also a barista course. One of our men completed the catering course and ended up getting a job at one of Jamie Oliver's restaurants! We also provide the men with the opportunities to undertake A levels, degrees along with a plethora of vocational courses.'

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

Wy: 'I think that for a successful life after release, the men have got to really want to change themselves. However, as an establishment it is our job to provide them with the tools and life skills so that they are equipped as best they can be to give them the maximum chance of leading a successful and crime free life. We also need to be encouraging and provide hope and motivation to try and help them to bring about the change'.

Wymott staff believed that as soon as the men step off the bus and enter into the establishment, it is the job of the staff to try and help these men turn their lives around and equip them with the mind set and skills to live as positive and successful a life as possible upon release.

Br: 'I think that addressing why the men are here and how they have got here is important as a first point of call. After this we can work on equipping them with the jobs, support and life skills that they need to ensure that they don't end up down that path again. We need to help them gain a different outlook on life and what they want to gain from it. Family ties and through the gate support are also massively important in helping the men with a successful life after release'.

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

Wy: 'At Wymott we have recently started hosting sports days which have proved to be so useful in improving relationships between staff and the men, it seems to really incorporate the whole idea behind rehabilitative culture. All of our family events also seem to have been beneficial to HMP Wymott's rehabilitative journey. Our attempt to normalise the establishment is something that we are proud of and we feel that it is a powerful way of fostering a rehabilitative culture'.

Br: 'At Brinsford we feel that our emphasis on ACEs training is a really good way of fostering a more

rehabilitative culture, particularly for the type of population that we are accommodating. Training such as this makes staff more aware of some of the terrible experiences these young men may have gone through, which in turn can help the staff to be more empathetic to the problematic behaviour that they sometimes display. We also have a development and progression unit which we are very proud of and uses the principles of procedural justice and rehabilitation to make it as rehabilitative as possible.'

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

Wy: 'Sometimes the men not wanting to engage can be a problem, however when this happens I think we just need to persevere with them and remind them that we have their best interests in mind. Lack of resources can also be an issue, particularly with staffing levels as it sometimes means that staff don't get as much quality time to have meaningful conversations as they would like. Changing the way that people think can also be difficult but persistence is key and I think that if we keep chipping away at the men and keep reinforcing positive behaviour then we can do it'.

Br: 'Budgets and funding can be an issue, along with resources. Sometimes you want to make things like the general fabric of the establishment better but it is difficult to do it with the limited resources that we have. In the past I think staff buy-in has been an issue, although I feel like this is not as big of a problem anymore as staff seem to be really bought into the rehab culture of Brinsford now. Helping the men to change their mind set and change their way of thinking can also be difficult but we just need to be consistent and continue to try and be role models for them.'

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

Wy: 'Ultimately I suppose a reduction in the number of re-offending rates would show that we are doing something right, although I think rehab culture is difficult to measure itself. Statistics such as a reduction in violence, self-harm and substance misuse would be good indicators though, along with positive MQPL's and SQL's [Quality of Prison Life and Staff Quality of Life measures].

Br: 'It is difficult to measure rehabilitative culture as it is so individualised but statistics such as levels of violence, self-harm and rates of re-offending should provide a good indication. Sometimes you can tell from the general mood and atmosphere within the establishment as to whether or not we are doing things well. Success stories no matter how small or large also give us hope that we are doing something right!'