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Special Edition
Rehabilitative Culture

Working in a Rehabilitative Culture

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HMP Grendon first opened as a Therapeutic Community in 1962. Over half a century later, it continues to operate successfully within the public sector, despite changing political and penal climates. In achieving this Grendon and other prison therapeutic communities have provided one of the most well established and long standing approaches to offender rehabilitation within the criminal justice system.

Grendon is a category B prison holding up to 230 residents. It is comprised of 6 separate therapeutic communities; an assessment and preparation for treatment unit, and 5 treatment communities including a 20 place unit offering a form of democratic TC for men with mild to moderate learning disabilities and difficulties. The prison largely holds men with indeterminate sentences who have committed serious violent or sexual offences. On average they have a longer history of involvement with the criminal justice system than other prisoners, they have significantly higher levels of formal disciplinary punishments for disciplinary infractions, have high levels of personality disorder and psychopathy and half have reported regular substance misuse whilst in prison.¹ These are men that have also experienced significant distress and trauma. Almost half reported a previous suicide attempt, and in addition, two-thirds report that they have been the victim of severe sexual or violent abuse themselves, usually during childhood.

Therapeutic communities utilize the social environment (sometimes referred to as the therapeutic milieu) as the basis for personal change. Derived from a group-based approach to treatment aimed at rehabilitating traumatized service men, therapeutic communities emerged in Europe after World War II. Within Western Europe and particularly the United Kingdom, therapeutic communities have been active in rehabilitating people who have committed offences for over half a century. Therapeutic communities adopt the view that the social systems and relationships within the treatment setting have a profound impact on those residing within them. In part, therapeutic communities

have origins in the Quaker movement, which advocated the importance of treating patients as capable, trustworthy, and having the capacity to take responsibility. They also acknowledge the potential harm done to people by institutions that stigmatize, erode personal identity, and disempower.

Therapeutic communities provide group therapy within a social environment which emphasizes a distinctive set of values, clinical practices, and organizational relationships. They evolved more from a set of values rather than a particular psychological theory. These values reflect the importance of respect, belonging, accountability and empowerment. Psychological change mechanisms are intertwined within a social therapy process, which has its basis in this underlying value system. These can be understood from different theoretical perspectives. Central to the change process is the learning that takes place from interpersonal relationships and interactions within the therapeutic community. This includes skills in problem solving and conflict resolution, the development of insight, the revision of unhelpful belief systems about self and others, and the learning derived from interpersonal feedback. The term 'living learning' has been coined to describe the nature of the therapeutic work that takes place in the therapeutic community. This recognizes how any institution can, when certain conditions are in place, provide a range of opportunities for interpersonal and social learning; attitudes and beliefs can be explored while allowing residents to develop new interpersonal, social, and life skills. It was not until the 1990s that Therapeutic Communities articulated a theoretically and empirically based 'model of change'.²

While the most important and defining aspect of their clinical practice is the therapeutic milieu, all therapeutic communities recognize the importance of therapy groups. Within HMP Grendon small therapy groups take place three times a week. These groups are comprised of around eight residents who are allocated with the intention that they will work together therapeutically over a prolonged period. The groups are

1. For a more detailed summary and further references, see Bennett, J. and Shuker, R. (2017) *The potential of prison-based democratic therapeutic communities* in International Journal of Prisoner Health, 13:1 pp. 19 - 24
2. Cullen, E. (1997) Can a prison be therapeutic? The Grendon template, in *Therapeutic Communities for Offenders* (eds E. Cullen, L. Jones and R. Woodward), John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, Chichester; Shine, J. and Morris, M. (2000) Addressing criminogenic needs in a prison therapeutic community. *Therapeutic Communities*, 21, 197-219

facilitated by at least one member of staff, but rely upon the active involvement of the group members. It is in these groups that issues are explored in depth, including examining the past and how this shapes individuals thinking and behaviour. The themes explored in small-group sessions are shared with all members of the community in line with a culture of openness, transparency, and non-confidentiality.

