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Making Good by Giving Back

A Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship 2014

Research interest:
approaches that can
promote positive identities
and desistance from crime.

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Trust

Helen Collins March 2015

Preface

This experience has taught me many things. Life is full of twists and turns and how people deal with and rise above some of these challenges never ceases to amaze me. I have listened to lots of stories of courage and examples of how individuals manage to work through the most difficult of circumstances, but one interconnection of stories kept interrupting my thoughts during my travels and continues to do so now I have returned home. I am not sure what, if anything, this interconnection means, but do think that it demonstrates the strength, resilience and importantly, the kindness of people. I thought it important to commit this story to paper.

Toronto

Called to help others, Greg's first posting with the Salvation Army was at the site of the twin towers in New York City soon after the attack. He began to minister a distressed NYPD police officer who was struggling to come to terms with some of what he had witnessed; the terrible suffering of others. In time and each night Greg helped the police officer to talk and work through some of his experience. Years later they remain in touch.

Winnipeg

It is September 11th and I am spending time on a retreat with women involved in the sex trade. One of the women, who I will refer to as Christine, is crying as she tells me that that she does not feel like joining in the activity that day. She is sad recalling someone close who she lost in the attack on the twin towers in New York City. Life following this event appears to have taken a turn for the worse. Christine is currently involved in the sex trade but has hopes of leaving soon and making a new start.

Vancouver

I meet with Kirsty who works tirelessly to help the children of people involved in the criminal justice system. Kirsty tells me that she moved back to Canada after losing her partner in a tragic drowning accident. Kirsty tried to resuscitate him but to no avail. With the help and support of her cousin Abby and her husband Aaron, Kirsty was able to begin to rebuild her life. Aaron was killed whilst on business on September 11th in New York City.

Supporting each other and walking on the beach Abby and Kirsty notice two killer whales that swim uncharacteristically close to the edge of the water. The whales accompany Abby and Kirsty for a time. This brought some comfort.

Three places and three stories...

Acknowledgements

In writing this report I draw from a range of research, but in the main from the work of Professor Shadd Maruna and in particular the research from his influential Liverpool Desistance Study.¹ The insight which this work provides has served as a huge influence to my work and thinking and to the form which my Churchill Fellowship was to take.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and Prison Reform Trust for enabling what has been a truly remarkable experience. I would also give my sincere thanks to all the workers who gave their valuable time and effort to facilitate my learning and to all the participants in the projects for their time and insight. Thank you to Durham Tees Valley Community Rehabilitation Company for the time to travel and to Hazel for opening doors since my return. Finally, thank you to my referees Shadd and Nicky and to all who provided support and encouragement; in particular thanks to John for your support, help and direction on geography.

A note on terminology

When completing a quick on-line search of the definition for the term 'offender' I find:

'Offender'- a person who has committed an illegal act (Oxford dictionary).

'Offender'- a person who is guilty of a crime (Cambridge dictionary).

'Offender'- someone who has committed a crime (Macmillan dictionary).

All of these definitions appear to me to refer to something in the past tense, but the continued use of the term also implies something that may occur in the future tense. In a similar vein is someone who tells a lie always referred to as a 'liar', someone who gets intoxicated always referred to as a 'drunk' and does the continued use of the term stand in contradiction to attempts that are made to reduce re-offending? Perhaps not, but my thinking would suggest so and I choose to use the term 'offender' only in particular instances and to illustrate particular thinking, for reasons which I hope will become clear.

Structure of the report

I use the research and experience from my travels throughout this report to illustrate particular concepts and thinking. A full itinerary of my travels is contained at Appendix B. The report is structured into four broad pieces:

- Desistance and identity;
- The learning from my travels;
- The wider implications of a model of 'giving back' and the thinking around a changed business model that a focus upon desistance encourages;
- Recommendations and proposals.

¹ Maruna, S. (2001) *Making Good: How ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives*, American Psychological Association, Washington.

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Introduction

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust provided the opportunity to research projects that aim to promote community reintegration and longer term desistance from crime. I travelled across Canada and the United States to visit projects, learn and to use this experience and knowledge to help others.

As background to this project, I have worked for the Probation Service for a number of years and have experienced some significant changes to the purpose and function of the service. These changes have ranged from the provision of officer's of the court whose function was to advise, assist and befriend, through to service purposes of enforcement, public protection and risk management and finally, to the current reorganisation and creation of Community Rehabilitation Companies. To provide further context to my fellowship and travels; I have never subscribed to the 'nothing works' school of thought with respect to reducing reoffending and think that the translation of the 'what works' approach in this country has been too narrow. The translation of what works has prioritised the delivery of accredited cognitive behavioural programmes and programmes of intervention that can demonstrate quantitative reductions in reconviction. Whilst the research of projects that contribute to reductions in reconviction is one of my primary aims, I also believe that the dogmatic pursuit of hard outcomes has stifled the development of innovation and potentially more effective approaches. Because of this belief my research led me away from the more typical probation and correctional services type approach to visit with projects that were in the main delivered by the faith sector and not for profit organisations.

The form which my fellowship was to take was heavily influenced by the more recent body of research which focuses upon the process of desistance. This body of research provides an understanding of the sometimes complex interplay of factors that can lead a person to cease their involvement in criminal activity and sustain their continued resolve to do so. This understanding can help to develop a much more inclusive, community located and sustainable response which I believe can assist individuals desist from crime and provide so much more. The research encourages new ways of thinking about our response to crime which I believe holds a powerful potential to reach into communities and provide a ripple effect of benefits. The opportunities provided by this fellowship have enabled the development of my thinking in this regard and the experience has allowed me to see how the concepts and theory can be put into concrete practice.

As learning invariably leads to more questions than answers my initial line of enquiry has shifted and I now find myself seeking answers to different questions; one of the wonderful aspects of research which I am sure will continue to develop and vex my thoughts. The other exciting aspect of research is the sharing of your thinking and hoping that someone else is able to take your concepts and questions to provide solutions and different lines of enquiry. I hope that this report provides an impetus for more thinking, more research and more developments in the arena of criminal justice and penal reform.

Aim of the Fellowship

The following extract is taken from a book given to me as a gift on my travels.² The extract describes the thoughts of a man, prisoner 332B, who is soon to be released from prison. I believe that the experience is as relevant today as it was when published in 1890 and illustrates how little has changed for returning prisoners:

“As the day of my liberation drew near, the horrid conviction that circumstances would perhaps compel me to return to prison haunted me, and so helpless did I feel at the prospects that awaited me outside, that I dreaded release, which seemed but the facing of an unsympathetic world. The day arrived, and, strange as it may sound, it was with; regret that I left my cell. It had become my home, and no home waited me outside. How utterly crushed I felt; feelings of companionship had gone out to my unfortunate fellow-prisoners, whom I had seen daily, but the sound of whose voices I had never heard, whilst outside friendships were dead, and companionships were forever broken, and I felt as an outcast of society, with the mark of 'gaol bird' upon me, that I must cover my face, and stand aside and cry 'unclean.' Such were my feelings.” (Booth 1890: Chapter 7).

Aside from the sheer feelings of hopelessness contained in the narrative of this piece, is the strong sense of self that the prisoner 332B portrays; the outcast, unclean gaol bird who feels he must cover his face on his return to life outside of the prison. The importance and impact which this sense of self has upon efforts to desist from crime and reintegrate is the primary subject of my research. I aimed to explore how projects can:

- Support people to move away from a life of crime;
- Promote their integration into communities and importantly;
- How projects and interventions can influence a shift in a person’s sense of identity that encourages or supports the process of desistance.

Identity and the role which this plays is an area which I believe is often overlooked in the design of interventions that aim to rehabilitate and reduce re-offending and is an element that is critical to the process of desistance.

I have worked with many people in prison and completing community sentences who have undertaken programmes of intervention and advised that the programme encouraged a change in thinking and motivation to make change; people who have also accessed services to stabilise and recover from addiction and who have accessed structural supports such as decent housing and employment; who have either:

- (a) Continued to offend or,
- (b) Have been unable to sustain their resolve and desistance from crime longer term.

