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Active citizens promoting rehabilitative outcomes

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> *'I passionately believe that active citizenship should be part of the learning framework in prisons to build a safer, respectful and more secure environment. The benefits would be felt across our prisons and in our outside communities. This would excite and enable prisoners to see that they can act to influence outcomes both inside and outside prison using new learning and skills.'*[1]
>
> PJ Butler, Governor, HMP Bedford

In 2015, the Prison Reform Trust launched active citizens panels to draw on the insights of people in prison about particular areas of concern and find solutions. Each panel explored a specific topic, such as: debt, a clean environment, grooming, the prevention of violence, or race equality.

PRT begins the process by consulting the governor or SMT members to agree on a challenge for which they would value input from residents. A panel of 6 — 12 people is set up and, typically, meets for four sessions:

1. **Evidence about the problem**—how widespread is it, who is affected, and how?
2. **What are the causes of the problem?**—How do Government, prison managers, officers, residents, and others contribute?
3. **What is the prison already doing to manage the problem?**
4. **What should be done?** The panel generates solutions, discusses their proposals, and refines their recommendations for a final report which is submitted to the governor.

The governor (or SMT) then meets the panel to discuss their recommendations and agree the next steps.

Participation in a panel requires people to respect different points of view, to support their views with evidence, and to share decision-making equally among the group. It calls for patience and active listening skills. The act of backing the panel's recommendations is a demonstration of trust and hope.

In July 2019, the Prison Reform Trust published Prisoners Reforming Prisons, summarising the learning from those active citizen panels which provided input on: safety from fights and assaults; staff-prisoner relationships; and the responsible use of time.[2]

Focusing on the last theme, this article draws on relevant active citizens panels to suggest ways that activities in prison can help to develop a rehabilitative culture. At a time when prisons are uniting around this concept, these panels contribute insights directly from residents about practical changes and reforms prisons can make to advance that vision.

Ruth Mann and colleagues explain that rehabilitative culture occurs when . . .

> *'All the aspects of our culture support rehabilitation; they contribute to the prison being safe, decent, hopeful and supportive of change, progression and to helping someone desist from crime. The aim is for everyone to feel safe from physical and verbal violence and abuse, for prisons to be places of decency, where everyone treats each other with respect, and people's basic needs are understood and met.'*[3]

Meaningful activities

What counts as purposeful activities often depends on what prisons can provide. The activities might range from offending behaviour courses or creative arts to packing tea bags. 'Meaningful activities' on the other hand are those that an individual would choose for themselves, because they fit their personal interests and motivations.

Currently, many prisons do not provide sufficient opportunities to maintain a rehabilitative culture. Only one in three male prisons inspected last year were rated as good or reasonably good for activity outcomes.[4] The prisons inspectorate sets a standard of 10 hours or

1. PJ Butler (2019) Foreword: *Prisoners Reforming Prisons: Active citizen panels' suggestions for improving prisons,* London: Prison Reform Trust.
2. Prison Reform Trust (2019) *Prisoners Reforming Prisons: Active citizen panels' suggestions for improving prisons,* London: Prison Reform Trust.
3. Ruth Mann, Flora Fitzalan Howard, and Jenny Tew (2018) "What is a rehabilitative prison culture?" Prison Service Journal, Issue 235 January 2018, pages 3-9.
4. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2019) Annual Report 2018-2019, London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons.

more out of cell on weekdays. In 2018-19, their prisoner surveys revealed that adult male prisons met this for only one in ten people. Nearly a quarter of prisoners surveyed said they spent less than two hours out of their cells on a weekday. In local prisons, even fewer were out of the cell for more than two hours. In almost half the prisons inspected, there were not enough education, skills and work activity places to cater for all prisoners throughout the week.[5]

Measuring purposeful activity is notoriously difficult. Time out of cell is unlikely to provide a reliable proxy. In a cell, people can use time constructively, such as writing a letter to a local housing association, but that time would not be counted as purposeful. Conversely, the fact that someone is out of the cell does not guarantee that what they are doing has a clear purpose. Too often, measurements reflect a low threshold.