Community meetings take place twice a week and are chaired by an elected resident chairperson and an agenda is followed. Typically this agenda includes decision making over who should take responsibility for which tasks, an exploration of any interpersonal problems experienced between members, and providing support for those experiencing distress. Residents are responsible for choices and the decision making necessary for community living. Residents also participate in additional creative therapies such as psychodrama and art therapy.

Each individual has a voluntary job that they do on behalf of the community. This can range from being the chairperson of the community, to being the person who waters the plants or looks after the fish tank. Each community supports a charity, often linked to offending, for which they raise funds and promote its aims. Twice a year, each community will host a 'family day', where loved ones will visit the community for a meal, to receive information about the work of the prison, see where the men live and meet those they live with. This is in addition to, and more extensive than routine family visits, which take place three times a week. Also twice a year, each community will host a 'social day', to which they invite people with a professional interest. This helps to humanise the contact men have with criminal justice professionals, but also develops the network of supporters for the establishment as a whole.

All of the various elements work together in order to provide an environment in which men are invested with trust and responsibility, are encouraged to explore their own background and history, and develop new

skills. It is the nature of this approach that therapy groups do not happen in isolation, but rather, 'every aspect of prison life is an integral component of the therapeutic community environment'.³

Interview

RS: What would you say are the key features of a prison culture that has the potential to help people rehabilitate? What needs to be in place?

TG: The most important feature is having a sense of community. By this I mean people working together who want to achieve the same goals. Where people come together with shared goals and shared responsibilities they will look out for and support each other. Prisoners and staff are then more likely to work together and you see the mutual support and interest they have in each another.

RS: The point about having shared goals is interesting. In your experience how do you get to a position where people want to work in the same direction?

TG: You do need good leadership from the staff group. The staff group have to work together. However any community still need clearly defined goals if they are going to work effectively together. The staff group can help the prisoners to achieve those goals. We have

'constitutions'⁴ on the wings but the staff also need to set that example and to role model the process of social behaviour. You also need good role models within the prisoner group. People who have the ability to define and shape a culture.

RS: How important is it to be able to define and shape the expectations we have of prisoners?

TG: Very important, but where the conditions are right this is something they will establish for themselves. If it's something the prisoners have come up with themselves, then it makes it more valid in their eyes. If they question it or if we just told them this is how it's going to be, it would just reinforce how things have always been; whereas if they all work

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3. Brookes, M. (2010), "Putting principles into practice: the therapeutic community regime at HMP Grendon and its relationship with the 'good lives' model", in Shuker, R. and Sullivan, E. (Eds), *Grendon and the Emergence of Forensic Therapeutic Communities: Developments in research and practice*, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, pp. 99-113: p.103
4. The 'Wing Constitution' provides the code of conduct and expectations required of residents. It gives an account of the procedures and rules residents are required to adhere to and forms an agreement between the staff team and residents which guides behaviour and participation in the regime.

collaboratively with the staff and amongst themselves it holds more weight.

RS: At Grendon the prisoners are jointly involved in writing the constitution with staff. They sign up to it, and periodically revise it. I suppose the question is what makes prisoners want to adhere to it? Why do they want to buy into it?

CC: The most important thing is the relationships they have with the staff. If you have staff who are enthusiastic, who want to help them, then that inspires the prisoners. That's why we can work together with them. It's why we can collaborate and agree goals and targets. But there's also something else, and it's about communication. One of the important things is that within Grendon we can build really positive relationships with the men. We have the open door policy in the office where residents come in and you will sit and you'll talk. And it could be about therapy but it could be about what they watched on television last night.

RS: And this connection with staff is an important factor in prisoners wanting to engage with the regime?

TG: Yes, prisoners need to know that staff are approachable, they can approach them at any time, be it just to have a general chat about football or TV or if they've got deeper things they want to discuss, but that's why it works so well because all the staff are approachable and the prisoners feel able to talk to them. If their personal officer's not in and the group facilitator's not in, they're still able to go to other staff as well.