My travel and research for the Trust has affirmed the thinking that for some people the completion of a programme and access to structural support may be enough to assist desistance. However, it also showed that for others these efforts will not be enough and that interventions that tackle the issue of identity and assist people to ‘deal with being an offender’ are also necessary if sustained reductions in re-offending are to be achieved. In

² Booth, W. (1890) In Darkest England and The Way Out. Etext Project Gutenberg. March 1996.

addition, I think that most would support the view that successful desistance also requires the welcome of the family, wider community and an approach that is much broader than the traditional remit of criminal justice agencies. Within this report I will suggest that the development of approaches that help people to make sense of their identity can also lead to a much more inclusive approach that can encourage the welcome of the wider community.

Presentation of the report

Whilst I initially set out to try and write a piece about my thinking and travels in an academic style research paper, my intention in this regard has also shifted. I have not presented a collection of statistics that illustrate the impact which the projects visited were having upon reductions in reconviction, though all could provide to varying degrees, sound outcome data to support the interventions or approach. When considering the audience I hope to reach; yes, I do hope some of my thinking may be considered by the academic world and yes, I certainly hope my proposals at the end of this piece can be considered by those who may be in a position to enable the thinking to be operationalised. However, I also hope to reach a much wider audience and to be able to promote further thinking and inclusion, particularly amongst the group of people about whom I write, those people who are, or have been involved in the criminal justice system as a result of offending. Who else after all is in a better position to consider the concepts, thinking and potential solutions?

I am also aware that a common critique of the thinking around desistance is that the research is not readily translated into practice. Within this report I try also to present my thinking and research in such a way that aids an understanding of how theory can inform practice and in turn be used to design more effective responses to reducing reoffending.

Desistance and the thinking that informed the direction of travel

Identity

The learning that has been taken from people who continue to be involved in criminal activity or who have managed to cease offending has highlighted the critical role which identity, one's sense of 'self', plays in the process of desistance. Whilst there are differing views on the role of identity in terms of the initial motivation to make change³, this body of research has shown how important it is that people are able to make sense of their past, present and future sense of self in order to move forward. We all at different times and in different contexts develop aspects or 'essences' to our identity, (for example mother, daughter, worker, friend etc.) that inform our sense of who we are. However, these essences to our identity are not always of equal weight or influence at particular times in our lives.

One of the assumptions which informed this research project was that when one of the essences to a person's sense of self is that of being an 'offender' that this can subsume all of the other aspects to a person's identity and prevent longer term desistance from crime.

*Smackheads, Cokeheads and ****heads*

Labelling

We all use labels and classifications to make sense of the world and I understand that labelling others helps us to work out who we might want to interact with and who we might want to avoid, as with that label comes a whole host of expectations. However, some labels also imply or apportion a degree of blame and I was intrigued when thinking about this to read about a study (Vann, 1976) which explored the attitudes to overweight people who were (a) overweight because of some sort of gland disorder or (b) because they just liked their food. One of the findings of this study was that participants administered longer electric shocks to those people who were considered to be overweight simply because of (b) their fondness for food. What significance of this when considering rehabilitation and the process of desistance from crime?

I have spoken to many people labelled as an 'offender' who described feeling 'lesser' in their interactions and of being ashamed of their status. I can understand this feeling in one sense and when thinking about this recall the realisation that it looked like I belonged to a group termed the 'underclass'. The 'underclass' is a term used to describe a culture of poverty which locates the blame for that poverty firmly with the individual rather than any wider societal factors.⁴ Belonging to a group labelled in this way did result in my feeling a bit 'lesser' and ashamed but I had other aspects to my 'self' that did not let this feeling overtake. Perhaps however, this experience is different when that one essence is that of being a deviant or an 'offender' which is imbued with connotations of blame. Perhaps this one essence can subsume all of the other essences of a person's personality and being? Perhaps also labelling someone in this way simplifies our classification system? In a similar vein to the field of addiction, the crackhead is no longer a complex individual that is addicted to a substance but is simply a crackhead. Taking this line of thought further I also often wondered why some drug users almost contribute to this labelling process by adopting a

³ See Paternoster and Bushway (2009).

⁴ See Charles Murray (1989).

certain dress or attribute to their persona such as a certain walk. Perhaps this is a form of defiance or self defence, as the research would indicate that the internalisation of a label associated with blame can have destructive consequences and lead to feelings of low self worth, depression and further isolation.⁵

Whilst my learning has not examined the reasons why we apply labels to others, some of the learning and research does provide insight into the impact of this activity which appears to operate on two subtle levels. When a person is labelled as an 'offender', a 'deviant' they are often distinguished by non-offenders as a type of 'other', a lesser, somehow different person.⁶ This label can then serve to stigmatise and exclude the 'offender' from mainstream society, meaning that the person often only feels included amongst people and groups that are similarly stigmatised.⁷ The stigmatisation as well as contributing to exclusion can also permeate at a deeper level and result in the internalisation of the stigma and label,⁸ a process often referred to as 'the looking glass self'. The concept of the looking glass self, developed by Lemert, suggests that an individual will hold a sense of self, a sense of identity that is informed by how they perceive other people view and reflect this view back to them through their interactions. The 'looking glass self' can then serve to contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy. The person labelled as 'offender' will either; make no attempts to access mainstream society (due to their perception of how they will be received), or this internalisation, coupled with the experience of rejection, will eventually impact upon the persons resilience and motivation to try and make positive change. Both effects can therefore contribute to a continued cycle of reoffending. I can certainly see this process reflected in the accounts of people either in prison or serving community sentences who have recounted feelings of shame, guilt, a feeling of 'otherness', 'lesser self' and an almost fatalistic world-view about the point of trying. Similar concepts and fatalistic world-views are contained in the accounts of the people who were actively involved in criminal activity interviewed in Maruna's (2001) Liverpool Desistance Study:

"The active offenders I interviewed, on the other hand, seemed fairly accurate in their assessments of their situation (dire), their chances of achieving success in the "straight" world (minimal), and their place in mainstream society ("need not apply")" (Maruna 2001:9).

The Liverpool Desistance Study showed a clear association between a person's sense of self and desistance. Those people who were no longer involved in criminal activity, the successful 'desisters', had reframed their past and subsequent sense of self in such a way that prevented them from becoming overwhelmed by feelings of shame and guilt and which avoided "the "schizophrenic" process of rejecting one's old self"(Maruna 2001:87). The successful 'desisters':

"...displayed an exaggerated sense of control over the future and an inflated, almost missionary, sense of purpose in life. They recast their criminal pasts not as the shameful failings that they are but instead as the necessary prelude to some newfound calling. In general, the highly positive accounts bore almost no resemblance to the ugly realities of the ex-offenders' lives (as one understands them in criminological research)" (Maruna 2001:9).

⁵ See Peterson and Seligman (1985). Burns and Seligman (1991).

⁶ See Sampson and Laub (1997).

⁷ Braithwaite (1989).

⁸ See Lemert (1951). Paternoster and Iovanni (1989).

Maruna described this cognitive distortion as “making good”; “By ‘making good’, not only is the desisting ex-offender “changed”, but he or she is also reconstituted. As with first becoming deviant, “the former identity stands as accidental; the new identity is the basic reality”(Maruna 2001:10). In this sense the person really always was ‘good’, but they are able to re-frame their past behaviour in the context of their experience be it youth, drugs, the company they kept etc. I have found support for this concept in the narratives of people who have located their offending in particular contexts of their lives, for example at the height of addiction. This perception of the self is not to be mistaken with ‘excuses’ when the person takes responsibility for their past behaviour, but provides a way of understanding which perhaps, as Maruna notes, allows the person to avoid being subsumed with shame and guilt and provides a mechanism to move forward.