The Chief Inspector of Prisons observed that

> *'Many prisoners took part in work that was mundane or not challenging enough to support them with the development of their employability skills or to prepare them for work after release.'*[6]

Market-driven strategies for prison jobs are important for those who will be released soon. But activities based on the job market are not the whole picture of how time in prison can bring personal meaning. A review of 'what works' in reducing reoffending found that important factors are the quality of the work and the degree of personal satisfaction an individual gains.[7]

A prisoner's perspective, drawn from a previous PRT research project, shows the importance of recognising strengths:

> *'In these places, even though we find ourselves in these situations, there are brilliant writers, artists, people that have created everything. Everybody somewhere inside them has got something that they're good at, but [prisons] don't look to find that in people or to help them.'*[8]

When someone's passions reinforce their skills, doing what they are best at is also what gives them most satisfaction. Certain qualities emerge when a person is in their element, such as: looking forward to the activity; being completely absorbed in the task; confidence in meeting the challenges; and the feeling that one's best skills are being put to use. Furthermore, the commitment and motivation to take part suggest that the activity can influence a person's self-image.[9]

Clinks recently published a report on mental well-being in prison. Their respondents suggested that activities that nurtured creativity, arts and exercise improved mental well-being.[10]

A resident in a closed prison ('AB'), interviewed for the Prison Service Journal, summed up the environment that is needed to promote true rehabilitation:

> Opportunity and hope. Those two things go together. You can't have hope if you've got no opportunities.

> *'Opportunity and hope. Those two things go together. You can't have hope if you've got no opportunities. If you've got no opportunities, you've got no hope. If people feel safe and then they have opportunities, they are going to have hope.'*

AB explained:

> *'If you've got an opportunity to do a plumbing course say, and if you do that plumbing course and you do well, it creates a thousand different hopes in your mind because you've just done something you know that I can take this outside and I can actually do this. You've given yourself something to work towards, look at, even to dream about and aspire to.'*[11]

5. *Ibid.,* pages 34, 36.
6. *Ibid.,* page 38.
7. Harper, G. and Chitty, C. (2005) "The Impact of Corrections on Reoffending: A Review of What Works", Home Office Research Study 291, London: Home Office.
8. Prison Reform Trust (2012) *Out for Good: Taking responsibility for resettlement,* by Kimmett Edgar, Andy Aresti and Neal Cornish, online: http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/OutforGood.pdf; accessed 22 August 2019.
9. See Ken Robinson (2010) *The Element: How finding your passion changes everything,* London: Penguin. Also: Alison Liebling et al. (2019) "Are hope and possibility achievable in prison?" The Howard Journal, online: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/hojo.12303, accessed 2 September 2019.
10. Clinks and VCSE (2019) "Whole prison, whole person: How a holistic approach can support good mental health in prison," online: https://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/clinks_whole-prison-mh_V4.pdf; accessed 13 August 2019.
11. Cited in Georgina Barkham-Perry (2019) "Rehabilitative culture in a closed prison," Prison Service Journal, July 2019, Issue 244, pages 29-31; online:https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/PSJ%20244%20July%202019.pdf; accessed 22 August 2019.

Recalling the activities people can undertake in a cell, one thing they cannot do is develop skills in working with others in a group. Setting individual goals should not eclipse the need for social interaction.

The importance of a sense of community in prison activities was reinforced in the Prison Service Journal by a staff member, Tris Green:

> *'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.'*[12]

The Prison Reform Trust's report Time Well Spent profiled citizenship roles such as peer support and mentoring, Listeners, arts, and prison representatives. These activities promote a shared ethos of care, trust, affirmation, and integrity which can make a profound contribution to social order.[13]

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The economist, Avner Offer, described the importance of affirmation and sociability to well-being:

> *'Personal interaction ranks very high among the sources of satisfaction. It can take many forms: acknowledgement, attention, acceptance, respect, reputation, status, power, intimacy, love, friendship, kinship, sociability.'*[14]

This suggests that citizenship roles in prison can steer the community from a preoccupation with risk, blame, and suspicion to more positive and trusting relationships.

This social basis of activity is supported by the prisons inspectorate's expectations: 'Prisoners are encouraged and supported to take responsibility for their rehabilitation and to contribute positively to the prison community.'[15]

Genuinely meaningful activity requires a foundation in the regime and the culture—a widely shared ethos that respects identity and promotes a sense of positive opportunity.

Active citizens panels on the responsible use of time

Active citizen panels were convened to respond to a variety of themes on the use of time in prison, which included:

- ❏ How can this prison do better at promoting resettlement?
- ❏ What can be done to help women here get ready for release?
- ❏ Taking responsibility for rehabilitation; and
- ❏ How can this prison treat people more like adults than children?

The first step in an active citizen panel is to build a picture of the problem. The panel members' analyses of the problems revealed factors that may not have occurred to governors.

For example, in one prison, the members discussed what gets in the way of using time in prison constructively. They mentioned poor communication about what was available; limited opportunities; activities that did not reflect people's areas of interest; and officers who deliberately block participation.

> *'There used to be a core day—work all day, association in the evening, visits on weekends. Now, three days a week you sleep in till eleven. You get into a pattern and then when you're released, you can't adjust to a working week.'*

Another group acknowledged that fights and assaults disrupt the regime. But panels also cited inactivity as a source of prison violence: i) lower wages increase the risk of conflicts over resources; ii) bang-up time raises frustrations; and iii) boredom drives drug misuse.