AB: It's easy to lose this in prisons and end up banging doors, counting, running around. Here I can have a two-hour chat with someone over the contents of Iron Bru. A lad I work with is fascinated with the chemicals and the difference between sugar-free because that's what he's interested in. I have to accept that. And I'm sat there listening to this and I'm chipping in thinking this is just great. I've got time to. I've got time to talk to this lad about, to me, very mundane things, but to him this is a major event in his life.

RS: Is it just time that allows this connection to form or is there something else which enables this, which then leads to the sense of collaboration that you were talking about?

AB: One important feature of the work here is the way all disciples work alongside each other. Here we

have a good rapport with civilian staff and we work together and collaborate.

TG: A lot of prisoners come from mainstream prisons and they don't trust psychologists, they don't trust clinical staff and they don't trust uniform staff. When they come here and see us working alongside the clinical staff that sends a really strong message about collaboration. Again, it's the role modelling that helps as well. It's also about getting the right people in. It's about getting the right people involved in the therapy and that's also very important.

RS: You've mentioned the time you spent with residents. You've mentioned the importance of having shared goals and how this can help create a climate where people collaborate. What else do you feel that the work at Grendon tells us about how to create a culture where people start to embrace the idea of wanting to make changes in their lives?

CC: For me the connection with families is really important. I know other prisons have family days, but they don't quite do them like Grendon does. Here the families can come down to the wing. They can meet the staff, they can meet the other community members; they can visualise them then when they phone, where the telephone box is; they can visualise their room.

Promoting relationships with families is key. Prisoners talk a lot about the changes their families notice in them and the boost this gives them.

TG: The culture of tolerance is also hugely important. If men make a mistake, it's the fact that we still want to work with them. Tempers may get frayed or a bit heated, exchanges may get heated sometimes but the fact is, staff will sit down and talk things through with residents and try and encourage them to do things in a different way, either through us or their peers, or the groups. It surprises some of them. When they break rules they think 'oh I'm going to get kicked out now' and sometimes they might be put up for 'commitment'⁵, but the fact is it's still done through the community and they get that support. It bowls them over sometimes, the amount of support they do get. They come to see making mistakes as a way of learning to get things right. We can ask 'Why did you do that? What were you thinking?' And the men will really engage with each other when they are considering the answers to these questions.

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5. Commitment refers to a resident being held account for their behaviour and engagement in the therapeutic community. Sanctions including termination of a residents place can be applied in cases where commitment is not being demonstrated.

RS: Tolerance seems to be a really important part in creating a culture which helps people change and helps people rehabilitate. I was wondering what your views were on how far this is something which other prisons can adopt? Can this part of our culture be relevant elsewhere?

AB: It can be down to individual staff. For example we had a lad here, he's gone back to mainstream, he was voted out of the community. We worked with him for three years. I paid him a visit when I was on a control and restraint course a couple of weeks ago. I was chatting with one of the officers who was on his spur and he says he found that if he gives this guy a job to do, he does it really well and if he keeps him working he keeps his head down and he obeys the regime. He knows that finding ways to keep him off 'basic'⁶ is very important, he is likely to go back on an ACCT plan, and possibly become confrontational. So he finds a way to support him. He noticed if he kept this guy working his behaviour would improve. So, yes tolerance is possible and in the right context can be a very helpful strategy.

RS: You've mentioned the connection between tolerance, working together and a sense of collaboration. Is there something about the way you go about your work here which is different to how you understood your role in other prisons?

CC: Yes I think there is. For example we organised having a Christmas meal with the families. We'd made table decorations, we'd decorated the wing. And the main issue here was when was the last time the men actually sat down with their family at Christmas. It was just a meal, but it was really important. When was the last time the men spent quality time with their families, and sat down and had a Christmas meal? But just even sitting down with them and having eaten dinner at a table with them, that's paramount really. But to do this you have to view your role from a different angle.