In contrast Paternoster and Bushway suggest that “the offender casts off his old identity in favour of a new one” (Paternoster and Bushway 2009:1107). I have also listened to people’s accounts which would support this viewpoint reflected in statements such as; “I was a horrible person then” and “I am a totally changed person now”. In one sense how the person locates and understands their offending is not my primary concern. What is important is that this research highlights how a person’s identity and sense of self can be either a critical enabler or barrier to the process of desistance.

The other really exciting implication of this research is that the internalisation of the stigma can be reversed. The sense of self as an ‘offender’ that ‘need not apply’ can be altered in a kind of ‘Pygmalion’ process. Providing opportunities for a person to receive an alternative view of the self to be reflected back to them, a view that is not imbued with connotations of blame, deviance or even pity, can contribute to a more positive self identity that will support the process of desistance. By drawing from the research of my fellowship I will suggest that this process and desistance from crime can be enabled by providing opportunities to Make Good by Giving Back.

The visits

In the following section I will outline some of the projects which I visited, describe how they affirm some of the concepts outlined and consider how they can assist the process of desistance.

Early on in my travels I realised that I could not retain all of the details of my visits. I was also cautious in my thinking that the projects could simply be replicated and taken from an American State or Canadian Province and super-imposed upon completely different systems and cultures that operate in the United Kingdom. Instead I tried to focus the learning and experience to capture particular themes and concepts which appear to contribute to the process of desistance, themes and concepts which I believe can be translated into the delivery of interventions in the United Kingdom.

Getting the basics right

A person is unlikely to actively engage in a programme or intervention unless their basic human needs are being met; that they have somewhere secure to live and enough funds to purchase the basic essentials. Research has repeatedly highlighted the importance of providing practical assistance that addresses basic human needs such as housing and health⁹ and the difference that securing employment or training can make.¹⁰ Another influential writer on the subject of desistance, Professor Fergus McNeill, when delivering a presentation for the newly formed Probation Institute¹¹ asked what might a service that was designed to assist desistance look like? Professor McNeill made a number of suggestions the value of which were reinforced during my visits:

- Imagine a one-stop shop for desistance/integration
- Easy access to services/supports
- A social space, an educational space, an embarkation point.

A model of reporting to probation in a location where specialist agencies were also located had proved successful in some areas of Durham Tees Valley previously. The Gallant project was designed to reflect a one-stop shop type model to provide almost immediate access to services which can help to promote reintegration. A system of referral and appointment can often mean that the person fails to keep the appointment (for many reasons) meaning that the need remains unmet and the cycle continues. My experience tells me that this type of immediate access is even more important for those people released from prison. The one-stop shop model can also provide efficiency savings through the shared use of buildings, personnel etc.

Re-entry Transition Center Portland, Oregon

As part of my fellowship I visited the Re-entry Resource Center in Portland which is funded by the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission. The Resource Center provides services for the formerly incarcerated that are designed to address the persons immediate needs such as

⁹ McNeil and Whyte (2007).

¹⁰ e.g. Farrington *et al* (1986).

¹¹ Presentation delivered at Darlington Probation Office 10th December 2013.

clothing and hygiene products, meals, housing referrals and services that can help the person to reach longer term goals such as employment assistance, reconciliation and treatment programs, peer mentoring programs, health care and dental treatment. This support is co-ordinated by Navigators who are themselves ex-prisoners. An evaluation¹² of the Center showed a positive impact on reducing recidivism rates for participants who were accessing the higher levels of services; a 25 percent drop in the arrest rate and 31 percent drop in the overall charge rate. A cost benefit analysis of this programme also showed that for each participant the Center generates a benefit of \$14.17 for every one dollar spent on the programme. My visit to this project affirmed my belief in the effectiveness of the one-stop shop type model.

Returning to the issue of identity, the environment where services are delivered from must also be a place where people do not feel ashamed attending. Some local research which I was involved in¹³ highlighted the importance of this point. One female interviewee who had attended the traditional probation premises and the Gallant project (off probation premises) spoke of how attending the probation office made her 'feel dirty and like one of them'. She advised that this made her feel so anxious and ashamed that she only ever really engaged with probation staff on a superficial level. If people are to be encouraged to access services and engage meaningfully with interventions that are designed to assist desistance then they need to feel comfortable in doing so. Also and in support of another of Professor McNeill's points, that services appear to be more effective when delivered using an educational slant and progressive model of delivery rather than a traditional correctional type approach. Some research has also shown how de-motivating 'backward' looking supervision can be (Farall, 2002). My visits also showed that the better environments are delivered from a community resource and not a resource specifically targeted toward 'offenders'.

Red Hook Community Justice Center, Brooklyn.

The Center for Court Innovation has been operating an extremely successful community court in the Red Hook area of Brooklyn since 2000. The primary aim of the project is to reduce crime and improve the quality of life in the Red Hook neighbourhood. An independent evaluation of the Justice Center conducted in 2013¹⁴ showed that the project was achieving some quite staggering results:

- Reduced levels of incarceration by 50%;
- Statistically significant reductions in recidivism;
- Significant decreases in the levels of arrests in the catchment area (though a clear causal relationship cannot be established);
- Reduced fear of crime amongst residents;
- Increased levels of trust and support from local residents;
- Cost-benefit savings of up to \$6.8 million.

The host who facilitated my visit to the center explained that prior to the establishment of the project the area was nicknamed the 'Crack Capital of America' and was characterised by high levels of crime, disorder and gang activity. The center has employed a number of

¹² Officer *et al* (2013) Resource Centers Preliminary Evaluation. (January 2013).

¹³ Collins, H. and Graham, J. (2013).

¹⁴ Lee *et al* (2013)

strategies to impact upon the Red Hook area, but it is the delivery with partners of a range of on-site services, such as drug treatment and housing advice that are of interest at this point. The services designed to meet local needs were requested by local residents to be available to all and not limited to court users. I was left with the impression that this was a real community resource which people convicted or un-convicted of a crime would feel comfortable accessing. Importantly the evaluation of the Center also found that ‘Red Hook residents perceive the Justice Center not as an outpost of city government, but as a home-grown community institution’ (Lee *et al* 2013:5).

Salvation Army Corps 614 Regent Park, Toronto

I learned a lot from my visits to some of the projects run by the Salvation Army but it is perhaps my visit and learning from the Regent Park project that identified the need for a different approach to dealing with social problems such as offending. The community center which I visited is located in an area of Toronto that was home to one of the largest social housing projects in Canada. The area had experience of every type of social challenge, crime, drugs, gangs and was an area known by the nickname of the ‘jungle’. When doing some background reading about the 614 project I also learned that the area had some of the highest levels of social service provision but that this level and type of provision was only scratching the surface of the problem. One of the driving convictions of the establishment of the 614 project was that the area did not need yet another social service provider or program, but a ‘transformational community life out of which social initiatives develop’. The intention is that initiatives in the area really try to grow from grass roots needs. Whilst the more typical type correctional programs are delivered from the community center (programs and community service) it was the residents acceptance and ownership of the center which I believe contributed to the project’s success. The local residents spoke of how critical the center and services were to their community and importantly of how they were more likely to seek and accept help from the project. Most of the residents who I spoke to also performed some sort of voluntary work for the benefit of the center. The whole area where the center is located is undergoing a massive redevelopment and local residents, no matter how bad they considered the area to be, talked about the fear of relocation, displacement and of the potential effects of gentrification.¹⁵ Whilst the area was still experiencing many social problems the potential for the community center and local residents to act as a positive driver for change was impressive. I believe that in a similar way to the Red Hook Center the project would not have been as successful had it not been for the element of community ownership and that this concept is equally applicable to the design and delivery of services to reduce re-offending.

¹⁵ Gentrification, the renewal of deteriorated urban areas which can lead to the displacement of the areas original population.

One day at a time.

The contribution of support groups.

When we make a change to our lifestyle that requires a real and sustained effort many of us join support groups like the AA, NA, Weight Watchers, Slimming World etc. This can provide a source of hope to see others who are succeeding, a shared experience, sense of camaraderie and feeling of not wanting to let others down. Is the same shared experience useful when one is making a life changing effort to desist from crime, a lifestyle which many people will have lived from an early age? For some people I believe that this type of support group can be useful, a belief that was affirmed through my visit to the Seventh Step Society.

