

Reflections

Our four major categories of groupwork (all related to criminal behaviour) are likely to persist. Offending behaviour groups will probably continue to thrive, particularly whilst there are probation officers based in prisons. Alcohol and drug groups are facilitated, in large part, by outside agencies and thus are less dependent upon prison personnel for their continuation. Anger control groupwork is the second largest national 'treatment' initiative and as such is liable to continue to increase over the coming years, although growth will be dependent upon a shift in facilitators from psychologists to prison officers. Sex offender groups are likely to improve further in quality because of the high profile and resources involved in what is the major national assessment and treatment initiative in prisons. Numbers of

lifer groups are liable to reflect numbers in the overall prison lifer population (currently on the increase). The future of anxiety management and social skills groups is less clear.

Overall, groupwork appears to be on the increase in prisons, the immediate future is fertile for development. ■

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DEAFNESS

Conference

'In prison deaf inmates are isolated and very often frightened resulting in violent behaviour.'

Progress through equality

I wish to focus this article on the deaf and to give an insight into their world and their specific communication problems.

The conference was aimed to make 'professionals' aware of problems in other specialist areas. It focused on five main areas Forensic, Mental Health, Education the justice system, Rehabilitation and the Counselling services. I will be trying to extract impartial issues from that conference.

Communication at the conference between deaf and hearing people was first class and set a standard for us all to aspire to. Many lectures were 'signed' by deaf professionals and for hearing people a 'Voice over' translation was provided. For the 'spoken' lectures the 'signing' was interpreted into Sign-supported English (SSE), British Sign Language (BSL) and mouthed orally for the deaf without signing skills.

For the benefit of European visitors French Sign was provided. For the hard-of-hearing a loop system was laid which connected directly with hearing aids.

Types of sign

To explain further about sign language, each region of the country has variations (as with our accents) and there are four main types of 'Sign', BSL, SSE, Piaget Dormann and Makoton.

Each country also has its own 'sign' language (so Esperanto it is not).¹

Forensic aspects of mental health and deafness

Under the Forensic aspects of deafness and mental health speakers from Rampton Hospital made us aware that not only were their inmates deaf but also disordered, detained and dangerous. Yet despite these

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Cristine is a prison officer at HMP Holloway. She attended the British Society for Mental Health and Deafness - Third National Conference at Owens Park, University of Manchester on Friday 9 and Saturday 10 September 1994.

¹ (Esperanto) = An international artificial language based on words common to the main European languages.

problems they had achieved a long-standing 'sign' class in education. During educational holidays inmates became very disturbed and frustrated at the lack of classes and consequently their lack of communication.

Sexual Offenders

Within this same area came the assessment and treatment of deaf sexual offenders. This area appeared to be reliant on the services of a few dedicated 'signing' psychologists.

Advocacy

One lone man in the North was meeting the challenge of helping with advocacy issues. He travelled great distances each week helping in courts and prisons but he was just completing a one year contract.

Issues in Education

A small percentage of hearing children are born to deaf parents but 90 per cent of deaf children are born to hearing parents thus they have no common language and many of these hearing parents are still being told not to allow their children to 'sign'! (presumably so that speech is acquired in some mysterious way). Is this the start of frustration and anger?

A child in the past may have followed the life plan of being sent at three to a boarding school and thus deprived of both parents (in the child's best interest of course). Whichever type of school is chosen 'hearing' 'deaf' or 'deaf integrated' the communication is often ineffective and the child feels he has done something wrong. Then after struggling with frustration, anger, emotional loss and learning English as a 2nd language the child is labelled 'slow'.

Then some ten years later the young deaf adult is faced with obtaining training (practically impossible) or finding a job (usually in the lower strata).

Culture and Language

Being Asian or black and deaf raises sign language problems and cultural language misinterpretations over and above the accepted ones for English speakers. For example why would a hearing person in reply to a question say 'No problem' to a deaf person? Why? thinks the deaf person would they say 'No' whilst meaning 'yes'.

Mentally ill and Language

The mentally ill and deaf tend to stay that way because of the lack of specialist centres. There are three around the country in London, Prestwick and Birmingham. There is a lack of specialised language for instance, there is no sign for "hallucinations". But a dictionary of specialist signs is now being compiled by Springfield workers.