AB: This can also provide people with a sense of hope.

RS: Hope? In what sense?

AB: Take family days.⁷ These are events full of hope. Men can be part of a community where they're sat down having a meal with their mum and dad. Visits can also be very powerful. On a normal visit, things are far more constrained. You're sat at a table with a bib on

and you can't get off your chair. Your hands are meant to stay on the table. Whereas here, in our normal visits, you know, things are far more informal. You can buy yourself and your family a drink and the men start to realise that things can be different, prison can be a place of opportunities.

RS: In the example you've just given, there is something about the importance of being able to connect residents, not just with the staff team, but also with their families. The way we help people connect with families seems to be very powerful.

CC: Yes it's very important. Small things like going up and buying their family dinner or buying them a cake that can instil a sense of responsibility and dignity. Residents have paid for these things often out of their own wages. But there's also an issue of transparency. I'm thinking about the families being involved in their journey. When they come onto the wing they can talk to staff. The targets can be discussed. So they have an understanding of how their brother, son, father or husband is going and how much progress he has made. And that's important.

RS: You've all emphasised the importance of relationships. What role do relationships have in shaping the culture at Grendon and why do you think are they particularly positive?

TG: First of all you're just seen as real people not just the uniform. You can sit and talk to residents and you can get to know about their lives and understand how and why they come to see things the way they do. Instead of just seeing prisoners as a robber or a murderer you come to understand what sort of background they have. Sometimes you find yourself thinking 'what chance do they really have'. It just gives you that little bit of empathy and more compassion, I suppose, and get to recognise the progress they make as well. And to some extent they get to know a bit about you as a person and why you're the person you are. The fact we might talk to them about what we've done at the weekend, obviously within limits, shows we're actually willing to form a connection — and that we're human. That's really important. A lot of these guys have had issues with authority figures throughout their lives, and now they learn they can trust us.

Small things like going up and buying their family dinner or buying them a cake that can instil a sense of responsibility and dignity.

6. A Basic regime is part of the Incentives and Earned Privileges system where prisoners are entitled to the most limited level of privileges.

7. Family days provide opportunities for family members to visit their relatives on their community. Families can dine together, cell visits are allowed and they are able to learn more about the experience of their relatives participating in treatment.

RS: Getting people to talk to each other and getting to know each other seems very important. How can this be achieved in practice?

AB: I've always tried to make time to walk round the landings and just have a chat with prisoners. I didn't sit in the office during association. I'd build up a bit of dialogue and then sometimes prisoners would come to me with a problem and I'd say 'I'll sort that out for you'. Here you've got the time but it's also part of the culture and an expectation. If you get that rapport right, even if the guy is a bit of a trouble-maker it can make such a difference.

RS: So allowing people to get to know you and seeing this 'human' side to you, you see that as really important?

TG: It's very important. For example look at the use of first name terms which I admit, I struggled with when I first came here. That was one of the biggest things I knew I was going to find hard, but I've got to be honest, it works. I never thought I'd ever say that but it's a massive thing, it really is and it helps the residents see us again as a person and somebody who wants to relate to them.

AB: I always call prisoners by their first name. It was almost to break the barriers. Even where I've worked in other prisons, that broke down barriers.

RS: You seem to be saying that using first names can have a disproportionate impact on making relationships positive. Do you have any other thoughts about what helps strengthen the quality of relationships?

TG: The emphasis on spending informal time with residents is really important. They have time to talk to us, they have that time to actually chat with us. Also the joint activities such as entertainment evenings and staff participating in these, is an important part of the culture. Again, it shows our willingness to get involved and their willingness to accept us being involved.

RS: You also seem to be saying that relationships become enhanced here because you allow people to have a responsibility which somehow empowers them.

AB: Yes for example the wing has a chairman⁸ and a vice chairman who are voted in by other residents. If you go for a job you have to be voted in. When you get voted into the job you have a say on things. I've been pulled up by the community for when I've said the

wrong thing, I've been told off by the community and had to own my part where I've got things wrong.