Seventh Step Society, Halifax

The Seventh Step Society originated in Kansas State Prison in 1963 and was organised by ex-convict Bill Sands and Reverend James Post. The Society uses a self help type model similar to the twelve step programme of AA (instead using seven steps) to help members avoid a return to reoffending. Group members spoke of benefiting from all of the things, like a shared experience, that support groups can provide and of the positives associated with the Society being exclusively for people who are trying to desist from crime. This initially struck me as a little contradictory given my belief that individuals need to shift from a sense of self as an 'offender' to successfully desist from crime. However, after talking it through with group members and looking at what type of self help groups were available, I made sense of it in the following way: people sometimes associate the joining of a group whose purpose is linked to something which can attract shame or blame with stigma. In my own experience I have seen people refuse to attend programmes which could really help them because they are run by addiction or mental health services, even if they are experiencing addiction or mental health problems, because of the stigma. The same thinking, I believe, can apply to programmes and groups associated with a religious faith or organisations such as AA or NA. Perhaps the Seventh Step Society provides a support group and network that is associated with stigma but that is accepted, honest, straightforward and perceived as legitimate for people who want to make that change and cease offending.

Another unique element about the Society is that, yes it is a group exclusively *for* the support of 'offenders' but the groups also comprise of core group members who have not been convicted of a crime, a composition that can offer real potential. Members can take hope, support and the shared experience from people who have been involved in offending and come out of the other side successfully, but also widen their social network and mix with members of the community they may not normally associate with in their everyday encounters. Ambrose questioned where else would he be able to associate with people like Mark, a core group member who is a practising lawyer?

My research indicated that membership of a self help support group can assist individuals sustain their resolve and avoid a return to offending, but also that groups like this can encourage the initial decision to make change and cease offending. The example of people who have ceased offending can challenge the thinking and neutralisation techniques which some people may use to explain their past behaviour and continued involvement in crime. Neutralisation can assuage feelings of guilt for something which the individual knows to be essentially wrong for example, 'no-one from round here succeeds', 'everyone round here

uses drugs', or 'everyone commits offences'. Maruna found that such neutralisations were repeatedly used in the Liverpool Desistance Study by people still actively involved in criminal activity. However, the example of someone with a similar experience who is successfully desisting from crime challenges such neutralisations, a challenge that may then serve to motivate and encourage positive change. One of the members, Scott explained, that being a member allowed you to effectively identify and challenge 'the rubbish', be this explained as neutralisations, justifications or excuses.

Are support groups important and can they 'assist' people in the process of desistance from crime? My travel and learning from those people either still involved in criminal activity or who are trying to start anew can only lead me to conclude in the affirmative, yes support groups can be important for some people, some of the time and the 'giving back' from longer serving members to newcomers can be an important motivator that sustains the decision to desist.

The Experiential

'Heroes of adjustment'

"At one time, when I was trying to quit using drugs I went to a residential rehab and on a night we did crafts. One older woman there watched me trying to do beadwork and said 'you're never going to make it straight'. After she said that I went to my room and practised beadwork all of the time-this got me through the really bad times". The story of a woman who has managed to exit the sex trade and is now helping those still being exploited.

I am sure that the older lady referred to above knew exactly what she was saying and the reaction and response which she hoped for. Nearly all of the projects which I visited used people who had experienced first-hand lifestyles characterised by poverty, addiction and crime. I am sure that I cannot do justice to the benefits which the experiential bring to the business of recovery and rehabilitation but perhaps the greatest thing which this group of people bring to the table is the promotion of 'hope'. As I noted on a blog of my travels, I do try hard to live in the moment and make the most of every 'now'. I would find it hard to imagine not being hopeful about moving forward, planning for that next night out, holiday or project, which often don't live up to anything like expectations but that still doesn't stop that optimistic looking forward to the next time. Hope, I think, is a complex phenomenon that is not always a reflection of experience or reality, but is something that can influence how we think, act, function and take care of ourselves and others. A person without hope can lack the motivation to try and make positive changes to their lives and feelings of hopelessness can have far reaching consequences.¹⁶ Many people told me how seeing 'so and so' succeed motivated them to try; 'if he could do it I knew I could' type of narrative. The experiential encouraged hope in a way in which I cannot imagine anyone who has not lived that type of lifestyle could.

On my travels I spent two days on a retreat with women involved in the sex trade which was organised by the Salvation Army and some local specialist charities, an experience which will stay with me for a number of reasons. There were no Julia Roberts Pretty Woman type stories here. The women did not have to welcome me but they did and in doing so shared their sense of humour, support for each other and stories and experiences. I can honestly say that the two days were the most intense and emotional I have experienced and that I left the retreat with a respect and admiration for these women, who in reality have few choices and who face a constant and extreme danger through their sexual exploitation. On an individual level I do not want to portray these women as weak victims, on the contrary they were strong resourceful survivors who made the best out of their experience. However, all who I spoke to recounted being abused, raped and beaten; some of their stories being totally incomprehensible to many of us. You could sense the air of anticipation and excitement driving to the retreat and similarly pick up on the sense of foreboding on the return to the city.

The retreat was paid for by funds generated from the operation of 'john's' schools in the area. Men arrested for soliciting sexual services are diverted from prosecution if they pay and participate in an educational programme which covers subject areas such as the legal ramifications of a criminal record, the health risks involved in their activity and sometimes the

¹⁶ See Ambramson, Metalsky and Alloy (1989).

experience as told from those being exploited. The aim of the programme is future prevention. I was left with the impression that even if the 'john's' school failed in its objective of future prevention, that the generation of funds in this way and their use to pay for activities such as the retreat was a good thing. The retreat gave the women some well needed time out. They slept, ate and used the 'safe' time to recover.

Writing in the 1960s Irving Goffman described how members of a particular stigmatised group can become representatives for that group, becoming "a living model of fully-normal achievement, being heroes of adjustment who are subject to public awards for proving that an individual of this kind can be a good person" (Goffman 1963:37 cited in Lloyd, 2010). The time spent on the retreat, more than any other, provided an insight into how powerful the experiential could be in promoting hope. The women still involved in the sex trade appeared to look to those who had managed to exit in Goffmans terms; as 'heroes' and the women who had managed to exit were clearly drawn to 'give back' and wanted to help those being exploited as much as they could. However, giving back in this context I observed could also be fraught with complexities and I think serves as a cautionary tale. Many of the women who have managed to exit experience post traumatic stress disorder. One such woman, Kim described experiencing frightening flashbacks and spoke of the need to be ultra aware of her feelings in order to keep a balance. Kim in fact chose not to stay over at the retreat given where she was at in her own journey. The 'wounded helper' in this setting must be provided with the right type of emotional support and guidance in order to function effectively.

Delancey Street, San Francisco

One of the projects I visited, the Delancey Street project in San Francisco, was completely run by the experiential, using a self help philosophy based upon the principle of 'each one teach one'. Delancey Street (a project which I will return to) has helped thousands of people in their recovery from addictions. Imagine no professionals. When I asked about social workers, therapists and visiting professionals I was advised 'we have all the experts we need right here'.