Counselling

A counselling service called 'Compass' in Merseyside is now undertaking counselling for the deaf and the training of deaf counsellors. A necessary service for sick people with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and other life threatening diseases.

The St John's project is for deaf people but rehabs and housing were very sparse with Community Psychiatric Nurses and Social Workers bearing the brunt of support in their area.

Nursing Training

Deaf nurses are now being trained under the National Vocation Qualification (NVQ) system and are excellent at their work. Students are now being accepted at hearing colleges but cannot take notes easily as they must watch the interpreters. Then the other problems of 'interpretation' occur which are the lack of emphasis to elucidate meanings and occasionally words are misinterpreted due to dual meanings.

Therefore given the above it is remarkable that the deaf manage to control their anger and frustration and in the majority of cases grow into normal contributory adults in our society.

Fear

The ones who do not control their anger and frustration come to prison. Often to avoid stigmatisation, they have become 'easy prey' in their desperation to fit in socially.

In prison deaf inmates are isolated and very often frightened, resulting in violent behaviour. They have little access to education and even on Sundays have no access to angelic texts or signing vicars.

Medically they are interviewed by nonsigning psycho-therapists and doctors must guess at their physical symptoms.

In the whole of the country we have only three known probation officers with signing skills and a dozen or more signing prison officers.

The court diversionary scheme works spasmodically and there seems to be mixed opinions about whether or not offenders who are mentally ill, should face-up to their offending.

Communications outside prison via Minicom

The plight of the deaf without reading or writing skills worsens considerably and their contact with the 'outside' world is prevented by their limited access to telephone facilities. A minicom system is a necessity, then messages can be typed and sent via the type-talk service. I am sure a minicom could be hired and moved around the prisons with convicted deaf inmates.

Hopefully, I have raised an awareness of the

problems associated with deafness. From their education, cultural and language problems followed by their mental health difficulties and their lack of facilities in prison for counselling, communication and rehabilitation.

'Improving communications' in prison becomes a whole new problem compared with our deaf equals.

Below is a short story from Jo in Holloway.

Well, I am deaf and I am still in prison on remand, even though I am really afraid. I desperately need to talk via a minicom system to my boyfriend and parents but I could not hear with a phone card. I try to make people understand what to say but when they pass it on with 'speech' the phone card is used up very quickly.

Summary

Also bear in mind that when deaf people eat they can't sign, when they walk away they cannot be called back, they cannot hear in traffic neither can they ask directions or questions. Things we take for granted. ■

Letters

Dear Sir,

In your issue No. 93, it was quite understandable for Ivor Ward as the Prison Service's Equal opportunities officer to defend his department from his 'ivory' tower backed by some statistics.

The reality at grass roots level is another matter. You only need to read the vernacular press to judge the dilemma of ethnic minority staff, BOV members and other volunteers trapped and marginalised in the Service.

Could it be that the 99 per cent of Ethnic Minority that he claims to have retained is due to the fact that these people have no other alternative job prospects to turn to in the present employment climate?

Apart from paper commitments, I do not

believe that Ivor and others in his position have ventured to address the plight of these people or their quality of life in a racist and sexist culture. Only a victim is aware of the patronising and humiliating treatment one faces from so called colleagues and management.

Nevertheless, I absolutely agree with Ivor that unlike the judiciary and others, the Prison Service have made great strides to try to monitor their problem. We at least have some idea of our enormous shortcomings. All we now need to do is to spare some resources to forge ahead with racial awareness education amongst our population.

Under the charismatic leadership of Mandella and DeClerk, South Africa appears to be on the road to recovery from

the ills of apartheid. Quite frankly, it is about time Britain followed suit with some vigour instead of the usual pussyfooting.

Yours faithfully

**Anver Jeevanjee
Board of Visitors and Prison
Service Race Relations Group.**

Dear Sir,

I have recently read Journal Issue No 94, July 1994. On reading Page One's 'comment' headed 'Breathalysers before Urine Tests', I challenge the article. In my opinion it is drugs not alcohol that is the leading problem within prison establishments.

In my experience drunken inmates admittedly can be, but are not always, a problem. They are never as difficult to deal