RS: We've been talking about giving prisoners responsibility, we've been talking about how people collaborate and also about how people get to know each other and how important that is. Could these features of a regime work within other prisons?

CC: There needs to be a way of getting the residents to be committed, be proud of their area and, their wing and for people to work together.

AB: Communal eating can be an important part of this. Staff here eat together with the residents. That's important. It's a massive thing to share these things

RS: That's interesting. You say that shared living, shared working together, shared facilities, these things are very important.

TG: It's essential to be honest. Even when they normally mix together, doing things together gets to people. When people start to get involved together and make decisions together and plan together that's huge.

RS: It sounds like collaboration is particularly important. In your view how could a culture of collaboration and involvement be established in other regimes?

TG: Some of the things residents are involved in here, such quiz nights, the entertainment nights, there's no reason you couldn't do those on a wing or part of a wing in other prisons, it's just finding ways to get people involved that's the challenge. For example we have the community team building days. These get all the staff and residents involved. We played dodge ball last time. It might be hard to sell it to staff initially but where you're getting staff and prisoners to join in together, there is a lot of fun to it particularly when a member of staff from my wing was smiling and that member of staff isn't really known for smiling a great deal, and he knew he was smiling and enjoyed himself. You know, quite a lot of people commented on that and wow, but he got involved, and it was interesting to see how it does get people. It got people talking back on the wing as well. But he'd enjoyed it although tried to play it down a bit but again, it helped. Those things can have a real impact. They help hugely in breaking down barriers.

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8. The Chair and Vice Chairman are elected members of the community. They are responsible for chairing the twice weekly wing meetings, managing wing business and a conduit between the resident community and staff team

CC: Yes, residents see the other side to us.

CC: Also building on residents' strengths has a big impact. The community recently worked together in designing a mural in remembrance of the holocaust.

AB: Yeah, that was really good

CC: People will get involved. On our wing we also organise creative activities such as these and it's sussing out and building on people's strengths. When you've got two people involved at the start you've got ten by the end of the hour.

AB: I think it's all about taking pride in your own wing.

RS: **The issue of pride has been commented on a few times today. How do you get people proud of where they live, and actively part of what's going on?**

CC: For me, I'm proud of Grendon. And I love being here.

RS: **Why?**

CC: Because I think it works and I see people change. I like to be part of that person's journey at the beginning and seeing them two or three years later at the end. But for me, if I'm proud of where I work then I'm proud of whatever community I go on.

RS: **Could you expand on why being proud of where you work has an impact on how you approach your work?**

CC: I've always been enthusiastic and I've always liked to get involved. This encourages the residents to see past the uniform and helps them to see you as you are. For example some of the residents didn't want to take part in the Remembrance Day event, and nobody was really getting involved. Anyway after a lot of discussion people started to take part. It was absolutely brilliant and everybody was really, really proud of what they'd achieved. The enthusiasm was infectious.

RS: **So your approach to your work helped people to become proud of where they live and work, where they felt they'd achieved something meaningful.**

CC: Yes, yes

AB: And that's seen sometimes in the events like the art event we just had. I walked around and there

was immense pride. Someone asked 'why isn't this work being displayed?' So we're now going to get the work displayed because they are brilliant bits of artwork. The resident had done this from his own head and he's quite chuffed that he's now had positive feedback from the Governor. And suddenly this re-invigorated him. And it helps that the Governors are very visible, they'll go onto the wings and say, nice one lads. Again, it's because they want to do it.

TG: Responsibility in terms of 'rep' jobs⁹ is also very important. How, one of the cleaners sees someone take pride in their work and then everyone can take a bit of pride in their particular area and this brings people together, people can see what can be achieved and that can make a difference to how they see themselves.

CC: I just remember on your wing Tris, when you have Adam (resident) down there and doing the World Cup event. He got everybody involved in C Wing.