Second Chance Programme, San Diego

The Second Chance Programme works with disadvantaged groups such as returning prisoners to prepare and place them into employment opportunities. The programme uses an individual case management approach to co-ordinate additional 'wrap-around' support services and provides a two-year follow on support program. The success rates achieved by the program are impressive with 70 percent of graduates securing what is considered to be decent employment within three to four months of completing the program and 70 percent of graduates retaining employment over the two year period. Using an intense and at times challenging curriculum the program demands high standards from the participants. As one of the workers explained 'these people need to work twice and three times harder than those without a criminal record to be successful'. There were lots of elements to the program which I felt contributed to its success but in this context it was the use of the power of the experiential which was impressive. The participants would not initially know which of the facilitators had also been a serving prisoner but the information would be disclosed at points in the journey in order to successfully break down barriers and to encourage hope and motivation. Again I cannot imagine that the same level of success would have been achieved had it not been for the power which experience can bring. I believe that the

experiential are sometimes able to challenge excuses, neutralisations or justifications much more successfully than people without any direct experience. I observed a skilled facilitator at Second Chance ask a female participant who had said she was 'sick of being tired', what was preventing her from succeeding? When the female replied "my criminal record" the facilitator asked what would be preventing her when she had learned how to deal with her record (as he had) so that it no longer presented a barrier; what would be the excuse then? The female in question had no further response and I believe began to then genuinely consider her chances of success.¹⁷

Overall the travels enabled me to see how giving back through the provision of support can assist the giver by providing a sense of purpose, a calling almost that serves to reinforce their own resolve to sustain the changes they have made to their lives. For the receivers, the use of the experiential provides something which can make all the difference to a person who may be contemplating making change like the lady who 'was sick of being tired'; the heroes provide hope.

¹⁷ See also the work of Father Peter Young.

The contribution of the faith community

A commitment, a calling, a faith

A point of note that struck me on my travels was the sheer commitment of the people working in the projects and programmes. I have worked in the public sector for many years and worked with some extremely committed people, but in some of the projects which I visited there seemed to be something else at work which was motivating these people to work tirelessly for the benefit of others. Something which I do not think any financial incentive could purchase. For some workers I do believe the motivation stemmed from their experience and as one absolutely energetic bundle of motivation explained “a few years ago that was me eating out of the bins-I want to use my experience to give back to them”. Another community volunteer in recovery from a lifetime of heroin addiction explained how cooking in his local community center had become ‘his drug of choice’; perhaps a substitute addiction but nonetheless a healthy activity that benefits others. The non-experiential also seemed to be driven by a vocation or even a calling to help others, which was sometimes associated with a particular faith, but more often than not just described as something they wanted, even needed to do. The energy projected by some of these workers couldn’t fail to rub off on you and I was left wondering how you could ‘bottle’ this vocation, commitment, or calling.

A lot of the workers with whom I met had no professional or formal qualifications, something which did not appear to prevent a level of professionalism that was impressive. Returning to Delancey Street, the two residents who facilitated my visit who had their own stories of hitting rock bottom, I believe would have been prime candidates for any executive position in a whole host of successful businesses. This thinking does present challenges in the sense that the development and delivery of interventions designed to reduce reoffending in the UK has largely been the preserve of the professionals; the social workers, police, probation officers, psychologists etc. This is perhaps understandable when considering the overall approach that interventions have taken and by this I mean an approach that sees the ‘offender’ as someone who’s offending behaviour needs to be challenged, their criminogenic needs met, or cognitive deficits fixed. An approach which views an ‘offender’ as someone that needs ‘fixing’ in some sense demands that there be an expert who is able to provide this fix. My interpretation of the research emerging from the process of desistance in contrast views the ‘offender’, not as someone who needs to be ‘fixed’ but as someone who needs to provide his or her own ‘fix’ which others may be able to encourage or assist. This approach would lend itself to the involvement of a wider range of people in this process. Whilst I am not advocating for a mass de-professionalization of interventions that aim to reduce re-offending, I am interested in the value which the involvement of a wider range of individuals and organisations can bring to this process.

I visited projects run by organisations such as the Salvation Army, Elizabeth Fry Society and John Howard Society, organisations which were perhaps ironically founded by English reformers, but in the UK do not provide the sheer breadth and depth of the work as is provided, for example in Canada. In considering why this would be the case I am sure it is not because of the lack of need but suspect is more a product of how contracts which provide rehabilitative services are let and how the public sector has operated in this country. Whatever the reason the visits left me in no doubt as to the benefits which the involvement

of the faith community and charitable sector can bring to interventions that aim to assist desistance.

The family

Shame is contagious

I came across a blog written by a clinical psychologist¹⁸ entitled; Shame: A Concealed, Contagious and Dangerous Emotion, when conducting a quick internet search and following discussions about one of the projects Caring for Families. Caring for Families is located in Calgary and is supported by the John Howard Society, Mennonite Central Committee and a number of other organisations.

Family members can carry a huge weight of guilt and shame and can experience a similar type of stigma to the person who has committed the offence. This secondary type of stigma or as Goffman terms 'courtesy stigma' can have debilitating effects in families particularly when the offence is of a serious violent or sexual nature. Often family members suffer in silence and can experience the same resultant effects of low self esteem and depression. Trying to support a loved one and working through the confusion as to the workings of the system, whilst trying to balance all of the fears associated with 'what the neighbours might say' cannot be easy. Sometimes the only way that the family can cope with their situation is to deny the offence or to minimise it, often the more serious offending being explained as a travesty of justice or even the fault of the victim. The Caring for Families project is a support group for people with a family member in prison that can provide practical help and information, but it is perhaps the emotional type of support which the group is able to provide that is critical to assisting desistance. Initially I thought the last thing you might want to do in these circumstances is to attend a group where you share your personal business. However, I learn that the offence itself is not discussed, that members can receive and provide support without having to know why the son, father, husband, sister is serving a prison sentence. I was also told that the majority of attendees at the first session spend most of the time crying because it is the first opportunity they have had to talk about their experience and feelings of guilt and shame for something which was of no fault of their own. One example was told of a woman who had not left the house for three years because of the shame she felt at her son's actions.

I believe that not only is this group a good thing to do and I am told requires minimal input, but we also know that the reconviction rates of returning prisoners who have managed to maintain family ties are lower. Some studies show up to a 20 percent reduction in the reconviction rates of prisoners who have received visits from family members or partners as compared to those prisoners who received no visits.¹⁹ Consider the release of a person with all of their angst and identity issues being released to a home that is in upheaval, where the family are experiencing disbelief, betrayal, shame etc. When looking at the prisoners return in this way I am left wondering how so many people are *actually* successful.

Blue Sky Project, Vancouver and Big Brothers, Big Sisters, St Louis

The children of people convicted of crime also carry a great burden of shame which, when coupled with the experience of the loss of a parent to prison, can have far reaching and negative effects. I visited two projects run specifically for children with parents who are either incarcerated or subject to community sentences; the Blue Sky project run by the Elizabeth

¹⁸ Lamia (2011).

¹⁹ May, C. *et al* (2008).

Fry Society in Vancouver and the Amachi programme, part of the Big Brothers Big Sisters initiative in St Louis. 'Amachi', a West African word meaning; "Who knows but what God has brought us through this child". Both of these projects provided affirmation of the importance of working with the children who are themselves at extremely high risk of being incarcerated when they grow. It was not so much the sterling work which these projects delivered that captured my imagination but the model of utilising volunteers. Both projects to differing degrees utilise volunteers, the Elizabeth Fry project operating a number of volunteering opportunities and student placements and Big Brothers Big Sisters being one of the largest youth mentoring organisations in the United States. The whole volunteering movement appears to be much more active in Canada and the United States, the reasons for which I am unsure, but I am sure that the potential benefits of developing a culture of volunteering and giving back can offer so much. The diversity and value that volunteers can bring to the delivery of projects was a recurring theme in all of my visits and led my thinking about the provision of services in a different direction.

A successful project operating in the North East of England, Safe Families for Children, is demonstrating the range of benefits associated with using volunteers and how a different model can be successfully applied to social problems. Safe Families for Children provide practical and emotional support to families in difficulty. The project originated in Chicago and has been running successfully in the North East of England for two years helping to provide stability to families and reducing the numbers of children entering the care system. The model operates by recruiting volunteers from local churches and as an example runs currently with six hundred volunteers and the support of two qualified social workers. The human costs that are saved from preventing children entering the care system must be immense and the potential re-investment of monies saved provides for an exciting opportunity. The success of this project and models such as the Delancey Street project have encouraged a different way of thinking about how society might tackle social problems, by scaling up the use of community members, rather than simply funding a traditional response that is informed by a 'treatment' or 'correctional' type model.