'There is a knock-on effect: no activities mean too much time in your cell. People do drugs because there is nothing else to do and boredom does their head in.'

A third group discussed living in a low-trust environment, which they said:

- ❏ stops progression
- ❏ makes it hard to prove you've changed
- ❏ undermines motivation
- ❏ can prevent work opportunities; and
- ❏ can hinder family connections.

12. Cited in Richard Shuker: "Working in a rehabilitative culture," Prison Service Journal, July 2019, Issue 244, pages 57-63.
13. Prison Reform Trust (2011) *Time Well Spent:* by Kimmett Edgar, Jessica Jacobson and Kathy Baker, London: Prison Reform Trust.
14. Avner Offer (1997) "Between the gift and the market: the economy of regard", Economic History Review, L, 3, 1997, 450-476.
15. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2017) Expectations: Criteria for assessing the treatment of and conditions for men in prisons, Version 5, Expectation 22, London: HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, page 17.

'You need to do things for yourself, and if you are not trusted you are treated like a child.'

A more rehabilitative regime

Rehabilitative culture suggests that the focus of prisons, in designing opportunities and activities, should be on enabling residents to exercise responsibility and make informed decisions about their future. Activities in prison should promote well-being; respond to and build up human dignity; and help boost self-esteem. In this way, time spent constructively inside prison can help prepare the person for the responsibilities they will face after release.

Prisoners consulted for a recent report by the PRT Prisoner Policy Network, said that there were three prerequisites in order to make good use of their time:

basic needs (a decent physical environment and safety)

psychological needs (a sense of belonging, self-confidence)

opportunities for self-fulfilment (a chance to realise your potential).[16]

Rehabilitation is often focused on training and preparing for release through housing and employment schemes. Crucial as these are, the panels suggested that underlying values also exert a powerful influence. Examples cited by panel members included: being treated as a person; being able to demonstrate trust and exercise responsibility; supporting hopes; and listening to concerns.

A group was asked what the prison's management team could do to take their report forward. The members said they wanted:

- ❏ commitment
- ❏ transparency
- ❏ respect
- ❏ trust
- ❏ follow through; and
- ❏ to work with us.

Another group described what prisons need to do to treat people as responsible adults: rewarding good behaviour as well as punishing bad behaviour; seeing each as an individual; enabling people to make decisions for themselves; and demonstrating trust by the opportunities provided.

Treating people as responsible begins in reception. One panel requested improvements to induction assessments, so that information is better targeted at specific needs (such as housing, debt or trauma). They proposed a regular update of people's needs by prison staff, so that they can work towards their goals. Groups also suggested that prisons should ask at induction what people are good at, and then provide relevant opportunities that build on those skills. One panel observed that prison jobs would be distributed more fairly if they were consistently based on people's qualifications and references.

Specific recommendations included the following:

- ❏ More could be done to make use of the resources people in prison can provide, for example, by facilitating peer-led classes in education.
- ❏ A new role of 'communication orderly' could be created to answer questions about how the prison works, and improve communication among managers, staff and prisoners. The prison should signpost the range of opportunities that are available.
- ❏ People would be more responsible for their finances if they received more reasonable pay and had better access to financial management advice.
- ❏ Businesses could be approached to provide a wider choice of employment opportunities inside prison.
- ❏ To support people's mental health, therapeutic job opportunities should enable people with mental health needs to hold down a job.
- ❏ As family ties are vital to rehabilitation, all prisons should provide access to Skype / Facetime.

In deciding on their list of recommendations, many debated whether their input would have any effect. The majority of panels took time to consider how likely it was that a specific proposal would be actioned. Limiting factors included national policies and resources. But most governors welcomed the reports from the panels and committed to take action on about three in five recommendations.

Active citizen panels fit in with a developing menu of tools for consultation, such as User Voice and the Prisoner Policy Network. These reflect well on cultural change in prisons.

As Ruth Mann and her colleagues observed:

> *'The content of our policies and procedures can support or hinder rehabilitation: do we encourage people to make their own choices, support relationship development, improve self-management skills and reward pro-social involvement where ever possible? Do we consult the people in our care to make our processes as effective and smooth as possible...?'*[17]

There is an emerging understanding that providing opportunities for residents to exercise responsible citizenship[18] is both a better preparation for release and a driver of a more respectful and supportive community inside the prison. Ensuring that prisons tap into that expertise and work together to find solutions to the problems facing their community is in everyone's interest.

16. Prisoner Policy Network (2019) "What do you need to make the best use of your time in prison?", by Dr Lucy Wainwright, Paula Harriott, and Soruche Saajedi, London: Prison Reform Trust, page 4.
17. Mann, Fitzalan Howard, and Tew, op. cit.
18. Responsible citizenship is a concept being developed by PJ Butler, in HMP Bedford.