TG: Yes this became a really important community event, getting people involved together. You just need a few people involved to start with and it's infectious sometimes, it does get to other people.

RS: **You've touched on something which is fairly unique to therapeutic community regime, which is the extent to which residents take responsibility. Is there any way in which that part of the culture at Grendon could work in a more active way in**

other prisons, where prisoners have more responsibility for day to day living and decision making?

AB: It's all about the ownership and the expectations we have of people. For example we don't shout 'gym' and we don't shout 'exercise' because people know the regime and take responsibility for themselves. In a way people follow the regime without us.

RS: **Are there other ways in which people could be given more responsibility and have more involvement for where they live?**

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⁹ 'Rep' jobs are positions of responsibility residents are elected into on their community by other prisoners

TG: Allowing people to have pride is very important. It's a rolling programme here where you have different people at different stages in their therapy. With peer support and modelling people start to see taking responsibility as routine. People find it easier to listen to their peers than to listen to staff.

RS: From your experiences of working in a therapeutic community, how do you consider that the challenges of setting up a rehabilitative culture in mainstream prisons can be overcome?

TG: For one you need experienced staff. Staff who have jail-craft. But you also need staff who are open minded and with the right values. That's very important. The other issue is getting staff to buy into things.

CC: You also need enthusiasm and you need belief
RS: How would you create that?

TG: Get staff to come and look round places such as therapeutic communities where they can see people working along side each and staff and prisoners collaborating together. Come here and see what we do. Spend a couple of days here

RS: What would that help achieve?

TG: Other colleagues could see how it works, they could see the benefits of a regime such as this. They could see the informal relationships that we have with the prisoners. The fact that they take ownership for their own lives. That it works. By talking to different staff and prisoners this would pay real dividends.

AB: Yes it's important to see the ways in which prisoners take responsibility; what it means to be wing chairman; how it feels to see prisoners sorting out their own problems and conflicts.

TG: They'll also see the real changes, the positive changes in people they used to work with. That would be really powerful.

RS: What else motivates men to comply, engage and becoming involved? Are there any easy wins, do you think. Changes or initiatives that could make a real impact and could be implemented relatively easily?

AB: Giving people positive feedback who have always been criticised. Prisoners often struggle to accept that. It might just be a wing cleaner's done a really good job. So I'd say you've done a cracking job there. I know it's a very basic level but when they do

something good and actually feel valued that has a real impact on relationships and how they see themselves as prisoners.

RS: You say it's basic but do practices which celebrate achievement and provide recognition have a particularly powerful impact?

TG: Yes, I think so. You see some guys they've got all these certificates of things they've done and they're really proud of it. And just having that to show some evidence of what they've achieved is a big deal to some people. It give them a sense of pride.

RS: What would you say has been the most important part of your work in creating a more rehabilitative culture?

AB: I've got time. I come through that gate in the morning and I'm not in a rush. I get on the wing. I'm not in a rush. We unlock. I'm not rushing. I can stand in the corridor and talk. If there's a problem I've got time to deal with it. I've got time to implement new ideas or time to resolve little issues without having to worry about the clock ticking away. And for me that's the big thing I've noticed here.

CC: For me it's building healthy working relationships with the men. I also think that the important thing is being a pro-social role model. Anything which helps prisoners to see you for who you are and not a uniform is particularly important. Breaking down those barriers is best achieved by building relationships and getting to know people.

TG: Something that stands out for me is the fact I can be myself. What I mean by that is if I do make a mistake I'll own it straight away and I'm not afraid to say I shouldn't have said that or shouldn't have done that. But I can still be me. I can have a laugh or a joke with the guys and it's these relationships which are so important.

AB: I also think that getting a sense of pride on the wings is so important. It's about getting people involved in making the wing somewhere they want to live and making their lives meaningful. It's about allowing people to have a genuine input and involvement.

RS: Thanks everybody for taking part in the interview.