Generativity

A generous spirit

“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give”; is one of my favourite quotes (and there are many) attributed to Sir Winston Churchill. Generativity, a concept which I explain as a concern and care for others or something bigger than one’s self, was found in the Liverpool Desistance Study to be a key theme in the maintenance of desistance. This finding is perhaps unsurprising when one considers the benefits of volunteering and giving back more widely which shows positive effects that range from improvements in physical health through to improved mental health and wellbeing.²⁰ Maruna’s work suggests that being involved in some sort of generative activity can meet the following needs in the lives of those he interviewed who were desisting from crime:

- *“Fulfilment:* Generative roles can provide an alternative source of meaning and achievement in one’s life.
- *Exoneration:* By helping others, one relieves his or her own sense of guilt and shame.
- *Legitimacy:* The penitent ex-offender who tries to persuade others not to offend is a well-known and established role in society.
- *Therapy:* Helping others actually helps the ex-offender maintain his or her own reform efforts.” (Maruna 2001:118).

In the forward to another influential report to my thinking; Time Well Spent, Erwin James when describing his experience of being a prisoner working in a unit that transcribed material, written and printed word, into Braille, tells us that: “It was the first time in my life that I experienced the satisfaction that can be gained from helping others”(Edgar, *et al* 2011:3). The power of ‘giving back’ is also reflected in the following quotes from prisoners undertaking voluntary work:

“I’ve always been take, take, take, but I’ve never given anything back...it will make me feel a hundred times better than I do now...if I can give something back instead of take” (Edgar *et al*, 2011:6).

“Most of my life I’ve been doing bad things – like selling drugs and doing things like that; getting praise for the wrong things. This is something that helps the community not hinders it. That doesn’t compensate, but I can make myself more valuable to society in the future” (Edgar *et al*, 2011:6).

Always believing in the power of experience I did previously complete a questionnaire²¹ which measured perceptions of generative behaviour. Having considered myself to be a fairly generous person I was sorely disappointed to find that I scored in the low range. This result actually motivated me to sign up for voluntary work with a local charitable organisation, work which I am still actively involved in and which I cannot imagine giving up. In a paper presented to the CSV volunteering charity (2007) entitled ‘The Bulemic Society’ Maruna points out; ‘Like de Tocqueville suggests you cannot truly understand the benefits of

²⁰ See Brown (1999); Youniss and McLellani (1999); Allen *et al* (1994); House, J.*et al* (1994); Moen, P. *et al* (1992); Thoits, P. (1983); Uggen *et al* (2004); Edgar, K.*et al* (2011).

²¹ The Loyola Generativity Scale, a self report questionnaire. McAdams and De St Aubin (1992).

volunteerism until you experience them' (Maruna 2007:6). My experience would affirm this thinking, I feel rewarded, good, like a nicer person when I undertake this work, enjoy the feeling of giving back and helping others and am sure that some of those who join me in my amateur attempts at craft also benefit in some way. Many of the projects which I visited involved some element of giving back and confirmed my belief in the power of this activity in assisting desistance. The person who has committed the offence is able to repay the community by providing a useful service that can promote all of the potential benefits such as a feeling of usefulness, pride and an increase in perceptions of generativity, that can in turn impact upon a changed sense of self. The activity also enables the person to 'signal' to others that they have changed, provides an opportunity to learn new skills and qualifications and enables the person to gain a reference or testimonial, something which many people involved in the criminal justice system find hard to secure. When considering why a person might opt to become involved in some form of activity that enables them to give back (which I shall refer to from this point as Social Action), my work, visits and conversations seem to point to two common reasons:

- a) The activity does meet some of the needs outlined by Maruna such as providing exoneration and fulfilment,
- b) People are motivated because of sheer boredom.

As one female recently released from prison explained to me; "the days are really long when you have no work"; "some days I don't see anyone". Social Action can provide people with opportunities for social interactions that almost force them to practice presenting an essence of the self that is important in reaching and maintaining a positive identity.

The welcome of the community

A domino effect

It is not hard to imagine how providers of rehabilitation services can link up with the faith and charitable community to deliver Social Action projects that provide opportunities for people to give back and impact positively on others. My own personal favourite imagining would be a project whereby people either incarcerated or serving community sentences prepared meals for the elderly and less able bodied in their community. The meals could then be delivered by volunteers working for an organisation such as Age UK, meaning that the people preparing the meal benefit from all of the positive effects of giving back and the elderly benefit from a hot wholesome meal and a welfare check. This welfare check as one colleague pointed out, could also prevent further problems from developing and serve to reduce costs to the public purse in the longer term. Thinking about giving back in this context, I believe, provides for an effective approach that can assist desistance but that also presents immense opportunities for wider community benefit.

Center for Court Innovation, New York City

Visits to projects delivered by the Center for Court Innovation showed how projects that involve giving back can, longer term, serve to strengthen communities, reduce the fear of crime and in turn promote the inclusion of people convicted of crime. The Center for Court Innovation was borne out of a project that aimed to tackle and reduce the levels of crime and disorder and the impact which this was having around the Times Square area of New York City. The Center conducts research and uses this to influence practice and policy by creating demonstration projects that test out new ideas and thinking to deal with issues of criminal justice. In the Times Square area the demonstration project that was borne was the Midtown Community Court and the projects quite staggering contribution to reductions in crime, levels of incarceration and perceptions of disorder led to the Center's expansion. An evaluation of the project showed that prostitution arrests reduced by 56 percent, illegal vending arrests reduced by 24 percent, use of jail as a sentence reduced 6 percent as compared to the downtown court and that the court saves an average of 1.2 million dollars each year through the reduced use of pre-sentence jail and the reduced use of incarceration post sentence.²²

One of the influences to the thinking behind the development of projects by the Center is the Broken Windows theory.²³ Broken windows theory tells us that if a building has some broken windows that are not repaired, it will soon suffer from more broken windows, become a target for vandals and quickly descend into an ever more state of disrepair. If however, the windows are mended vandals will be less likely to inflict further damage to the building thereby preventing bigger problems from developing longer term. Crimes of disorder such as vandalism and criminal damage can serve to increase public perceptions of crime and contribute to levels of anxiety and fear.²⁴ Community benefit projects that tackle how the environment in a community looks offer the same benefits of Social Action and provide the added potential of contributing to a reduction in the fear of crime.

²² See www.courtinnovation.org/research/community-court-research. Hakuta *et al* (2008)

²³ Wilson, J.Q. and Kelling, G.L (1982).

²⁴ Innes, M. and Fielding, N (2002).

Center for Court Innovation, Brownsville, New York City

I was advised that Brownsville has one of the highest concentrations of public housing in the States and is an area that has been characterised by crime, drugs and gang activity. I came across a saying about the area “If you’re 25, you’re either dead, or in jail or you’re done with the gang life.”²⁵ An impressive programme delivered by the Center for Court Innovation in Brownsville combines a course of business entrepreneurship with a project of community benefit that is delivered to young people. The community benefit element is similar to the model of community service that preceded the current model of Unpaid Work in this country for which research showed had consistently lower reconviction rates than those which were predicted.²⁶ This body of research highlights themes such as the sentences re-integrative potential,²⁷ opportunities for pro-social modelling and the perceived fairness of the sanction²⁸ as contributing to the overall effectiveness. Certainly, Carter and Pycroft suggest that environmental schemes such as those previously undertaken by community service ‘appear to operationalise a model of desistance’ (Carter and Pycroft, 2010;212). The Brownsville projects complete similar environmental work but importantly, also seek to change the narrative of a space. For example, an area of waste ground that was associated with a violent act that evokes feelings of sadness or anger amongst community residents and contributes to a fear of crime would be cleaned up and replanted with greenery. This would be followed by what I think is a really powerful component, in that the site would then be used to host events such as children’s sports and games, in time changing the negative narrative of the space into a positive.

Also impressive about the projects delivered by the Center for Court Innovation is the long term strategic view that is taken and the development of approaches that really try to understand the problems as experienced by that community. The Brownsville project which I visited had been delivering services for approximately four years, but it is envisaged that a community court would not be operational in this area until year seven when the respect and trust of the community had been forged. In some projects local community residents were paid a small stipend by the Center to conduct a community survey. Because the local community residents knew who the informal leaders in that community were, knew how to reach residents who may not ordinarily complete surveys, they were able to gather a much more representative response used to shape a much more informed solution. Another aspect to this strategy was that the community residents having identified the problems were then motivated to develop the solutions. For example, in one survey the lack of after-school provision was identified as a problem. Some of the residents who completed the surveys, with some assistance from the Center, went on to source funding which enabled them to set up after-school provision in the community. The identification of problems by the community with some assistance by the Center served to seed growth in that community.

²⁵ [Lightbox.time.com/2012/01/31/brownsville-brooklyn](http://lightbox.time.com/2012/01/31/brownsville-brooklyn).

²⁶ Lloyd *et al* (1994); May (1999); Killias *et al* (2000).

²⁷ Mclvor (1992).

²⁸ Rex *et al* (2004).

Social Enterprise

The Delancey Street model

Delancey Street operates in a number of American States and has provided residential rehabilitation services to thousands of people helping them to successfully recover from a dependence upon drugs and alcohol. Whilst there were lots of impressive aspects to Delancey Street I think that the most striking feature is the projects use of a business model and the impact which this was having upon residents and the community alike. Delancey Street operates using the funds that are generated from a number of successful businesses that are staffed by residents; restaurants, cafes, removal, upholstery, an art gallery, car mechanics etc. The residents to whom I spoke projected a pride at being part of a successful business. It seemed important that they were not perceived as someone to feel sorry for or as a drain upon state resources, but as an actively contributing citizen working for the good of the project. A similar theme emerged when talking to customers in the cafe who clearly supported the aims of the project. It is perhaps not a common occurrence for local residents to welcome large numbers of people recovering from addictions and whilst I accept that the project has worked on community relations for a long time, it appeared to be the fact that the residents were perceived as contributing that made the difference and led to a much greater acceptance and community welcome. I also visited with a project that operates using a similar model in the North East of England run by the organisation Betel. Betel also provides residential rehabilitation services and operates in part from the funds that are generated from furniture restoration and re-sale and a gardening business. The visits to Delancey Street and Betel highlighted the benefits that can result from the use of an underpinning model that works toward self-sustainment. Such models can enable the projects to retain a level of independence, promote a sense of pride amongst service users and appears to contribute to a much greater level of social and community inclusion.

“Not only might social enterprises therefore be a suitable, supportive structure in which to alter offenders’ attitudes and behaviour, but social enterprises, whether in prison and through probation services, might be a more successful means of increasing an individual’s ‘stock’ of social capital to encourage desistance from crime and better enable their reintegration into civil society“(Sampson and Laub,1997 cited in Cosgrove and O’Neill, 2011:26).

Whilst there appears to be only a limited amount of research into the impact of models such as social enterprise upon reducing reoffending²⁹, a model that can assist desistance at a limited or nil cost to the public purse is a theme I find myself wanting to pursue and is a theme that perhaps lends itself to thinking about social problems in a different and more constructive way.³⁰

²⁹ Cosgrove and O’Neill (2011).

³⁰ Consider the model of utilising volunteers in the Safe Families for Children initiative.

Thinking about a different approach

I think some of the successes of the projects which I visited with and some which I have been involved with in my work have stood or fallen on the quality of leadership. When the leader moves on the project sometimes runs the risk of losing its vision, impetus and impact. I believe that with the design of rehabilitative services you can put in systems that mean the whole model will not collapse, but this can sometimes mean that the project becomes just that; a system and a process that has lost its driving force. If desistance is indeed a journey and not an event, then longer term sustainable solutions need to be found that do not rely upon the leadership of one or a few individuals. Leaders need to be able to devolve the drive of the project to those with a vested interest and commitment to success in a similar way to the strategy adopted by the Center for Court Innovation. This thinking then leads to one of the central propositions of this report, that the people involved in the social problem, the people presenting the social problem, must be involved in developing and leading the solutions to the social problem. I believe that without the involvement of those involved to continue to take forward and grow the solution, no matter how innovative or effective the solution, it will not sustain longer term. All of the visits influenced my thinking in this regard and contributed to a belief that we need to look at social problems differently. By doing so may well produce some different and more effective solutions.

The traditional response to social problems, in this case offending, has been that the state and or charitable funding streams/private donations fund a body of professionals to deal with the problem. This model of intervention may however, only ever achieve limited success. Even if there were unlimited funds provided to the body of professionals can this model ever really provide more than a sticking plaster type solution? Consider the current reconviction rates in this country, expanding caseloads of social services, levels of overcrowding in the prison system etc. In my experience and in times of plenty when the services I worked for were well funded the problem did not appear to diminish, in my field reconviction rates remained stubbornly high and it did not seem to matter how much funding or staffing that this enabled, it was never enough; the demands of the caseload just seemed to expand. The model is also always going to be at risk of having to change its function and purpose dependent upon the state's political ideology of the time (consider the changes to the role and function of the probation service) and those services that are dependent upon charitable funding or private donations are constantly chasing funding streams for survival. Some would suggest that opening the market up to a diversity of providers may help solve the problem and we can certainly see how this strategy plays out in the UK with respect to the provision of rehabilitative services. It is likely however, that the same model will be applied, some professional body still attempting to solve the problem by doing something to it. All of my visits have affirmed the view that when people involved in the problem are part of the solution then a more effective response is formed. Also that the involvement of people experiencing the problem in this way has the potential to create a domino effect that can then impact upon other problems and outcomes; recall the community members conducting the surveys for the Center for Court Innovation who went on to set up after school provision.

The thinking that service users or communities are best placed to provide their own solutions is not a novel concept or idea. However, the concept is given a vehicle in the form of Social Action. Providing people with opportunities to give back through Social Action will, I believe, promote desistance, provide a springboard for a positive 'knock on' effect in communities

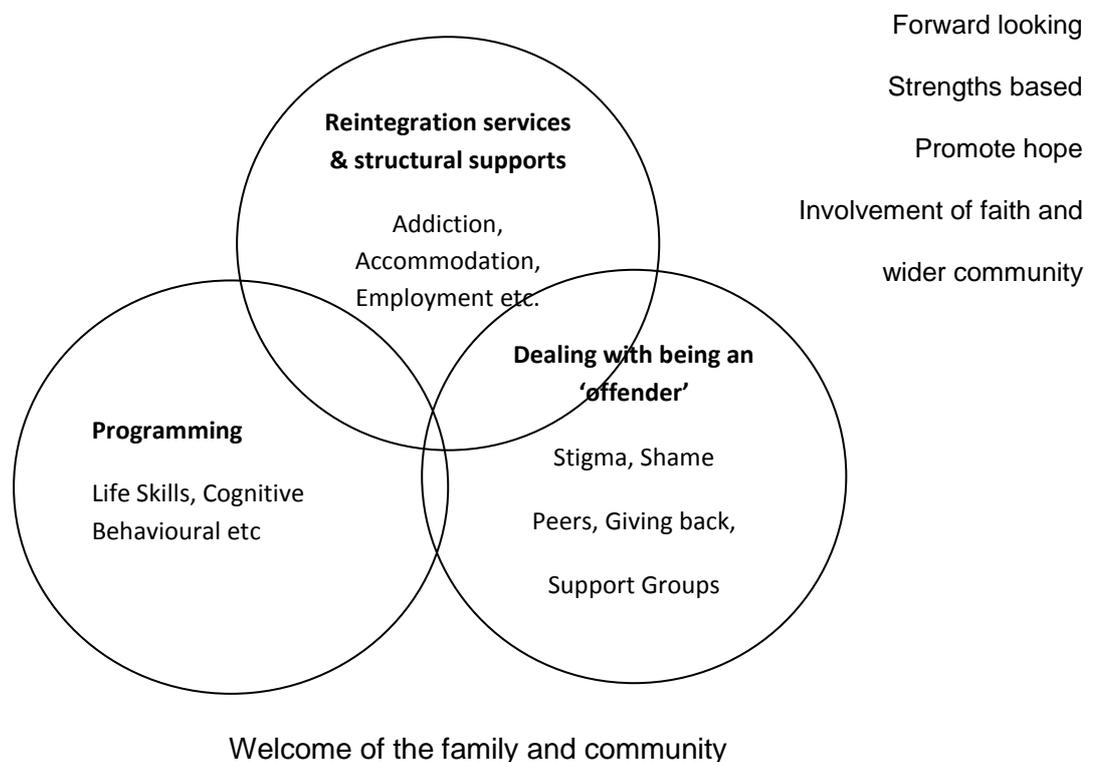
and allow a model to develop, not as an 'add on' to professional services but eventually as a solution that will be 'supported' by professional services.

Conclusion

When trying to draw together some of the concepts from my learning, the challenges inherent in trying to integrate a group of individuals who are labelled and stigmatised into an at best ambivalent community become apparent. This group perhaps carry a strong sense of self as lesser or other and may have no real sense of purpose or feelings of usefulness. Add to this the challenges of trying to navigate the system in order to secure the basic necessities, convince others that they are worth a second chance and for some, at the same time work toward their recovery from addiction, leads me to conclude that the chances of success appear slim. Thinking about the challenges in this way may go some way to explaining why so many individuals are unable to sustain a lifestyle of desistance from crime and the implications do not appear to lead to a simple remedy. I would therefore suggest that if we are to be effective in reducing reconviction then the business of rehabilitation requires a new approach. An approach that recognises the importance of a person's sense of self in the process of desistance.

If we accept that the essence of a person's identity is an important consideration in the process of desistance then we can begin to form potential solutions that aim to encourage a shift in the sense of self as an 'offender', increase levels of generativity and promote a greater concern for others. I believe that we can achieve these aims by providing opportunities for people serving prison and community sentences to 'make good' by 'giving back', through Social Action. Social Action will not in itself be enough however and the development of such projects will need to form part of a holistic response that incorporates the delivery of effective programmes, the provision of reintegration services and structural supports.

The pre-requisites to desistance



I believe that the development of opportunities through Social Action can also break down misconceptions about ‘offenders’, remove barriers through greater community involvement and in turn encourage a community response that is more conducive to successful integration. Such an approach may also inform thinking around alternative business models such as social enterprise.

England and Wales have one of the highest prison populations in Western Europe. Figures show that 46 percent of returning prisoners will be reconvicted within one year of release³¹ and that approximately one third of people subject to community sentences are reconvicted within one year of sentence.³² The destructive human costs associated with these statistics are immense and the wider social and economic costs far reaching. The cost of the design and delivery of a programme of intervention that incorporates practical support, programming, and Social Action would be minimal in comparison and is not a complicated concept to operationalise.

Returning to the work of Maruna. In the paper entitled; *The Bulemic Society*, reference is made to volunteering opportunities (or in my language Social Action) such as repairing broken wheelchairs, fire fighting and providing citizen’s advice. Maruna concludes that:

“Maybe. Like many of us, prisoners struggle to find a sense of meaning in their lives. They seek to fill empty lives with cocaine binges, joy rides and violence. Fortunately, some find they can fill this void equally well with creative writing, raising children or even volunteering. This is how rehabilitation ‘works’.

Or, maybe not.

Fortunately, if volunteer work fails as a panacea – like every other magic bullet for rehabilitating prisoners in a broken society inevitably has – at least the world will have more respite care, fewer forest fires, more citizens advice and more repaired wheelchairs.” (Maruna 2007:7)



(One of my visits with members of the Seventh Step Society, Halifax)

³¹ Prison Reform Trust (2014).

³² The Center for Social Justice (May 2014).

Recommendations

1. Providers concerned with reducing reoffending should review their delivery model to incorporate approaches that encourage people to deal with the negative stigma associated with 'being an offender'. Reviewing services in this way will encourage a more forward looking and strengths based approach that can assist the process of desistance.
2. The delivery of rehabilitative services to people subject to community sentences and post-release licence supervision would benefit from a one-stop shop type approach. Services should be delivered from an accessible environment that does not contribute to the negative sense of self as an 'offender'.
3. Opportunities for people to give back through a programme of Social Action should be developed for those serving prison and community sentences. These opportunities can be used to impact upon a negative sense of self and provide a link to further learning and development.
4. Programmes of Social Action that assist desistance but which also seek to change the narrative of spaces and contribute to a reduction in the fear of crime should be designed. This will encourage a greater community welcome and increase the likelihood of successful reintegration.
5. Services that aim to assist desistance would benefit from much greater involvement from the faith community and not for profit sector. Greater involvement of these sectors brings a wealth of diversity and commitment that can assist reintegration and the process of desistance.
6. Services that aim to assist desistance would benefit from much greater involvement of the experiential in both their design and delivery. The positive contribution which support type groups (like the Seventh Step Society) can provide should also be explored.
7. Services to support the families and children of people affected by offending and imprisonment should be developed. This type of service will provide many longer term benefits including reductions in reconviction rates.
8. The design and delivery of rehabilitative services would benefit from the use of alternative business models such as social enterprise. The use of such models can promote integration through greater community acceptance and instil a level of pride and motivation in service users that can assist the process of desistance. The development of such models will also longer term reduce demand upon services and agencies.
9. The design and delivery of rehabilitative services would benefit from community consultation and longer term strategic planning such as the approach adopted by the Center for Court Innovation. The feedback from the community would help to develop much more informed and responsive solutions that may also generate and seed growth.

Since returning home I have discussed the general recommendations contained in this report with the Police and Crime Commissioner responsible for County Durham and Darlington and Darlington Community Safety Partners, who have agreed to support the development of Social Action and a model based upon the learning from desistance. The commitment to the development of inclusive approaches to public safety and wellbeing will, I believe, enable the potential of Social Action to be realised. Work to develop the programme and supporting services based upon a hub type model of access has also begun with Darlington Fire and Rescue Service. The respect and potential impact which the image of the Fire Service can have upon the label and stigma associated with offending is already becoming apparent and I am sure will lead to the development of more innovative approaches to crime and prevention.

Glossary of terms

Cognitive behavioural programmes-programmes designed to alter a person's thinking which it is thought will then lead to changes in behaviour.

Desistance-the process by which a person ceases offending.

Experiential-people who have firsthand experience.

Generativity- a concern and care for others or something bigger than one's self.

Looking glass self- a concept that explains how a person's sense of self is affected by and develops from interpersonal interactions and the perception of others.

Pygmalion process-a type of self fulfilling prophecy.

Social Action-voluntary activity that benefits others.

Social Enterprise- a business that has social aims and goals and that reinvests profit for the pursuit of these social aims.

Travel Itinerary

Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada 2nd- 5th September 2014; visited with Seventh Step Society.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada 5th- 9th September 2014; visited with Salvation Army projects.

Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada 9th – 12th September 2014; spent 2 days on retreat with women involved in the sex trade organised by the Salvation Army and Klinik.

Calgary, Alberta, Canada 12th – 17th September 2014; visited with Circles of Support and Accountability run by the Mennonite Central Committee, the John Howard Society and learned about the Caring for Families project.

Travelled through the Rockies by train.

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada 19th – 21st September 2014; visited with Salvation Army projects and Elizabeth Fry Society.

Portland, Oregon, USA 21st – 25th September 2014; visited with Mercy Corps Northwest, Multnomah County Department of Corrections, Volunteers of America and learned about Bridges to Change.

San Francisco, California, USA 25th September – 30th September 2014; visited with Delancey Street.

San Diego, California, USA 30th September – 6th October 2014; visited with Second Chance Programme and Jails to Jobs.

St Louis, Missouri, USA 6th October-12th October 2014; visited with ARCHS re-entry programme, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Salvation Army.

New York City, New York 12th October – 19th October 2014; visited with Center for Court Innovation, specifically projects in the Brownsville, Bronx and Red Hook areas of the city.

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